The Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize Lecture

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Materialism and the Persistence of Race in the Jim Crow South

Forty years ago, television images beamed around the world helped solidify the image of the Southern US steel town – Birmingham, Alabama – as a citadel of segregation, a cauldron of racial terrorism and a gruesome manifestation of the ‘collective’ investment of white Southerners in defending the American system of racial apartheid known as Jim Crow. And it was Birmingham’s police chief Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor, directing his Klan-ridden force from inside the cockpit of his special-order, one-man armoured tank, and who famously ordered fire-hoses opened up and police dogs unleashed on civil rights demonstrators, who seemed to many to embody the vicious, ‘solid’, implacable white South’s unbroken commitment to racial supremacy. Connor became an icon of bitter-end segregationism; the courage and determination of the black freedom movement compelled defenders of Jim Crow to make Birmingham their last stand.

As historians discover all the time, however, things are not always as they seem. This is an especially significant point to bear in mind when approaching the history of the post-emancipation American South, where historians have too frequently surrendered to the assumption that the racial antagonism so palpable in 1963 was an all-pervasive and permanently fixed feature of Southern society. This perspective had been developed into something of a historical axiom by the Georgia-born historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips in the late 1920s. Phillips was an unapologetic defender of the slave system who argued that the ‘central theme of southern history’ had been the persistence of a ‘common resolve indomitably maintained’ among white Southerners of all classes to preserve the South as a ‘white man’s country’. Phillips’s assumptions were most effectively challenged by the pre-eminent Southern historian of the last half-century, C. Vann Woodward – a liberal of the kind now virtually extinct in American politics, who for all their faith in gradualist reform upheld a genuine commitment to racial justice. Ironically, however, the Phillips thesis has found a new resonance, in recent years, in the work of historians who identify themselves either with black nationalism or the Left. The materialist interpretation of Southern history, with its ostensibly dogmatic focus on relations of production, strikes some as insufficiently nuanced for unravelling the complex, deeply-rooted psychological motives driving white agency in an era aptly described by one historian as ‘the most violent and repressive period in the history of race relations in the United States’.

In part, this estrangement reflects an understandable reaction to the ruthless campaign waged against black Southerners in defence of white supremacy during the years straddling the turn of the century. ‘Faced with the obscenity and scope’ of that effort, Jane Dailey has written in her indispensable study of plebeian interracialism in late nineteenth-century Virginia, ‘it [has become] easy to see white supremacy as irresistible’. The view that white racism has been a static feature of Southern life, effortlessly sweeping away all before it, loses sight of the ‘sense of possibility, of movement, that people on the ground [both black and white] sensed’ at various junctures in the evolution of the modern South. The path from emancipation to Jim Crow was rockier than

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2 For an extended critique of one of the most sophisticated and seminal recent studies sympathetic to a black-nationalist perspective, see Kelly 2004.
is sometimes realized’, Dailey writes, ‘with many detours and switchbacks along the way’.4

In tonight’s lecture I want to explore, at some length, one of the most remarkable of these ‘detours’ along the road to the Solid South, and to apply the insight that can be gleaned from that exploration to underline the deficiencies in the ‘racial interpretation of Southern history’ pioneered by Phillips and repackaged by a new generation of historians. I want to do so by returning to Birmingham, because its evolution in the ninety or so years before 1963 illuminates a great deal about the persistence, or, more precisely, the continual re-invention, of race hatred in the Jim Crow South.

It is more than a little ironic that Birmingham is fixed today in public memory as a symbol of the power and vehemence of white supremacy. It is a town, after all, with no direct connection to plantation slavery, having been founded after the defeat of the Confederacy. It was founded, moreover, as an explicitly modern project; a city that, upon realising its full industrial potential, would stand as a beacon for the ushering in of a new, progressive order that all of the South would emulate. But its reputation as a bastion of white supremacy is even more difficult to square with the fact that there had been not one, but several apocalyptic junctures in Birmingham’s development when its leading citizens worried openly that the social order they had so meticulously constructed out of the ashes of the Confederacy’s defeat was on the verge of disintegration. In the 1880s and 1890s, in 1908 and again in 1920, local elites faced interracial plebeian and working-class insurgencies that threatened to bring the edifice of racial and class hierarchy crashing to the ground. Five times between 1890 and 1920, black and white Birmingham district coal miners overcame considerable obstacles to mount district-wide strikes against the South’s most powerful industrial employers. Twice in the first two decades of the twentieth century, state officials declared martial law, dispatching troops and opening the floodgates to vigilantism in order to suppress strikes approaching insurrectionary levels. The visceral racism that seemed, by the early 1960s, to have become such a permanent and organic feature of city life was, in reality, a historical consequence of these clashes. In this sense, the Birmingham experience is instructive for what it says about the broader evolution of the Jim Crow South: far from being a natural, inevitable feature of Southern society, white supremacy had to be periodically re-imposed,

4 Dailey 2000, pp. 6, 156.
or at least reinforced – often at gun-point – to guarantee the continued viability of the social order that Southern white élites had constructed for themselves.

What were the constituent elements of that social order? Some clues as to its main features are embodied in the figure of ‘Bull’ Connor himself. Before he earned a permanent footnote in history as the archetypal bigoted Southern white sheriff, Connor had become a familiar figure among local whites in his role as radio announcer for their semi-professional baseball team, the Birmingham Barons. Less well known, however, is that Connor had his start in law enforcement while working as a mine guard, and later directing the anti-union ‘steel police’ for TCI, the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company. TCI had been, since the late nineteenth century, the largest employer in Birmingham’s mineral district: ‘As TCI went’, one observer noted, ‘so went the rest of the district’. In 1907, TCI was itself bought out by US Steel, at the time the largest industrial corporation in the world.5

Connor’s tenure at TCI in the 1930s had provided him with solid preparation for the infamous role he would assume several decades later. In the face of the Congress of Industrial Organizations’ (CIO’s) attempts to organise Birmingham’s notoriously non-union steel mills in the 1930s, Connor had been known to hold trade unionists ‘in jail incommunicado for months at a time’. ‘A lot of them just disappeared’, two of his former adversaries later recalled. ‘Nobody knows where they went. . . . [They] just died or [were] killed or thrown in the river or something’. When the Steelworkers’ president Philip Murray arrived in Birmingham to speak before an integrated audience of local steelworkers, it was Connor who ordered police to extend a rope down the middle of the hall to enforce segregation (an act that did not prevent ‘three burly white steelworkers’ from cutting the rope down twice before submitting to police orders). It was during the 1930s, as well, that Connor had been elected to a stint in the Alabama House of Representatives. There, his closest associate was James Alexander Simpson, a ‘rabid’ racist and an immensely powerful lawyer who served as the legislative mouthpiece for Birmingham’s ‘Big Mules’, the nickname by which the district’s leading steel and industrial corporations were known.6

In introducing this early, unfamiliar biography of Connor, I do not mean to suggest that white resistance to desegregation can be reduced to an élite

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5 Kelly 2001, p. 52.
conspiracy cooked up by Southern industrial capital and carried out by its men in blue. Certainly, by 1963, the Jim Crow South had become deeply polarised around race, and the campaign actively involved a broad cross-section of Southern white society, including substantial numbers of skilled white workers. Moreover, as tensions came to a boil by the middle of the decade, fissures would begin to develop in élite ranks, with some white élites opting to come to terms with the movement in hope that stability could be restored with their basic prerogatives intact. But Connor’s biography does raise interesting questions about an aspect that has often been ignored in recent treatments of Jim Crow – that, for Southern élites, the maintenance of a system of racial hierarchy was intimately bound up with their ability to exploit Southern black and white labour under conditions that would allow the South to compete with its more technologically advanced industrial rivals to the North. Jacquelyn Hall’s compelling proposition that Jim Crow can best be understood as ‘racial capitalism’ – ‘a system that combined de jure segregation with hyperexploitation of black and white labor’\(^7\) captures the essence of the post-emancipation South in a way that the race relations framework cannot.

The relationship between that ‘hyperexploitation’ and the formal ordering of racial hierarchy begins, not in the 1930s with Bull Connor but earlier, in the 1880s. As it had throughout the former Confederate states, the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877 marked the restoration of white ‘home rule’ in Alabama. From 1866 onwards, a campaign of racial terrorism had gathered momentum, aimed at rolling back the social upheaval unleashed by emancipation. The campaign gathered force under the banner of white supremacy until an increasingly preoccupied and indifferent federal government gave the green light for restoration of conservative, white power in the Southern states. ‘Restoration’ is a somewhat inappropriate term to describe what occurred in 1877, since the ‘new men’ who came to power in the ‘redeemed’ South were committed, not to the reconstitution of the agrarian order that the antebellum ruling class had idealised in its defence of slavery in the 1850s, but to a new, industrial South that would catch up with, and eventually overtake, the industrial North.

Birmingham would come to epitomise all the contradictions inherent in that new departure: the discovery of vast coal and iron ore deposits in the

\(^7\) Hall 2001.
area in the early 1870s raised expectations that the district might eventually outrun Pittsburgh as the world’s leading manufacturer of steel. But natural abundance was insufficient to guarantee such an outcome: the key to the region’s coming prosperity was its seemingly infinite supply of cheap native black and white labour. ‘Nowhere in the world is the industrial situation so favorable to the employer as it is now at the south’, a typical editorial in the Manufacturers’ Record boasted. The black worker, in particular, represented to industrial élites the ‘most important working factor in the great and varied resources of the [region]’, whose labour would ‘yet aid his white friends . . . to take the lead in the cheapest production on this continent’. The Birmingham district would become, in the words of one of its ablest industrial historians, ‘an iron plantation in an urban setting’.8

The modernisers’ determination to retain cheap black labour as an indispensible element in making the region profitable goes a long way toward explaining the evolution of racial segregation in the late nineteenth-century South. The most influential account of the rise of formal segregation locates the origins of the system in élite attempts to deflect an interracial, third-party challenge to the New South social order in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Leaders of the new, industry-oriented leadership of the South had barely consolidated their authority under the banner of ‘white supremacy’ when sharp internal antagonisms began to re-emerge – most ominously in the form of an ‘agrarian revolt’ – and threaten white solidarity. By the end of the 1880s, an oppositional third party had emerged in many parts of the South: white sharecroppers and farmers began defecting from the Democratic Party, considered too beholden to the ‘money power’, and, in order to make themselves electorally viable, were compelled to seek support from African-Americans, thereby violating the Democrat’s central shibboleth. Substantial numbers of blacks, themselves angry over their desertion at the hands of a Republican Party no longer interested in defending civil rights, cast their lot with the Populists, and an unprecedented, interracial revolt began to take shape, raising the alarm among élites across the South.

African-Americans played a central role in the life of these insurgencies. Particularly in northern Alabama, where the Greenback-Labor Party emerged as ‘the strongest advocates of the rights of blacks’ in the Deep South, African-Americans ‘figured prominently, sometimes dominantly’ in party life. The

8 Manufacturers’ Record 1890 and Lewis 1984, p. xiv.
Alabama Greenbacks’ ‘most charismatic leader’, the black coal miner Willis Johnson Thomas, became so popular ‘that predominantly white clubs invited him to speak, and his revivalistic fervor resulted in interracial meetings’. The coloured Greenback Club at Jefferson Mines, of which Thomas was the ‘leading spirit’, ‘had the best order and held the most regular meetings of any club’ in Alabama, one prominent white party organiser noted. Local Democrats worried openly that ‘if we let this nigger alone he will ruin our whole State’, and fretted that the rise of the Greenbacks threatened to overturn the delicate racial hierarchy that Redemption had only recently restored. ‘Three years ago’, one dejected Democrat complained after a brush with Thomas in 1878, ‘if a negro dared to say anything about politics, or public speaking, or sitting on a jury... he would be driven out of the county, or shot, or hung in the woods.... Now white people are backing them in doing such things’. That the party’s opponents found this latter aspect of anti-Redeemer activism so troubling is significant: reports of an imminent collapse of the colour line were certainly exaggerated, but the racial egalitarianism exhibited in the Greenback insurgency contrasted dramatically with the fierce injunctions against interracialism emanating from elite circles throughout the South.9

Significantly, these insurgencies established their most formidable strongholds in the mining camps of the Birmingham district. The development of the coal region concentrated large numbers of black and white miners in areas already nourishing a tradition of defiance against black-belt élites, bringing a cohesion to such sentiments that could not be matched in the hill-county districts of Georgia or Mississippi. Concentrated in the coal camps, where most of them worked as full-time miners, Greenback organisers circulated throughout the surrounding countryside, organising local farmers into party clubs. The semi-proletarian character of the northern Alabama Greenbacks imbued the organisation with a bread-and-butter pragmatism that was lacking elsewhere; their local party programme not only reflected the national organisation’s general concerns over the growing haughtiness of capital but concerned itself with the day-to-day grievances of area miners. The party railed against the notorious convict lease system and low wages and demanded an end to payment in company scrip. It gave voice to miners’ complaints that they were being cheated through short-weighing of coal and pledged itself to work for more stringent safety laws and a rigorous system of mine inspection.

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The élite response to the rise of Southern Populism foreshadowed their reaction to every major episode of interracial lower class revolt in the coming years. Charitably enshrined in the historical literature as paternalists and racial moderates, the ‘forward-thinking’ industrial modernisers turned, almost reflexively, to race-baiting: white Populists were physically intimidated through vigilante methods reminiscent of the Klan and denounced as traitors to their ‘Anglo-Saxon heritage’. Through a combination of flagrant bribery and even more extreme physical coercion, black Southerners were neutralised as an electoral factor, and the Populist challenge rolled back. In public declarations that were, in his view, completely compatible with everything else he had advocated for Southern progress, the New South propagandist Henry Grady (editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*) upheld the ‘infallible decree’ that the ‘supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained forever, and the domination of the negro resisted at all hazards’. Only the unequivocal enforcement of black subordination, it seemed to Grady and others of his standing, could exorcise the frightening spectre of impending class conflict among whites.10

The defeat of the Populists ushered in a period referred to by the pioneering black historian Rayford Logan as the ‘nadir’ in African-American history11 – a period marked by the horrific racial violence and legal restrictions that became the hallmark of the segregated South. Prior to the decisive defeat of Populism in 1896, only one state (Mississippi) had begun the process of disfranchising black voters, but, by the first decade of the new century, every one of the ex-Confederate states had effectively deprived black Southerners of the ballot. Separation of the races in all public accommodations – loosely, unevenly observed in custom before the rise of Populism – became formally inscribed and legally enforced throughout the South in the worsening racial climate after the mid-1890s. White supremacy had been salvaged, and the Populist challenge deflected, but at great cost to black Southerners and to the possibilities for an interracial alternative in the South.12

The scale of the retreat was partially mitigated in the Birmingham district, where interracialism outlived the defeat of the third-party movements, and would be resurrected in a few short years. The concentration of large numbers

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10 Grady 1972, p. 51.
11 Logan’s 1954 seminal study became better known as Logan 1965.
of industrial workers in the district, for whom some pragmatic alliance across the colour line represented not a utopian extravagance but a pragmatic necessity, lent coherence and continuity to a tendency that was more difficult to sustain in the rural South. Miners managed to maintain some semblance of basic workplace organisation through the 1890s – first in the Knights of Labor and then in the independent United Mine Workers of Alabama – before finally affiliating to the United Mine Workers of America (the UMW) at the turn of the century. But the obstacles to effective interracial collaboration were considerable.

The importance of the South’s large pool of ‘cheap, docile negro labor’ was elevated by the region’s peculiar industrial evolution. The region presents an almost classical example of what Marxists have described as ‘combined and uneven development’: the turn-of-the-century South included a number of exceptional areas where large concentrations of industrial workers laboured in mills, foundries, and manufacturing plants on a par with the most advanced in the North, but these stood like frontier outposts of a new age in a region overwhelmingly steeped in primitive agriculture, in some places little-changed from the way it had been conducted in the antebellum period. Most obviously, the low standard of living that Southern employers were able to impose on blacks, made possible in part by the legal framework of Jim Crow, set a low standard for the treatment of Southern workers of both races. The South remained the most impoverished region of the United States, with per capita wages for industrial workers at about one third the national average as late as 1935. And, while white workers generally received higher wages than blacks, by any measure (mortality, literacy levels, exposure to disease, access to health care), they endured worse conditions than their counterparts anywhere else in the country.

Not only the economic conditions faced by Southern workers, but their rights as nominally free workers were sharply circumscribed in the New South order. Broad application of the convict lease system in the mining industry, for example, provided employers with a vital mechanism for resisting the demands of free workers, white and black. As leading coal operators were well aware, the presence of convicts made it nearly impossible for free labour to organise effective industrial action. This explains why the overwhelmingly white mine workforce in Tennessee engaged in a year-long rebellion against convict lease operators there in 1892, on several occasions arming themselves to take possession of the mines and freeing the convicts being held in company
The same dynamic was central to the fight against the convict lease system in Alabama, where the UMW provided the most consistent opposition to the convict system. In neither case did miners necessarily espouse thoroughgoing racial egalitarianism, but the dynamic for a confrontation between white employers and white workers – that is, a split in the ranks of white supremacy – was inscribed in the New South’s industrial order.

Calculated attempts to pit black workers against Southern whites went beyond the convict lease system. Employers expressed a ‘preference’ for black labour in circumstances where, they were convinced, blacks could be forced to work under conditions and for wages that free white workers would spurn: ‘The Southern employer . . . shrinks from having white labor introduced which will call for concessions and demand rights denied the negro’, editors at the Manufacturers’ Record acknowledged. Black workers’ vulnerability provided employers with a barrier against trade unionism emanating from the North. One English traveller to the region noted the ‘disposition’ among Southern employers ‘to rely on black labour as a conservative element, securing them against the dangers and difficulties which they see arising from the combinations and violence of white labourers in some of the Northern cities’. The Negro’s ‘presence’, employers acknowledged, ‘has prevented the spread of labor organizations in the South [keeping the region] free from the futile interruptions by strikes and other disturbances of the exertions of capital and labor’.

With the defeat of Populism, Birmingham district employers set about constructing a system of racial paternalism, which aimed to take advantage of the legal and physical vulnerability of black workers under Jim Crow to rid the district of union agitation. Armed with the franchise and with some guarantee of their civil rights, African-American workers had shown themselves at least as susceptible to political militancy and trade unionism as whites, but growing racial hostility and the deterioration of their predicament after the mid-1890s, compounded by harsh material desperation, meant that employers came increasingly to view their endless supply of black labourers desperate to escape plantation drudgery as vital to their hopes for warding off union organisation. District mines and mills absorbed a large number of

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13 On the Tennessee convict war, see Shapiro 1998.
whites from outlying counties in northern Alabama, and efforts to import skilled labour had brought a handful of European immigrants, but, by the end of the century, employers attempted to satisfy their labour demand mainly through increasing employment of blacks. By 1900, African-Americans formed the largest ethnic component in the mines, and within ten years would make up three-quarters of the iron and steel workforce. Birmingham became home to the largest concentration of black industrial workers in the nation.16

The basic elements of the paternalist strategy are evident as early as 1894 when, faced with an attempt to organise his Blue Creek mines, TCI founder Henry DeBardeleben offered to establish an all-black colony – a ‘Negro Eden’, as he put it – in return for a guarantee of labour peace. ‘A job at Blue Creek is a desirable one’, he advised blacks. ‘[You] can have your own churches, schools and societies, and conduct [your] social affairs in a manner to suit [yourselves], and there need be no conflict between the races’.17 DeBardeleben’s appeal prefigured the coal operators’ approach to black labour in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Deliberately wrapped in a challenge to racial self-esteem, his proposition represents an attempt to put the best face on the newly ascendant doctrine of ‘separate-but-equal’ and harness it to the benefit of the operators; to hold out the semblance of power and autonomy now that black self-determination had been shorn of any real substance. And, to the extent that the miners’ union fell short of practising real equality, the operators’ appeals inevitably struck a chord among black miners.

What is most remarkable about the employers’ efforts at manipulating racial antagonism, however, is not their success, but the miners’ ability to disrupt these attempts with effective cross-racial campaigns. They did so, moreover, in a context where interracialism was not only difficult, but almost universally condemned as an heretical affront to Southern ‘tradition’. The bulk of Race, Class and Power is concerned with the history of working-class interracialism between two major miners’ strikes in 1908 and 1920. Both of these strikes are narrated in close detail in the text, and I do not want to spend a lot of time here reconstructing them. Instead, I will concentrate on two aspects of these confrontations that I consider crucial to the book’s contribution to our understanding of Southern history in this period: first, the reaction that

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17 Norrell 1991, p. 128.
working-class interracialism provoked among the New South’s ruling class, many of whom genuinely considered themselves ‘friends of the Negro’, advocates of a progressive new order for the South; second, the incredible potential – unrealised in the end – that working-class black and white Southerners showed during each of these confrontations for transforming the South. Throughout both of these strikes, the situation was far too grim and precarious, the odds against a miners’ victory too unfavourable, to ever allow a full-fledged ‘festival of the oppressed’ to manifest itself. Neither strike, at any point, ever spilled out far enough beyond the bounds of industrial confrontation to compel a fundamental questioning of white supremacy on the part of whites. But the events do provide us with a small glimpse of the possibilities.

Frank Evans had been mayor of Birmingham before the turn of the century, elected in part with the support of the district’s black establishment. But, by the time a miners’ strike broke out in 1908, Evans was on the payroll of the Alabama Coal Operators Association (the ACOA), paid for the diatribes that he submitted regularly to the local press. One of his most lurid reports on the strike appeared after he witnessed an outdoor, interracial mass meeting at Dora. In his account, he drew a direct, and potent, parallel between the extraordinary situation developing in the district and the ‘horrors’ of black Reconstruction thirty years earlier. ‘It was a third of a century ago’, he wrote, ‘that the people of Alabama by rigid force . . . stopped the advance of a threatening peril which endangered our social fabric – the inculcation in the minds of black of the idea of social equality’, an idea that had only been put down by ‘the Caucasian blood of this state’. ‘When today this correspondent saw the commingling of whites and blacks at Dora, where he beheld the sympathetic arms of a negro . . . embrace a white speaker . . . in the very presence of white women and girls, I thought to myself: has it again come to this?’, he wrote in the Birmingham Age-Herald, 8 August 1908.

Evan’s reports were broadly representative of the turn to race-baiting that both miners’ strikes elicited from Birmingham’s most respectable citizens. Operators Walter Moore and Guy Johnson penned a letter to the local press characterising the UMW’s interracial policy as ‘a direct insult to our southern traditions’. Another complained that the ‘chief white leaders of this strife’ had ‘fired the minds of ignorant and vicious blacks with the statement that . . . the negro was doing all the work and the white man getting the pay’. The editor of the Birmingham Age-Herald’s society page, Dolly Dalrymple,
horrified by the union’s attempt to organise interracial women’s auxiliaries in 1908, mounted an aggressive defence of the colour line: ‘White women and black women meeting on the basis of “social equality” indeed! White men holding umbrellas over negro speakers! Black men addressing white men as “brother”! The women of our fair southland resent it!’ The spectacle witnessed by one correspondent at Jasper, where ‘a brass band led a parade through the streets’ in which ‘negroes as well as whites bore red flags, and black men were among the principal speakers’, seemed to Birmingham’s men of wealth to portend certain disaster. They reacted with a call to arms. In 1908, a group of prominent citizens met with UMW officials and publicly threatened to unleash a race riot. The local businessmen’s association threatened to organise vigilante squads until the Governor of the state acceded to their demand to impose martial law. Declaring that he would ‘not tolerate eight or nine thousand idle niggars in the State of Alabama’, Governor Braxton Bragg Comer finally suppressed the strike, ordering the military to cut down the tents of strikers evicted from company housing. In 1916, and again in 1920, strikers had to defend themselves not against the Ku Klux Klan, revived in the district by the steel companies to contain wartime labour militancy, but also the actions of the state National Guard, who carried out a number of brutal lynchings under the direct auspices of district coal operators.18

Clearly, the spectre of working-class interracialism revealed the limits of racial paternalism and demonstrated the compatibility of Southern ‘progressivism’ with the most reactionary elements of Southern white ‘tradition’. To generalise from the Birmingham experience, racism won ‘a new lease on life’ in the region’s scramble for industrial prosperity. But what did these confrontations reveal about the permanence and immutability of Southern racial custom? Here, some qualification is in order. Miners did not manage, during either of these confrontations, to establish an egalitarian oasis in the midst of the racially-charged climate of the early twentieth-century South. Formally, the UMW disavowed any intention of interfering with the racial status quo, a position that reflected both the defensive posture they had been compelled to adopt in the face of unrelenting attacks from all sides and the racial sentiment of a majority of its white membership, who had been won

18 Birmingham Age-Herald, 3, 22, 24, 25 and 27 August, and 25 September 1908; see also Hornady 1921, p. 55.
to a defence of ‘industrial equality’, but who had not yet been compelled to transcend the deeply-inscribed ideas about race then dominating Southern society. But many white miners came to realise, in the course of events, that the degradation of black labour was somehow aimed at them as well, and realised that no challenge to their employers’ power was possible without a degree of interracial co-operation.

Insofar as we are able to reconstruct these strikes, they demonstrate the relative fluidity of racial boundaries at the bottom of Southern society, and show that heightened polarisation around class – around the antagonistic material interests of Southern white élites and the mass of ordinary Southerners of both races – began to undermine the racial hierarchy thought to be unchanging and indelibly inscribed in Southern society. One of the conspicuous effects of the mineworkers’ challenge was the way it helped puncture the aura of white invincibility. In a society that threatened harsh retribution against those blacks who transgressed even the most trivial aspects of racial etiquette, the audacity of black strikers who took up arms to defend their union set officials reeling. The more than twenty thousand miners who joined the strike in 1908 included many of those who had been recruited to DeBardeleben’s ‘Negro Eden’ a decade earlier. Black strikers were ‘everywhere in predominance and armed to the teeth’, one military official declared, and when deputies challenged two armed blacks at Blue Creek and ‘told them to stop parading the roads with their weapons’, the strikers ‘stood up and gave the deputies a fight, firing at them with considerable precision’. Of seventeen strikers arrested for dynamiting houses at Acton, thirteen were African-Americans. Twenty-seven strikers were arrested after an attack on a trainload of scabs at Blocton, among them ‘8 negro men, 1 negro woman, and the balance Slavs’. Two black men and a black woman were the only people arrested for setting the charge to a TCI foreman’s house at Pratt City. And, when the 1908 strike went down to defeat, UMW officials lauded their black members: ‘There are no better strikers in the history of the UMW than the coloured miners of Alabama’, one declared. ‘They fought manfully for their rights’.19

One other telling feature of both strikes – alarming to both black and white élites – was the way in which protracted upheavals managed to rearrange lines of sympathy and solidarity according to union membership rather than race. Although, in both cases, the operator’s strategy for breaking the strikes

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19 Lewis 1987, p. 49; Birmingham Age-Herald, 18 and 21 July and 20 August 1908.
rested on the importation of large numbers of black strike-breakers, in neither strike did the campaign to rid the district of scabs manifest a specifically racial dynamic. If anything, UMW members expressed a certain amount of sympathy for the trainloads hauled in from the plantation districts, many of whom were unaware that they were being brought in to break a strike. In contrast, local farmers who willingly crossed the picket lines (and who were more likely to be white) were shown little leniency. Black unionists did not hesitate to deal harshly with scabs of either race, and white miners were known quite frequently to take up arms in defence of black strikers in police custody. The ‘Citizen’s Committee’ aligned with the operators complained that within the UMW ‘the negroes have been elected to high office...and their authority and counsel are respected and obeyed’. They swore out an affidavit against the union, complaining that black UMW vice president Joe Sorsby had been observed ‘very often dictating to the white stenographers with his hat on his head, and with a cigar in his mouth’.20

In the end, the attempts of union coal miners in the Birmingham district to defy the power of regional élites failed; their efforts overcome by the superior, and awesome, power of the mine operators and their allies. Their tentative breach of the colour line was contained before it could have developed into a wider, frontal challenge to Jim Crow, but, in the course of their struggles, black and white miners had exposed the relationship between racial hierarchy and labour exploitation that lay at the heart of the system. If the Alabama mining district constituted an anomalous feature on the industrial landscape of the New South, it was not because the conditions endured by black and white miners were exceptional: labourers in the region’s timber and turpentine camps, iron ore mines, docks, levees, railroads, and even cotton fields worked under régimes that would have felt familiar to most miners. Birmingham’s exceptionalism lay in the fact that its coal miners – unlike most of their counterparts in Southern industry – succeeded in giving area employers a run for their money. Far from being indifferent to or repelled by the excesses of Jim Crow, white employers were its chief beneficiaries. White workers, however, were among its victims. In their attempts to mount an effective challenge to the power of their employers, black and white Alabama miners advanced a vision that – while falling short of thoroughgoing racial egalitarianism – nevertheless had to be snuffed out lest it become infectious among

20 Governor Thomas Kilby Administrative Files 1921a, 1921b.
others at the bottom of Southern society. The 1920 defeat, in a strike that the business press dubbed Alabama’s ‘most stupendous confrontation between labor and capital’, dealt a severe blow to working-class interracialism. The path was now clear for the rise of the ‘Bull’ Connors, while prospects that the challenge to Jim Crow would involve substantial numbers of ordinary white Southerners had been weakened. The stage was, in some respects, set for the confrontation that would spell the end of Jim Crow, under very different terms, a half-century later.21

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21 Davies (circa Nov. 1920).


Giuseppe Tassone and Peter Thomas

Editorial Introduction

The attack launched by historical revisionism against the revolutionary tradition of 1789–1917 has generated devastating political and cultural consequences. One of these is the shadow cast over the international anti-fascist Resistance movement as well as over the political and social forces whose ideologies are explicitly referred to as Bolshevik. According to Domenico Losurdo, historical revisionism results from the encounter of the critique of the revolutionary tradition with the critique of the establishment reading of what he calls ‘the Second Thirty Year War’ as a democratic crusade. If this is the case, he notes, Carl Schmitt is its spiritual father. With his denunciation of Jacobinism and Bolshevism for having conjured up the image of ‘the absolute enemy’ against whom an unlimited war is to be waged, the German political scientist paved the way to all the successive attempts to undermine the revolutionary project. Schmitt argues that the ideal of perpetual peace, which developed out of the French Revolution, has turned into its opposite, constantly demanding for its purposes a policy of universal

\[1\] See Losurdo 1996.
intervention and total war. But the war declared by the revolutionary tradition knows for him no rules or limitations: blinded by missionary fanaticism, its proponents call for replacing the war between states and their armies with an international civil war, which runs transversally across the states, thus blurring the distinction between combatants and civilian population.

Ironically, this implacable indictment pronounced by Schmitt is also aimed at countries such as Britain and the United States which, from 1914 to 1945, conducted a sort of war-revolution against Germany, which they assimilated to the ancien régime. Britain and the United States embraced the same philosophy of history as the Jacobins and Bolsheviks. This philosophy of history regards history as the triumphal march of democracy, which is to say that it sees history as proceeding in a linear way towards the establishment of democracy all over the world as if such a result were inevitable, and predetermined by a divine ruling.

Furthermore, Losurdo argues that there is a clear theoretical convergence between such historical revisionism and neoliberalism: the former is nothing but the historiographical version of the political movement embodied by the latter. This is most visible in Hayek, contends Losurdo, for whom the denial of social and economic rights presupposes the liquidation of the revolutionary tradition. Similarly, Mises claims that the responsibility for the horrors and massacres of the last century is to be attributed to the communists and ‘Marxist social democrats’ who demanded the extermination of the bourgeoisie. Yet, between historical revisionism and neoliberalism there are also political and methodological differences. In criticising the revolutionary tradition, neoliberal theorists often do not go so far as to put into question the legitimacy of the ‘democratic revolution’ conducted by the great Western powers against the ancien régime of Germany between 1914 and 1945. However, this contradiction reflects, for Losurdo, a divergence between different kinds of revisionism. Where Mises, Hayek, Furet, Nolte and Pipes, for instance, leave Versailles and Nuremberg untouched, Schmitt and Heidegger,\(^2\) on the other hand, deconstruct the universalist ideology of the revolutionary tradition and claim that this has been also embraced by the forces of the Entente in their democratic crusade against Germany. Thereby, they themselves become instruments of domination.

\(^2\) On Heidegger, see Losurdo 2001.
Losurdo seeks to confute the attempt made by historical revisionism to deduce *a priori* the totalitarian phenomenon from the revolutionary project and its ideal. He points out that this logical derivation fails to take into account the extent to which various processes of total mobilisation spread across all the countries involved in the conflict. Paradoxically, it was the Marxist and revolutionary tradition that first denounced the totalitarian effects of war. At the end of the nineteenth century, Engels claimed that colonial competition and the increasing militarisation of the state threatened to swallow up the whole society. Bukharin, on the other hand, saw a new Leviathan looming up on the horizon, and this Leviathan did not limit itself to the control of the economy and politics of the state, but sought also to envelop other aspects of social life such as religion, philosophy, medicine and chemistry. In contrast, it was the social class targeted by the revolutionary movement – the social and political forces represented by Jünger, for example – that celebrated the cathartic effect of war and its capacity to regenerate a spirit of national unity.

In the following article, Losurdo attempts to analyse the emergence and consolidation of one of the central categories of the historical revisionist tradition, which enjoys a broad confidence today, namely, the category of ‘totalitarianism’. The general currency of this term, extending from the mainstream discourses of his native Italy (particularly evident in the rhetoric of Berlusconi, for instance) to include even some elements of the Left, signals it as a shibboleth in need of a rigorous analysis regarding its origins and contemporary ideological function. Losurdo refuses to accept the contemporary category of totalitarianism at face value and instead proposes to place it back in the historical context from which it emerged, both in terms of its relation to the ideological forcefields of its time and the integration of such ideologies in determinant political practices. In particular, Losurdo focuses his attention upon the discrepancies in the formulation of the category of totalitarianism in Arendt’s fundamental study, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, relating that work’s contradictions to the differing historical moments in which its central sections were composed. He is not content, however, merely to demonstrate the extent to which Arendt’s book was overdetermined and compromised by the immense geopolitical transformations in the years immediately following the Second World War. This meant that, in effect, it produced at least two categories of totalitarianism in conflict with each other, one of which was to carry the day, becoming consecrated as the ‘official’ theory of totalitarianism of the democratic West. Having demonstrated the contradictions of the
conjuncture which lie at the origins of the category of totalitarianism, Losurdo analyses the ideological functions of manipulation and mystification, which it has assumed in contemporary debates, and the extent to which it actively prevents a comprehension of the history which it purports to explain. Unjustifiably generalising selected experiences and ignoring others (in particular, the experience of colonialism), the current category of totalitarianism threatens to become a genus which is necessarily found in the examination of each particular species in which it is realised, a category whose application to concrete historical instances produces and reproduces its own presuppositions. Explanation of the past descends into justification of the present, a transformation which, since The German Ideology, the Marxist tradition has read as a revealing symptom of the presence of the ideological. As Losurdo suggests (but, due to limitations of space and the conceptual focus of his argument, is unable to explore fully in this study), an adequate category of totalitarianism and an understanding of the processes to which it refers could only be forged through a more concrete engagement with the specificity of actual history than the present ahistorical abstraction is able to perform. Furthermore, given the central role that a rhetoric of totalitarianism played in the second half of the twentieth century in justifying imperialist aggression, and continues to play in contemporary efforts of régime change, Losurdo invites us to consider whether a category originally intended to comprehend one of the great tragedies of modern European history, and thus designed to help to prevent its reoccurrence, has not instead been transformed into an element which assists in the reproduction of similar tragedies on a global scale.

References
Domenico Losurdo

Towards a Critique of the Category of Totalitarianism

A polysemous category

Already in 1951, when Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was first published, the concept of totalitarianism had been debated for decades. And yet, the meaning of the term still lacks a proper definition. Is it possible to find a way through what appears to be a maze? In this article, I shall not examine the examples in which the adjective ‘totalitarian’, even more than the noun that derives from it, bears a positive connotation. In other words, I shall not concentrate on the positive use of the term ‘totalitarian’ with reference to the capacity, attributed to a religion or to any ideology or world view, to posit solutions to all of the many problems that arise from a dramatic situation, or even to answer the question of the meaning of life, a question that concerns humans in their totality. In 1958, though rejecting ‘legal totalitarianism’, that is, totalitarianism imposed by the law, Karl Barth extolled the universalistic impulse and the all-encompassing effectiveness of the Christian ‘message’: ‘The free grace of the Gospel, too, is “totalitarian”, because it
aims at the whole, it demands all human beings, and demands each of them totally for itself'.

Here, instead, I shall focus on the political debate. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno hardly discuss the USSR. Besides dealing with the Third Reich, they analyse `totalitarian capitalism':

Previously only the poor and savages had been exposed to the untrammelled force of the capitalist elements. But the totalitarian order has granted unlimited rights to calculating thought and puts its trust in science as such. Its canon is its own brutal efficiency.

Horkheimer and Adorno consider the stages that paved the way to Nazism to be not only the violence perpetrated by the great Western powers against the colonial peoples, but also the violence perpetrated, in the very heart of the capitalistic metropolis, against the poor and outcasts locked in the workhouses. Simone Weil, another author influenced to some extent by Marxism, held to a similar perspective. Though Weil occasionally compared Hitler’s Germany to Stalin’s Soviet Union, when she denounced the horror of total power, of totalitarianism, she referred primarily to colonialism and imperialism: ‘The similarity between Hitler’s system and ancient Rome is so astounding that one is tempted to believe that, two thousand years later, only Hitler was able to faithfully copy the Romans’. Between the Roman Empire and the Third Reich, we find Louis XIV’s unbridled and unscrupulous expansionism: ‘The regime he established already deserved, for the first time in Europe after Rome, the modern epithet of totalitarian’; ‘the dreadful destruction of the Palatinate [carried out by the French conquering troops] was not even justified by the circumstances of a war’. Moving backwards from ancient Rome, Weil gave a proto-totalitarian interpretation to the biblical event of the conquest of Canaan and the annihilation of its people.

Consider some liberal thinkers. In tracing the genesis of ‘totalitarian democracy’, Jacob Talmon comes to the following conclusion:

If... empiricism is the ally of freedom, and the doctrinaire spirit is the friend of totalitarianism, the idea of man as an abstraction, independent of the

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1 In Pombeni 1977, pp. 324–5. Italics are mine.
4 Weil 1990, pp. 204, 206.
historic groups to which he belongs, is likely to become a powerful vehicle of totalitarianism.5

Clearly, Talmon’s targets are the Declaration of Human Rights and the French revolutionary tradition as a whole (not only Rousseau, but also Sieyès).

As for Hayek, ‘the tendencies that culminated in the creation of totalitarian systems are not confined to the countries that later succumbed to them’,6 and they are not limited to the communist and Nazi-fascist movements. With regard to Austria in particular:

It was not the Fascists but the socialists who began to collect children from the tenderest age into political organisations to make sure that they grew up as good proletarians. It was not the Fascists but the socialists who first thought of organising sports and games, football and hiking, in party clubs where the members would not be infected by other views. It was the socialists who first insisted that the party member should distinguish himself from others by the modes of greeting and the forms of address.

Hayek can therefore conclude: ‘The idea of a political party that encompasses all of the activities of an individual, from the cradle to the grave’, and that radiates a general Weltanschauung, this idea is associated first of all with the socialist movement.7 Behind this movement is a much older tradition that can be found, as Hayek – the father of neo-laissez-faire – will observe later on, in ‘“social” or totalitarian democracy’.8 At any rate, ‘economic control and totalitarianism’ are strictly connected.9

Therefore, if, on the one hand, colonialism and imperialism are the main (though not the exclusive) indicted phenomena, on the other hand, the principal (though not exclusive) target of the polemic is the revolutionary tradition that from 1789 leads to 1917, passing through the 1848 demand for the right to work and the ‘“social” or totalitarian democracy’.

At this point, a further distinction can be made. So-called ‘leftist’ totalitarianism can be criticised from two quite different perspectives. It can either be regarded as the product of the unfortunate organicist ideology attributed to Marx, Rousseau, or even Sieyès (this is Talmon’s and Hayek’s

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5 Talmon 1960, p. 4.
6 Hayek 1986, pp. 8–9.
7 Hayek 1986, p. 85.
8 Hayek 1960, p. 55.
9 Hayek 1986, Ch. VII.
approach); or it can be discussed by examining the material characteristics of the countries in which Communist totalitarianism has prevailed. This is the method used by Karl Wittfogel: the ‘comparative study of total power’ — reads the subtitle of his book — shows that this phenomenon manifests itself especially in the East, in a ‘hydraulic society’ characterised by an attempt to achieve total control over the necessary hydraulic resources for the development of agriculture and for the actual survival of the people. In this context, far from being the forefather of Communist totalitarianism, Marx is its critic *ante litteram*, as emerges from his analysis and denunciation of ‘Oriental despotism’, to borrow a category used by Wittfogel in the very title of his book.\(^{10}\)

However, the implication is that ‘total power’ is not exclusively linked to the twentieth century, and therefore a further distinction is necessary. While Arendt insists on the novelty of the totalitarian phenomenon, Popper comes to an opposite conclusion. According to Popper, the conflict between the ‘open society and its enemies’ seems to be eternal: ‘What we now call totalitarianism belongs to a tradition which is just as old or just as young as our civilisation itself’.\(^{11}\)

One final remark on this: we have seen that totalitarianism can be denounced from the right or from the left. Yet, in some cases, the denunciation comes from circles and figures associated with Nazism, and it is directed exclusively against its enemies. In August 1941, during the campaign, or rather, the war of extermination against the Soviet Union, faced with a relentless and unforeseen resistance, the German General Halder explained away such resistance with the claim that the enemies had carefully prepared for the war ‘with the absolute lack of scruples typical of a totalitarian State’.\(^{12}\) Although he did not use the term ‘totalitarianism’, Goebbels explained the unexpected, unprecedented resistance that the invading army encountered in the East in a similar manner: by erasing every trace of free personality, Bolshevism ‘transforms men into robots’, ‘war robots’, ‘mechanised robots’.\(^{13}\) The accusation of totalitarianism can even be targeted at the Western enemies of the Axis. In 1937, the aspiration of fascist Italy to form a colonial empire of its own clashed with the hostility that came first of all from England, and thus England

\(^{10}\) Wittfogel 1959.
\(^{12}\) In Ruge-Schumann 1977, p. 82.
was condemned for its ‘cold, totalitarian discrimination against all that is not simply English’.14

The turn of the Cold War and Hannah Arendt’s contribution

Since the publication of The Origins of Totalitarianism, the polysemies of the debate we have briefly discussed have tended to be dispelled. In May 1948, Arendt denounced the ‘development of totalitarian methods’ in Israel, referring to ‘terrorism’ and the expulsion and deportation of the Arab population.15 Only three years later, no room was left for criticism directed against the contemporary West. And, now more than ever, the only politically-correct position was the one that targeted exclusively Hitler’s Germany and the Soviet Union.

This position triumphed during the Cold War and onwards. On 12 March 1947, Harry Truman proclaimed the ‘doctrine’ named after him: after the victory in the war against Germany and Japan, a new phase in the struggle for freedom had begun. The menace now came from the Soviet Union: ‘totalitarian regimes imposed on free peoples, by direct or indirect aggression, undermine the foundations of international peace and hence the security of the United States’.16

The point is clearly indicated here: one should not move backwards from the twentieth century. Besides, it would make no sense to attack the socialists alongside the Communists; however serious their past faults might have been, the socialists were now usually allies of the Western world. And to use an approach similar to the one that would later be proposed by Wittfogel would be misleading for two reasons. The category of ‘Oriental despotism’ could hardly legitimate a US intervention, for example, in the civil war that broke out in China (where, immediately after the proclamation of his doctrine, and precisely in the name of the struggle against totalitarianism, Truman pledged to support Chiang Kai-shek).17 On the other hand, insisting on the actual conditions, which would explain the affirmation of ‘total power’, would make the condemnation of Communists more difficult and less aggressive. For this

14 Scarfoglio 1999, p. 22.
15 Arendt 1989, p. 87.
17 See Mao’s argument against the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson (the speech is dated 28 August 1949).
reason, the deductivist approach ended up prevailing. The Cold War took on
the shape of an international civil war, one that tore apart all countries transversally. The best way for the Western world to face this war was to
establish itself as the champion in the struggle against the new totalitarianism,
which was labelled as the necessary and inevitable consequence of Communist
ideology and programme.

Where does Arendt’s contribution fit in this context? Immediately following
its publication, The Origins of Totalitarianism was harshly criticised by Golo
Mann:

The first two parts of the work deal with the prehistory of the total State.
Here, however, readers will not find what they usually encounter in similar
studies, that is, researches on the peculiar history of Germany, Italy, or
Russia. . . . Instead, Hannah Arendt dedicates two thirds of her work to anti-
semitism and imperialism, especially English-style imperialism. I cannot
follow her. . . . Only in the third part, which represents the goal of the whole
book, does Hannah Arendt really seem to tackle the subject. 18

What Mann considered to be essentially off-topic are the pages dedicated to
antisemitism and imperialism. And, yet, the point was to explain the genesis
of a régime like Hitler’s, which overtly aimed at creating, in Central and
Eastern Europe, a great colonial empire based upon the dominion of a pure,
white, Aryan race, once the Jewish germ of subversion, which fuelled the
revolt of Untermenschen and inferior races, had been exterminated once and
for all.

However, Golo Mann grasps an actual problem. How can the last part of
Arendt’s book, which exclusively targets Stalin’s USSR and the Third Reich,
coexist harmoniously with the first two parts, where Arendt criticises France
(for its antisemitism) and particularly England (for its imperialism)? England
was the country that played a central and ruinous role in the struggle against
the French Revolution: Edmund Burke did not limit himself to defending the
feudal nobility on an internal level, but he enlarged ‘the principle of these
privileges to include the whole English people, establishing them as a kind
of nobility among nations’. This is where the genesis of racism, ‘the main
ideological weapon of imperialistic politics’, must be sought. 19 Understandably,

18 Mann 1951.
then, these unsettling ideologies took root particularly in England, where they fed off England’s obsession with ‘inheritance theories and their modern equivalent, eugenics’. Disraeli’s position was not very different from Gobineau’s: both were devoted defenders of ‘race’, though only Disraeli succeeded in securing positions of such power and prestige. Furthermore, it was above all in English colonies that a power free of the limitations of the capitalistic metropolis began to be theorised and experimented against ‘subject races’. Already within the English Empire, there emerged the temptation to use ‘administrative massacres’ as instruments to maintain supremacy. This is the starting point for understanding the ideology and practice of the Third Reich. Arendt’s portrait of Lord Cromer was rather similar to the one she would later give of Adolf Eichmann: the banality of evil seems to find its initial feeble embodiment in the British ‘imperialist administrator’ who, in his ‘indifference and aloofness, in [his] genuine lack of interest in [his] subjects’, develops a ‘philosophy of the bureaucrat’ and ‘a new form of governing’, ‘a more dangerous form of governing than despotism and arbitrariness’. Arendt’s criticism of Cromer is quite harsh, but it mysteriously disappears in the third part of The Origins of Totalitarianism.

The fact is that Arendt’s book is actually made up of two different layers, which were written during two different periods, and are separated by the momentous mark constituted by the outbreak of the Cold War. Still in France, Arendt viewed the book she was writing ‘as a comprehensive work on anti-semitism and imperialism’, and a historical investigation on what she then called ‘“racial imperialism”, the most extreme form of the suppression of minority nations by the ruling nation of a sovereign state’. At that moment, far from being a target, the USSR was, rather, a model. It had to be credited – as Arendt observed in the fall of 1942 (after moving to the United States and following, from there, Hitler’s Operation Barbarossa) – with having ‘simply eliminated anti-semitism’ by means of ‘a right and quite modern solution to the national question’. In Zionism Reconsidered, written in October 1945, Arendt made an even more significant remark:

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20 Arendt 1958, pp. 176, 183.
21 Arendt 1958, pp. 131, 133–4, 216.
22 Arendt 1958, pp. 211, 212, 213.
23 Young-Bruehl 1984, p. 158.
What every political and national movement in our times should give its utmost attention to with respect to Russia – namely, its entirely new and successful approach to nationality conflicts, its new form of organizing different peoples on the basis of national equity – has been neglected by friends and foes alike.25

I have chosen to use the italics to emphasise the overturning of position that would take place a few years later, when Stalin would be accused of purposely disjointing the existing organisations in order to artificially produce the amorphous mass that constituted the basis for the advent of totalitarianism.

According to the third part of The Origins of Totalitarianism, what characterises Communist totalitarianism is the sacrifice, inspired and stimulated by Marx, of morals on the altar of the philosophy of history and its ‘necessary’ laws. In January 1946, however, Arendt had expressed herself in very different terms:

In the country which made Disraeli its Prime Minister, the Jew Karl Marx wrote Das Kapital, a book which in its fanatical zeal for justice, carried on the Jewish tradition much more efficaciously than all the success of the ‘chosen man of the chosen race’.26

As a theorist of justice, Marx is seen here quite positively, and in sharp contrast to an English Prime Minister who formulated theories which would later be inherited and radicalised by the Third Reich.

During the passage from the first two parts of the book, which still possess the vehemence of the struggle against Nazism, to the third, which is instead tied to the outbreak of the Cold War, the category of imperialism (a category subsuming first of all Great Britain and the Third Reich as a sort of highest stage of imperialism) is replaced by the category of totalitarianism (which subsumes Stalin’s USSR and the Third Reich).

The species of the genus of imperialism do not coincide with the species of the genus of totalitarianism. Even the species that apparently remains unchanged, that is Germany, is described in the first case as originating with Wilhelm II at the earliest, and in the second case it appears as late as 1933. At least with regard to formal coherence, the initial plan appears to be more rigorous. After clarifying the genus of ‘imperialism’, in tracing the specific

25 Arendt 1978c, p. 149.
26 Arendt 1978a, p. 110.
differences of this phenomenon, the initial plan moved on to analyse the species of ‘racial imperialism’. But how could the categories of totalitarianism and imperialism now blend together into a coherent whole? And what relationship connected them both to the category of antisemitism? Arendt’s answers to these questions seem to seek an artificial harmonisation between two levels that continue to be scarcely compatible.

Rather than being one single book, The Origins of Totalitarianism consists in reality of two overlapping books which, despite the adjustments later made by Arendt, fail to achieve any substantial unity. Renowned historians and historians of ideas (Carr and Stuart Hughes) reviewed the work with respect and occasionally with admiration, but they immediately noticed the disproportion between Arendt’s actual and thorough knowledge of the Third Reich, and her inaccurate understanding of the Soviet Union. In particular, they emphasised the difficulties in Arendt’s attempt to adapt the analysis of the Soviet Union (associated with the outbreak of the Cold War) to the analysis of the Third Reich (rooted in the years of the great coalition against fascism and Nazism).27

The Cold War and the later adjustments of the category of totalitarianism

In The Origins of Totalitarianism, Arendt spoke of concentration camps always and exclusively in relation to the USSR and the Third Reich. What is particularly striking is the fact that Arendt did not even mention her own direct experience of this total institution: together with many other Germans who had fled Nazi Germany and had been considered suspicious after the outbreak of the war because they were citizens of an enemy state, Arendt had been confined for some time in Gurs. The living conditions must have been quite harsh: the common feeling – Arendt writes in 1943 – was that ‘we had been shipped there “pour crever” [to croak] in any case’, to the point that some of the inmates briefly considered the possibility of ‘suicide’ as a ‘collective act’ of protest.28

When The Origins of Totalitarianism was published, concentration camps were a sinisterly vital institution in Yugoslavia, as well, though inmates were,

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in that case, the Communists who remained loyal to Stalin. More generally, in this Balkan country, dictatorship was certainly no less strict than in Eastern Europe. However, in the case of Yugoslavia, which had sided with the Western world after the break with the USSR, ‘many aspects of despotism’ could be recognised, but nothing more than that, as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles affirmed in 1953. Dulles’s position is somehow confirmed by Arendt’s silence with regards to this point.

Further proof of the impact of the Cold War can be furnished: ‘Mussolini, who was so fond of the term “totalitarian state”, did not attempt to establish a full-fledged totalitarian regime and contented himself with dictatorship and one-party rule’. Arendt assimilated fascist Italy with Franco’s Spain and Salazar’s Portugal.

The accusation of totalitarianism spared Spain, Portugal, and Yugoslavia itself, but it struck or grazed even unexpected countries:

The chances for totalitarian rule are frighteningly good in the lands of traditional Oriental despotism, in India and China, where there is almost inexhaustible material to feed the power-accumulating and man-destroying machinery of total domination, and where, moreover, the mass man’s typical feeling of superfluousness – an entirely new phenomenon in Europe, the concomitant of mass unemployment and the population growth of the last 150 years – has been prevalent for centuries in the contempt for the value of human life.

It is worth pointing out the fact that, despite its parliamentary régime, India was at the time allied with the USSR!

As we have said, according to Arendt, what characterised Communist totalitarianism was the sacrifice, inspired and stimulated by Marx, of morals on the altar of the philosophy of history and its necessaritarian laws. The same argument presented in The Origins of Totalitarianism reappeared in a contribution, dated March 1949, by Dean Acheson, the United States Secretary of State during the Truman administration: NATO was the expression of the Atlantic and Western community, a community united ‘by common institutions and moral and ethical beliefs’ against a world that would not hearken to the

31 Arendt 1958, p. 311.
reasons of morals, indeed, a world inspired by the ‘Communist belief that coercion by force is a proper method of hastening the inevitable’.

Nevertheless, despite the substantial concessions to the ideological atmosphere of the Cold War, something of the original plan for *The Origins of Totalitarianism* continued to survive even in the third part of the book. What is immediately noticeable here is the distinction between Lenin’s revolutionary dictatorship and Stalin’s strictly totalitarian régime. Breaking with the Tsarist politics of oppression against minority nations, Lenin organised as many nationalities as possible, promoting the rise of a national and cultural awareness even among the most backward ethnic groups, which, for the first time, succeeded in organising themselves as autonomous cultural and national entities. Something similar occurred with the other forms of social and political organisation, as well: trade unions, for example, achieved an organisational autonomy they had never possessed in Tsarist Russia. All of this represented an antidote to the totalitarian régime, which presupposed a direct, immediate relationship between a charismatic leader, on one side, and an amorphous, atomised mass, on the other. The articulated structure built by Lenin was systematically dismantled by Stalin, who, in order to establish his totalitarian régime, had to disorganise the masses, so as to render them the object of the charismatic, undisputed power of the infallible leader.

How can the shift from Lenin to Stalin be explained? And why was the articulated, organised society that had emerged out of the revolution unable to oppose the systematic tactics of disarticulation and disorganisation that led to the imposition of the totalitarian régime? According to Arendt, ‘there is no doubt that Lenin suffered his greatest defeat when, with the outbreak of the civil war, the supreme power that he originally planned to concentrate in the Soviets definitively passed into the hands of the party bureaucracy’. The shift toward a totalitarian régime, then, was not the inevitable result of an ideological original sin (Marx’s history of philosophy); it was, first and foremost, the result of specific historical circumstances which directly put into question the responsibility of the Western powers, of the countries that had a consolidated liberal tradition and that were committed to fuelling, in any possible way, the anti-Bolshevik civil war. Incidentally, it is unclear how

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34 Arendt 1958, p. 319.
the association, made by Arendt in the third part of her book, between Bolshevism and Nazism can still hold: it was Lenin, not Stalin, who founded the Bolshevik Party. And, above all, the accusation against Marx is hardly justified. Yet, according to Arendt, in his political strategy, Lenin was guided more by his instinct as a great statesman than by Marxist ideology as such. In reality, the steps taken to emancipate national minorities were preceded by a long, complex debate that revolved precisely around the national question examined from a Marxist perspective.

The change between the initial project and the actual composition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* involved a fluctuation on a methodological level, as well. On the one hand, Arendt indulged in a deductivist interpretation of the totalitarian phenomenon, one clearly similar to that of the liberal authors we have already mentioned: she interpreted Stalin’s totalitarianism as the logical, inevitable consequence of Marxist ideology. On the other hand, Arendt was forced to make reference to the peculiar historical conditions that explained the advent of Stalin’s totalitarian régime: civil war, international aggression by the Entente powers (though Arendt does not mention it), the undoing of organisational structures, and so forth. The distinction between Leninism and Stalinism, between revolutionary dictatorship and the subsequent totalitarian régime, interrupts the strict, merely ideological, line of continuity established by Hayek and Talmon in order to connect Marx to totalitarianism.

Not by chance, this distinction was one of the targets of Golo Mann’s criticism. Another, even more relevant, target was represented by the first two parts of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in their entirety. Besides the reservations Mann expressed in his review, his conversation with Karl Jaspers (which Mann quotes in *Erinnerungen und Gedanken*) is particularly eloquent. Here, Mann urged Jaspers to move away from the heretical positions held by his disciple:

Do you believe that English imperialism, and especially Lord Cromer in Egypt, has something to do with the totalitarian State? Or French anti-semitism, the Dreyfus case? ‘Is that what she wrote?’ ‘Certainly; she devotes three chapters to it’. Blindly trusting his dear friend, he [Jaspers] had recommended her book, which he himself had only read briefly.35

Golo Mann was right. With regards to totalitarianism, Jaspers was unquestionably more orthodox than Arendt. And Arendt herself ended up yielding to the influences of the criticism directed against her, as emerges particularly in her essay, On Revolution. Here, Marx is regarded as the author of the ‘most pernicious doctrine of the modern age, namely that life is the highest good, and that the life process of society is the very centre of human endeavour’. The result is catastrophic:

This development led Marx into an actual surrender of freedom to necessity. He did what his teacher in revolution, Robespierre, had done before him and what his greatest disciple, Lenin, was to do after him in the most momentous revolution his teachings have ever inspired.36

‘The fanatical zeal for justice’, which Arendt wrote about in 1946 and which had for the most part disappeared only five years later, had now completely vanished, and not only with regards to Marx. The most relevant shift was another: the line of continuity that led from Marx to totalitarianism (passing through Lenin) was now smooth and even. Behind Marx was the influence of the French Revolution, which Arendt condemned as well, thus moving further away from The Origins of Totalitarianism.

The change in Arendt’s position, now atrophied into Talmon and Hayek’s deductivist approach, is now clear, as is the triumph achieved by Golo Mann. Beyond the concessions granted to Mann by Arendt, what prevails today is a reading of The Origins of Totalitarianism that seems to take into account the ideological preoccupations he expressed. Indeed, concerning the debate on totalitarianism, is there anyone today who still remembers Lord Cromer and his ‘new form of governing’, ‘a more dangerous form of governing than despotism’? Who mentions the temptation to use ‘administrative massacres’, a temptation that follows the history of imperialism like a shadow? Who discusses the category of imperialism anymore? Of the two parts that make up Arendt’s book, the one commonly used and examined is the less valid section, the one more burdened by immediate ideological and political preoccupations. In his review of The Origins of Totalitarianism, Golo Mann summarised his criticism thus: ‘It is all too subtle, too intelligent, too artificial. . . . In short, on the whole we would have preferred a more vigorous,

more positive tone’. Indeed, the theory of totalitarianism later became less ‘subtle’, more ‘vigorous’ and more ‘positive’, fully meeting the needs of the Cold War. A product of organicism, or of right-wing or left-wing holism, and somehow inferable a priori from this poisoned ideological source, totalitarianism (in both its opposite configurations) explains all of the horror of the twentieth century: such is today the predominant vulgate.

**The theory of totalitarianism and the selection of twentieth-century horrors**

This vulgate does not even attempt to investigate some of the major catastrophes of the century, though it nevertheless insists on explaining them. Let us move backwards from the October Revolution, which is supposed to constitute the starting point of the totalitarian era. How, then, should the First World War be regarded, with its total mobilisation, its total regimentation, its executions and decimations even within one’s own camp, its ruthless collective punishments that included, for instance, the deportation and extermination of the Armenians? And, even earlier, how should the Balkan wars and their massacres be viewed? And still proceeding backwards, what interpretation should be given to the tragedy of the Herero, who were judged to be unfit as a servile work force and who, in the early twentieth century, were sentenced by an explicit order to be annihilated?

Now, rather than backwards, let us move forward from the First World War and the October Revolution. Just over two decades later, concentration camps appeared in the United States as well, where, in compliance with an executive order issued by Franklin Roosevelt, all American citizens of Japanese origin, including women and children, were locked up in concentration camps.

At the same time, in Asia, the war led by the Empire of the Rising Sun took on some particularly horrifying aspects. With the rape of Nanking, massacres became a kind of sport and pastime: who would be fastest and most efficient in beheading the prisoners? The dehumanisation of the enemy now reached a rare and perhaps ‘unique’ level: rather than on animals, vivisection experiments were conducted on the Chinese, who also served as living targets for Japanese soldiers’ bayonet practice. Dehumanisation extended also to the women who, in the countries invaded by Japan, suffered brutal

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37 Mann 1951.
sexual slavery: they became ‘comfort women’, forced to ‘work’ at frantic pace to provide pleasure to the war-exhausted occupying army, and often eliminated as they became worn-out or sick.38

The war in the Far East, where the Japanese tortured their English and American prisoners and even used bacteriological weapons against the Chinese, came to an end with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, carried out despite the fact that Japan had reached the end of its resources and was preparing to surrender: for this reason, some American authors have compared the annihilation of the civil population in the two helpless Japanese cities to the extermination of the Jews carried out by the Third Reich in Europe.

None of this is present in Arendt’s book. Japan hardly appears in the analytical index: the war in Asia is only briefly mentioned to denounce China’s totalitarianism, and not even limited to the Communist Party, but extended to the whole country, behind which, as we have seen, Arendt saw the influence of ‘Oriental despotism’. Beyond the impact of the Cold War – in the meantime, Japan had joined the anti-totalitarian front – all the limits of the category of totalitarianism emerge here.

And the said category can provide no plausible explanation even for the tragedies it directly discusses. The ‘Final Solution’ was immediately preceded by two steps. During the First World War, it was Tsarist Russia (a country allied with the Entente powers) that promoted the mass deportation, from the borderland, of the Jews, who were suspected of being disloyal to a régime that oppressed them. After the collapse of Tsarism and the outbreak of the Civil War, it was the White troops (supported by the Entente) who unleashed the hunt against the Jews, labelled as the secret inspirers of the ‘Judeo-Bolshevik’ revolution: the massacres that ensued – as historians emphasise – seem to foreshadow precisely the ‘Final Solution’.39

**An arbitrary, inconclusive deductivism**

If the omissions that characterise the modern-day theory of totalitarianism are astounding, what is clearly untenable is the deductivist approach to which this theory appeals. In the communism proposed by Marx, state, nation, religion, social classes, all of the elements that constitute a meta-individual identity disappear; it makes no sense to speak of organicism and to derive,

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39 For the general overview of the twentieth century, see Losurdo 1996, and 1998.
from this supposed original sin, the annihilation of the individual within the totalitarian system. And, with regard to the sacrifice of morals on the altar of the philosophy of history, this motif had previously been refuted or at least drastically problematised, in January 1946, by Arendt, who had portrayed Marx as a sort of Jewish prophet with a thirst for justice.

The deductivist approach reveals itself to be arbitrary and inconclusive even in reference to the Third Reich. If we leaf through the genealogical tree of Nazism as it is commonly viewed by the most authoritative historians, we inevitably encounter Houston Stewart Chamberlain: according to Ernst Nolte, Chamberlain was a ‘good liberal’ who ‘waves the flag of individual freedom’. Indeed, we are dealing with an author who maintains that Germanism (which, in the final analysis, is synonymous with the Western world) was characterised by the resolute rejection of ‘monarchic absolutism’ and any view of the world that would sacrifice the ‘individual’ for the sake of the community. Not by chance, Locke is seen as the ‘one who re-elaborated the new German Weltanschauung’; and, as for previous examples, one would be William of Ockham, and another, even before him, Duns Scotus, who held that the ‘individual’ constituted the ‘only reality’.

A historical reconstruction of the ‘cultural origins of the Third Reich’ cannot ignore Arthur de Gobineau, either: the author of *Inequality of Human Races* celebrated the ‘liberal traditions of the Aryans’, who long resisted against the ‘Canaanite monstrosity’, that is, the idea of a ‘homeland’. And, if in this context we also include Julius Langbehn, as George Mosse, among others, suggests, we can note his even stronger profession of individualistic faith, or rather, his celebration of the ‘Holy Spirit of individualism’, the ‘German principle of individualism’, this ‘stimulating force, fundamental and original of every Germanism’. The countries that represented a model for this were, for the most part, the classic countries of the liberal tradition. If Gobineau dedicated his book ‘to His Majesty, George V’, Julius Langbehn celebrated the English people as ‘the most aristocratic of all peoples’ and ‘the most individual of all peoples’. Analogously, Gustave Le Bon (an author admired by Goebbels) contrasted, in a constant and positive manner, the Anglo-Saxon world to the rest of the planet.42

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40 Nolte 1978, p. 351.
41 Mosse 1964, passim.
42 For the analysis of Gobineau, Langbehn, Chamberlain, and Le Bon, see Losurdo 2002, Chapter 25, § 1.
But why should we go so far, after all? Let us read Mein Kampf. Hitler harshly criticised a vision of the world which insisted on attributing a ‘creative, culture-creating force’ to the state, and not only belittled the value of race, but was also guilty of ‘underestimation of the individual’, or rather, of ‘individuals’. The ‘progress and culture of humanity’ rested first and foremost ‘on the genius and energy of one’s personality’; thus, we were never to lose sight of ‘individual men’, of the ‘individual’ [Einzelwesen] in its irreducible peculiarity, in their ‘thousands of the finest differentiations’. Hitler proffered himself as the authentic, coherent defender of the value of ‘personality’, of the ‘subject’, of the ‘creative power and ability of the individual personality’, of the ‘idea of personality’ in contrast to the ‘democratic mass idea’, which found its most obvious and repulsive expression in Marxism. If Marxism denied ‘the value of personality’, the Nazi movement ‘must promote respect for personality by all means; it must never forget that in personal worth lies the worth of everything human; that every idea and every achievement is the result of one man’s creative force’.

Of course, Nazism also appealed to choral unity in the struggle against the enemy; but this was a motif used, for obvious reasons and in various manners, by the ideology of war in all of the countries involved in the Second Thirty Years’ War. It would be necessary to examine the stages through which the celebration of the ‘individual’, ‘personality’, and the ‘single’ was transformed, in a conscious or surreptitious way, in order to extol a culture or a people truly capable of grasping these values, consequently hierarchising peoples and condemning ‘races’ considered to be intrinsically and irremediably collectivistic. However, this dialectic also manifested itself within the liberal tradition, and, at any rate, it cannot be described by means of the categories of organicism or holism.

In the best of hypotheses, to insist on explaining totalitarianism through organicism or through the sacrifice of morals for the sake of the philosophy of history is equal to explaining the soporiferous effect of opium by referring to its vis dormitiva.

43 Hitler 1971, pp. 382–3.
44 Hitler 1971, p. 345.
45 Hitler 1971, p. 421.
46 Hitler 1971, p. 442.
47 Hitler 1971, pp. 443–5 and passim.
48 Hitler 1971, pp. 65, 352.
49 See Losurdo 2002, Ch. 33, § 2.
Totalitarianism and one-party rule

Let us now put aside the cultural origins of totalitarianism and concentrate on its characteristics. These should consist of a ‘[state] ideology, a single party typically led by one man, a terroristic police, a communications monopoly, a weapons monopoly, and a centrally directed economy’. Of the last two characteristics – as the authors of this definition admit – the first is perhaps associated to the nature of the state as such, and the second can also be found in Great Britain, which at the time (in 1956) was profoundly marked by nationalisation and social reforms. We should therefore concentrate on other characteristics. Is a communications monopoly exclusively linked to a ‘totalitarian dictatorship’? As is perhaps well known, during the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson created a Committee on Public Information that provided 22,000 news columns to the press each week, withholding everything that was considered susceptible of favouring the enemy. Is it a ‘terroristic police’, then, which peculiarly defines totalitarianism? It almost seems as if the two authors of *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* were unaware of the history of the country to which they had moved. The Espionage Act of 16 May 1918 stated that a person can be sentenced to up to twenty years in prison for using ‘any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the Constitution of the United States, or the military or naval forces of the United States, or the flag . . . or the uniform of the Army or Navy of the United States’. Renowned American historians have highlighted the fact that the measures launched during the First World War aimed ‘at eliminating even the slightest traces of opposition’. And violence from above mingles with violence from below, a violence tolerated and even encouraged by the authorities and which consists in a ruthless hunt for anyone who may be suspected of insufficient patriotism.

As for the ‘single party typically led by one man’, what we witness here is the parallelism and confusion between two problems which are considerably different. With regards to the role of the leader, a comparison may be interesting. In 1950, at the outbreak of the war in Korea, while President Truman did not hesitate to intervene independently of Congress, Mao was instead forced to confront and defeat a strong opposition from the Politburo, an opposition

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against which he was initially in the minority.\textsuperscript{53} The fact remains that, unlike the United States, China was led by a one-party rule and that such a characteristic is typical of totalitarian régimes. Besides holding the monopoly of political action, the party is rather an army-party and, at the same time, especially in the case of the Communists, a Church-party. Is this enough to confirm the validity of the theory of totalitarianism?

On the contrary, if this theory exclusively targets Communism and Nazism, it was already refuted by Hayek, who correctly included the socialist parties into the comparison. Indeed, in depreciating the incapacity of the bourgeois press to influence the ‘large masses’ and in declaring that a lesson should be learned from the insurrection campaigns launched by ‘Marxism’, Hitler made reference first of all to the ‘Social Democratic press’ and to the ‘agitators’ (public speakers and journalists) of social democracy.\textsuperscript{54}

However, Hayek too was guilty of remaining tied to empirical observation without questioning the reasons for the occurrence of the phenomenon (the army-party and the Church-party) he recognised and criticised. The socialist parties aimed at breaking the bourgeois monopoly of communications, and therefore they promoted the publication of party organs, the organisation of schools for the training of officials, and so on. This problem did not concern the bourgeoisie, since the latter could count on the control of the school apparatus and the great information organs, as well as on the direct or indirect support from the Churches and other associations and branches of civil society. The anti-socialist legislation launched by Bismarck forced the party to adapt to the conditions of illegality, and brought about the aspiration to break the bourgeois monopoly of violence. This dialectic had already developed during the French Revolution. The bourgeoisie tried to maintain the monopoly of violence by imposing eligibility clauses even regarding enlistment in the National Guard. Thus, on the opposite side, parties also became organisations for struggle.

This dialectic reached its highest point with Tsarist Russia. In developing his party ideology, Lenin had in mind the model of German social democracy, but he strengthened its centralised structure even more in order to combat Tsarist autocracy and a police régime that was particularly watchful and brutal. Understandably, then, the Bolshevik Party revealed itself to be, more

\textsuperscript{53} Chen 1994, pp. 181–6.
\textsuperscript{54} Hitler, 1971, pp. 528–9.
than any other, prepared for the permanently extraordinary circumstances that, from the First World War on, characterised Russia and Europe. For this reason, the Bolshevik Party became a model not only for the Communists, but also for their antagonists. As Nikolai Bukharin observed at the XII Congress of the Bolshevik Party in April 1923:

More than the representatives of any other party, the Fascists have embodied and put into practice the experience of the Russian Revolution. If we consider them from a formal perspective, that is, from the perspective of the strategy of their political methods, we see a perfect application of Bolshevik tactics, and specifically, of Russian Bolshevism, in the form of a rapid concentration of forces and a vigorous action carried out by a steady and compact military organisation.55

The contiguity which, for Hayek, was synonymous with ideological and political proximity is here synonymous with antagonism. To the attempt, on the part of labour parties, to break the bourgeois monopoly of violence, the bourgeoisie responded by breaking the socialist and communist monopoly of revolutionary parties: this was Bukharin’s interpretation.

After all, the time sequence established by Hayek is schematic and inaccurate. In other circumstances, it was the socialists who had to learn from their antagonists. In Italy, while the trade unions and political organisations of the working classes were systematically crushed by the fascist assault (on the eve of the March on Rome, that is, of the coup d’état by the king and Mussolini), in an attempt to organise a defence, Guido Picelli (then a socialist) felt the need to break away with the legal tradition:

We now need new methods. To contrast the armed forces we need armed forces too. Therefore, we need to form, in Italy, the ‘proletarian red army’. Unfortunately, events have proved enough, and the few of us had maintained this from the very beginning: fascism can be beaten on the same ground of violence upon which fascism itself dragged us first. The Christian resignation advocated by the leaders of the reformist method have made the enemy bolder, and undone our organisations. . . . Proletarians need a new method of defence and battle: ‘its army’. Our forces must organise and discipline themselves voluntarily. Workers must become soldiers, proletarian soldiers, but ‘soldiers’ nonetheless. . . . In order to attack us, the bourgeoisie did not

create a party that would have been inadequate, but an armed organ, its army: fascism. We must do the same. 56

Above all, what is arbitrary is the point of departure indicated by Hayek. We can easily move backward from the starting point he indicated (the formation of socialist parties). Once again, we are in the presence of a dialectic that had already emerged during the French Revolution: if the people’s Jacobin sections represented the answer to bourgeois, land-owning monopoly of the National Guard, the jeunesse dorée was the bourgeois land-owners’ response to the people’s monopoly of the organised revolutionary party. From this clash, the dominant class that professed liberalism was only apparently absent: the proto-fascist organisation that formed in France in the early twentieth century served as ‘auxiliary police’ for state power and the dominant class. 57

A similar dialectic develops also with regards to the trade unions. Obviously, the capitalists – as Adam Smith had already noted – do not need them. 58 And yet, the trade unions inspired by Marxism and more-or-less radical opposition movements were followed by trade unions inspired by the Church and, later on, by others still, inspired by the fascist and Nazi movements. Finally, even ‘unions’ of capital are born.

In its drawing together and assimilating of two ‘facts’ (the socialists’ and communists’ appeal to the army-party and the Church-party, on the one hand, and the same appeal by the fascists and Nazis, on the other), Hayek’s interpretation reveals itself as affected by positivistic superstition. And it is precisely this superstition that, in the final analysis, constitutes the foundation of the current theory of totalitarianism. Following Hayek’s logic, we could even draw Roosevelt and Hitler together: indeed, the ‘fact’ is unquestionable that both resorted to tanks, war planes and ships!

On the other hand, in forging his weapons for struggle, Hitler did not limit himself to observing the socialist and Communist parties. As he denounced the incapacity of traditional bourgeois parties to influence the people, who were thus helplessly exposed to subversive influence and uprisings, Hitler resolved to learn not only from social democracy, but also from the Catholic Church which, in spite of everything, he admired for its ability to sweep up the masses and for recruiting cadres even from the poorest social classes. 59

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58 Smith 1981, p. 67 (Book I, Chapter VII).
What the Führer especially praised was a religious order: ‘It was with Himmler that the SS became this extraordinary militia, devoted to an idea, faithful unto death. In Himmler I see our Ignatius of Loyola’.60 Already celebrated by Joseph de Maistre as the only organisation capable of standing up to revolutionary freemasonry,61 and later used as a model by Cecil Rhodes for his imperialistic idea of ‘rule through secrecy’62 – as Arendt points out – the Jesuit order was finally viewed as the organisation of capable, disciplined and committed cadres needed by the counterrevolutionary civil war of the twentieth century. Should we then associate Masonic lodges, Societas Jesu, and Schutz Staffeln?

Racial state and eugenics: the United States and the Third Reich

We would be providing a very poor definition of the Third Reich if we limited ourselves to highlighting its totalitarian character, making particular reference to the phenomenon of one-party rule. With regard to leaders of one-party dictatorships, it would not be difficult at all to put Hitler side-by-side with Stalin, Mao, Deng, Ho Chi Minh, Nasser, Ataturk, Tito, Franco, and so forth, but this pedantic exercise is quite inadequate as a concrete historical analysis. And even if we separate the two ‘totalitarian’ leaders Stalin and Hitler from the ‘authoritarian’ Mussolini, whose power was limited by the presence of the Vatican and the Church, we still will not have made much progress. More than an actual step forward, this argument would represent a drift: from ideology we have inadvertently moved to a completely different sphere, to realities and facts that are pre-existent and independent from the ideological and political choices of fascism.

With regards to the Third Reich, it is quite difficult to make a definite and concrete statement on it without mentioning its racial and eugenic programmes. And these programmes lead us to a very different direction from the one proposed by the category of totalitarianism. Immediately after his rise to power, Hitler made sure that he clarified the distinction, even on a juridical level, between the position of the Aryans and those of the Jews and the few mulattos who still lived in Germany (at the end of the First World War, coloured troops belonging to the French army had taken part in the occupation

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61 Maistre 1984, p. 205.
of the country). In other words, a major aspect of the Nazi programme was that of building a racial state. And what were, at the time, the possible models for a racial state? Even more so than South Africa, the first example was the Southern United States. Still in 1937, Alfred Rosenberg made explicit reference to South Africa: it was well that it remain ‘in the hands of northerners’ and whites (thanks to appropriate ‘laws’ not only against ‘Indians’, but also ‘blacks, mulattos, and Jews’), and it should serve as a ‘solid bulwark’ against the menace of a ‘black awakening’. However, the main point of reference was represented by the United States, this ‘wonderful country of the future’, which had the merit of formulating the well-thought-out ‘new idea of a racial State’, an idea that should now be put into practice, ‘with youthful vigour’, by expelling and deporting ‘the blacks and the yellows’. We only need to take a look at the Nuremberg legislation to recognise analogies with the situation that was taking place on the other side of the Atlantic: clearly, in Germany, it was first of all Germans of Jewish descent that occupied the place of African-Americans. ‘In the United States’ – Rosenberg writes in 1937 – ‘the Negro question is on top of all crucial questions’; and once the absurd principle of equality has been eliminated concerning the blacks, there is no reason why they should not reach ‘the same resolution for the yellows and Jews, as well’. Even for his plan to build a German continental empire, Hitler had in mind the United States model, which he praised for its ‘extraordinary inner strength’: Germany was called upon to follow this example, expanding to Eastern Europe as to a sort of Far West and treating the ‘indigenous people’ in the same way as the redskins were treated.

We come to the same conclusion if we examine eugenics. As is well known, with regard to this ‘new science’, the Third Reich was indebted to the United States, where eugenics, which was invented during the second half of the nineteenth century by Francis Galton (a cousin of Darwin’s), became very popular. Well before Hitler’s rise to power, on the eve of the First World War, a book was published in Munich, Die Rassenhygiene in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika (Racial Hygiene in the United States of North America), which, already in its title, pointed to the United States as a model for ‘racial hygiene’. The author, Géza von Hoffmann, vice-consul of the Austro-Hungarian

63 Rosenberg 1937, pp. 666, 673.
64 Rosenberg 1937, pp. 668–9.
Empire in Chicago, extolled the US for the ‘lucidity’ and ‘pure practical reason’ it had demonstrated in confronting, with the necessary energy, a very important problem that was instead so often ignored: to violate the laws that forbid sexual intercourse and interracial marriages could be punished with up to ten years in prison, and not only the people responsible for the act, but also their accomplices, could be condemned.67

Even after the Nazi rise to power, the ideologues and ‘scientists’ of race continued to claim that ‘Germany, too, has much to learn from the measures adopted by the North-Americans: they know what they are doing’.68 It should be added that this was not a unilateral relationship. After Hitler’s rise to power, the most radical followers of the American eugenic movement looked up to the Third Reich as a model, and even travelled there on an ideological and research pilgrimage.69

It is now necessary to ask ourselves a question: Why, in order to define the Nazi régime, should the argument regarding the one-party dictatorship be more valid than that of racial and eugenic ideology and practice? It is precisely from this sphere that the central categories and key terminology of the Nazi discourse derived. This is the case with *Rassenhygiene*, which is essentially the German translation of *eugenics*, the new science invented in England and successfully exported to the United States. But there are even more sensational examples. Rosenberg expressed his admiration for the American author Lothrop Stoddard, credited with coining the term *Untermensch*, which already in 1925 stood out as the subtitle of the German translation of his book, *The Revolt against Civilization: The Menace of the Under Man*, published in New York three years earlier.70 As for the meaning of the term he coined, Stoddard clarified that it indicated the mass of ‘savages and barbarians’ who live inside or outside the capitalist metropolis, who are ‘essentially un-civilizable and incorrigibly hostile to civilization’, and who must necessarily be dealt with once and for all.71 In the United States, as in the rest of the world, it was necessary to defend ‘white supremacy’ against ‘the rising tide of colour’: what incited the coloured people to revolt was Bolshevism, ‘the renegade, the traitor within the gates’ which, with its insidious propaganda, reached

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68 Günther 1934, p. 465.
69 See Kühl 1994, pp. 53–63.
70 Rosenberg 1937, p. 214.
71 Stoddard 1925a, pp. 23–4.
not only the colonies, but even ‘the “black belts” of our own United States’. The extraordinary success of these theories is quite understandable. Even before receiving Rosenberg’s enthusiastic comments, Stoddard had already been praised by two American presidents (Harding and Hoover), and he was later welcomed and honoured in Berlin, where he met not only the most renowned representatives of Nazi eugenics, but also the highest officials of the régime, including Adolf Hitler, who had already begun his campaign to decimate and subjugate the Untermenschen.

One more term should be examined. We have seen that Hitler looked at the white expansion into the Far West as a model. Immediately after invading Poland, Hitler proceeded to dismember it: one side was directly incorporated into the Great Reich (and the Poles were expelled from it); the rest constituted the ‘general Governorate’, within which, as General Governor Hans Frank declared, the Poles would live as in ‘a sort of reservation’ (they were ‘subject to German jurisdiction’ without being ‘German citizens’). The American model was copied here in an almost pedantic manner.

At least in the beginning, the Third Reich planned to also establish a Judenreservat, a ‘reservation for the Jews’, once again based upon the model of the reservations where Native-Americans were segregated. And, as far as the expression ‘Final Solution’ is concerned, it was not in Germany, but in the United States that it first emerged, though it referred to the ‘Negro question’ rather than the ‘Jewish question’.

In the same way that it is not surprising that ‘totalitarianism’ found its most concentrated expression in the countries involved in the Second Thirty Years’ War, so it is not surprising that the Nazi attempt to build a racial state drew its inspirational motifs, its categories and key terminology from the historical experience that possessed the richest heritage of these elements, namely, the historical experience accumulated by white Americans in their relationship with Native-Americans and African-Americans. Of course, one should not lose sight of all the other differences, in terms of government, law, limitation of state power (with regards to the white community), etc. But the fact remains that the Third Reich represents the attempt, through total war

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72 Stoddard 1925b, pp. 220–1.
73 On all of this, see Kühl 1994, p. 61. President Harding’s flattering comment is quoted at the beginning of the French translation of Stoddard 1925b.
74 In Ruge-Schumann 1977, p. 36.
and international civil war, to create a régime of world-scale *white supremacy* under German hegemony by resorting to eugenic, sociopolitical and military measures.

What is at the heart of Nazism is the idea of *Herrenvolk*, which is associated with the racial theory and practice carried out in the Southern United States and, more in general, with the Western colonial tradition. It is precisely this idea that the October Revolution attacked: not by chance, in fact, the revolution called upon the ‘slaves in the colonies’ to break their fetters. The common theory of totalitarianism concentrates exclusively upon the similar methods attributed to the two antagonists and, besides, claims that they derive univocally from a supposed ideological affinity, without making any reference to the actual situation or to the geopolitical context.

**Towards a redefinition of the category of totalitarianism**

The main flaw of the category of totalitarianism is that it transforms an empirical description tied to specific characteristics into a general logical deduction. It is easy to recognise similarities between Stalin’s USSR and Nazi Germany. Starting from those, it is possible to construct a general category (totalitarianism) and to highlight the presence of this phenomenon in the two countries. However, to transform this category into a key to explain the political processes that took place in the two countries is an unjustifiable leap. The arbitrariness of this move should be evident, for two main reasons. We have already discussed the first: surreptitiously, the analogies between the USSR and the Third Reich with regards to the question of the one-party dictatorship are considered to be the decisive ones, whereas the analogies on the level of eugenics and racial politics (which would lead to very different associations) are ignored or eliminated.

Let us now concentrate on the second reason. Even if we focus on the one-party dictatorship in the two countries, why should we make reference to the two ideologies rather than to the similarity between the political situation (the permanently extraordinary circumstances) or the geopolitical context (the peculiar vulnerability) that the two countries were facing? I strongly believe that the totalitarian phenomenon is determined not only by ideologies and political traditions, but also, and quite powerfully, by the objective situation.

In this respect, it may be useful to reflect on the origin of the term ‘totalitarianism’. Two years after the outbreak of the October Revolution, in the aftermath of the First World War, the criticism of ‘revolutionary totalism
revolutionärer Totalismus emerged.76 The use of the adjective seemed to imply the existence of a different kind of totalism from the revolutionary form. While it pointed directly to a species (‘revolutionary totalism’), the genus (totalism) calls to mind, though indirectly, a different species, that of warlike totalism. Indeed, the noun used (which precedes the later term, ‘totalitarianism’) was placed immediately after an adjective which, from 1914 on, began to resound in an obsessive way. There was thus talk of ‘total mobilisation’ and, a few years later, of ‘total war’ and even ‘total politics’.77 ‘Total politics’ was the politics that could face up to ‘total war’. Was not this, too, the actual meaning that should have been attributed to the category of ‘totalitarianism’? Both Mussolini and Hitler explicitly declared that the movements and régimes they led were born out of war; and war inevitably determined the revolution that broke out against these movements, as well as the political régime that resulted from it.

If this is the case, to associate the USSR and Hitler’s Germany as the expressions par excellence of totalitarianism becomes even banal: where else should the political régime that corresponded to total war have revealed its fundamental characteristics if not in the two countries that were at the centre of the Second Thirty Years’ War? It was not at all surprising that the institution of the concentration camp took on a much more brutal shape here than, for example, in the United States, which was protected by the ocean from the threat of invasion, and which suffered losses and devastations that were much less significant than those suffered by the other countries involved. About a hundred and fifty years earlier, on the eve of the launch of the new federal constitution, Alexander Hamilton had explained that the limitation of power and the establishment of government by law had been successful in two insular-type countries which were protected by the sea from the threat of rival powers. Were the Union to fail and a system of states similar to the ones in Europe to emerge from its ruins in America, too – warned Hamilton – a permanent army, a strong, central power, and even absolutism would appear. In the twentieth century, even though it continued to represent an element of protection, the insular position was no longer an insurmountable obstacle: following the total war against the great European and Asian powers, the United States, too, witnessed the rise of totalitarianism, as demonstrated by

76 Paquet 1919, p. 111. Nolte 1987, p. 563 has drawn attention to this.
77 Ludendorff 1935, p. 35 and passim. Clearly, the motif of total mobilisation is particularly tied to Ernst Jünger.
the terroristic legislation that aimed at crushing any and all opposition, and above all, by the emergence of the most typical institution of totalitarianism, the concentration camp.

It could be argued that, in comparison to the Soviet Union and the Third Reich, concentration camps in France and in the United States were much tamer (though it would be superficial and irresponsible to see them as a mere trifle). Regardless of this, the fact remains that, in order to be adequate, a theory must be able to explain the emergence of this institution in all four countries, including those that enjoyed a liberal system, and it must clarify to what extent the differences are due to ideological diversity or to diversity in the objective situation and in the geopolitical context. A truly adequate theory must also explain the concentration camps in which the liberal Western world as a whole segregated native people in the colonies (for centuries the target of total war). And, in more general terms, it must explain why, since the outbreak of the First World War, even in liberal countries, the state was endowed, in Weber’s own words, with ‘a “lawful” power over the life, death, and freedom’ of its citizens. Far from providing an answer, the contemporary theory of totalitarianism cannot even formulate the problem.

**Performativ contradiction and the ideology of war in the contemporary theory of totalitarianism**

Marx sowed the seeds of the Communist totalitarianism he influenced: this notion was present in Arendt’s work from the Cold War onwards, and it has now become an integral part of the contemporary theory of totalitarianism. However, to paraphrase a famous expression used by Weber with regard to historical materialism, the theory of the non-innocence of theory is not a taxicab one can get in and out of at will. So, what role did the common theory of totalitarianism and the banner of the struggle against totalitarianism play in the massacre that in 1965 took the lives of hundreds of thousands of Communists in Indonesia? And with regard to Latin America’s contemporary history, its darkest moments are not tied to ‘totalitarianism’, but to the struggle against it. Just to give an example, a few years ago, in Guatemala, the Truth Commission accused the CIA of having strongly helped the military dictatorship to commit ‘acts of genocide’ against the Mayas, who were guilty of sympathising with the opponents of the régime supported by Washington.78

78 Navarro 1999.
In other words, with its silence and repressed thoughts, has not the common theory of totalitarianism itself turned into an ideology of war, of total war, one that has helped to increase the horror it supposedly condemned, thus falling into a tragic performative contradiction?

Nowadays we constantly hear denunciations, directed toward Islam, of ‘religious totalitarianism’⁷⁹ or of the ‘new totalitarian enemy that is terrorism’.⁸⁰ The language of the Cold War has reappeared with renewed vitality, as confirmed by the warning that American Senator Joseph Lieberman has issued to Saudi Arabia: beware the seduction of Islamic totalitarianism, and do not let a ‘theological iron curtain’ separate you from the Western world.⁸¹ Even though the target has changed, the denunciation of totalitarianism continues to function with perfect efficiency as an ideology of war against the enemies of the Western world. And this ideology justifies the violation of the Geneva Convention, the inhuman treatment of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, the embargo and collective punishment inflicted upon the Iraqis and other peoples, and the further torment perpetrated against the Palestinians. The struggle against totalitarianism serves to legitimate and transfigure the total war against the ‘barbarians’ who are alien to the Western world.

Translated by Marella and Jon Morris

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Massimo De Angelis

Separating the Doing and the Deed:
Capital and the Continuous Character 
of Enclosures

I. Orientations

Capital encloses. The diverse movements comprising the current global justice and solidarity movement are increasingly acknowledging and fighting against this truism: by opposing the attempts to relocate communities to make space for dams; by resisting privatisation of public services and basic resources such as water; by creating new commons through occupations of land and the building of communities; by struggling against patents which threaten the lives of millions of AIDS patients; by simply downloading and sharing music and software beyond the cash limits imposed by the market.

Despite the accumulating evidence of real social struggles against the many forms of capitalist enclosure, the fact that capital encloses is not something that has been sufficiently theorised by critical social and economic theory. On the side of mainstream research, the broad question of enclosures appears one of justification and modes of implementation. As regards justification, we have what has been referred to as the ‘tragedy of the commons’. The core
of this argument, first proposed by Hardin, is that commons are incentive and distribution arrangements that inevitably result in environmental degradation and generally resource depletion.¹ This is because the commons are understood as resources for which there is ‘free’ and ‘unmanaged’ access. In this framework, no one has an obligation to take care of commons. In societies in which commons are prevalent, Hardin argues, people live by the principle: ‘to each according to his needs’ formulated by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. By assuming that commons are a free-for-all space from which competing and atomised ‘economic men’ take as much as they can, Hardin has engineered a justification for privatisation of the commons space rooted in an alleged natural necessity.² Hardin forgets that there are no commons without community within which the modalities of access to common resources are negotiated. Incidentally, this also implies that there is no enclosure of commons without at the same time the destruction and fragmentation of communities.³

There is an extensive literature on the modes of privatisation and methods of implementation, on the alleged benefits that they would bring, not to mention the different fields in which enclosures of commons would emerge and be reinforced following trade liberalisation policies in new areas such as public services. In this immense literature, enclosures are the *basso continuo* of a neoliberal discourse within which we are fully immersed.

On the critical side, there is, of course, plenty of literature opposing this or that privatisation, this or that strategy of trade liberalisation, identifying the effects of WTO-sponsored trade liberalisation policies, or the immense

¹ See Hardin 1968.
² For a critique of Hardin’s approach, see, for example, Anderson and Simmons 1993. Ronald Coase offers a parallel argument to that of Hardin. The theorem that goes under his name, the ‘Coase Theorem’, proposes that pollution and other ‘externalities’ can be efficiently controlled through voluntary negotiations among the affected parties (that is, both polluters and those harmed by pollution). A key to the Coase Theorem is that many pollution problems emerge with common-property goods that have no clear-cut ownership or property rights. With clear-cut property rights, ‘owners’ would have the incentive to achieve an efficient level of pollution. Thus, pollution can be reduced through voluntary negotiation by assigning private property rights to common-property resources and the consequent development of a market in property rights can be established. Now, the problem with this is that every human action is a social action and therefore bound to produce ‘externalities’. In Coase’s framework, therefore, everything becomes enclosable. See Coase 1988.
³ For an analysis of the relation between commons and communities, see De Angelis 2003 and de Marcellus 2003. For an application of this analysis in the area of higher education, see Harvie 2004.
social cost of the building a new dam and relocating millions, or the injustice involved in privatising water. Yet, there are very few systematic works attempting to put it all together, as theoretical constructs, so as to help us to clarify the nature of the enclosing force we are facing.

Apart from few exceptions, it is within Marxist literature that we find the most paradoxical deficiency in the attempt to theorise enclosures as an ongoing feature of capitalist régimes. This is a literature that, in principle, should be very sensitive to issues of struggles and capitalist power, as well as to alternatives to capital. But there is a major fallacy in the way traditional Marxist literature has dealt with the issue of enclosures. It marginalises

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4 The literature here is truly, and fortunately so, very extensive. For some examples see Shiva 2002b on intellectual property rights and enclosure of knowledge and Shiva 2002a on water enclosures. On the important wave of struggles against water privatisation in Cochabamba, Bolivia, see the resources in Web 5. On the impact of dam projects on local populations and their struggles see the resources, for example, on the case of the Narmada Valley in Web 1 and 2. On the massive integrated system of enclosures across Central America under the plan Puebla-Panama see Hansen and Wallach 2002. The campaign against GATS (General Agreement on Trade and Services) has highlighted the corporate agenda of ‘locking in’ past privatisation and ‘enclosures’ as well as promoting new ones. See the resources in Web 3 and Web 4, as well as Wasselius 2002. On the damaging effects of debt and the struggles against it see the resources in Web 6. For a broad survey and identification of struggles against the enclosures imposed through structural adjustment policies, see Walton and Seddon 1994.

5 Exceptions derived from three different perspectives are offered for example, firstly in the work of John McMurtry who tries to put it all together by identifying the market as an ethical system and counterposes commons to marketisation; see McMurtry 1998, 1999, 2000. Secondly, another exception is the work of John Holloway 2002, and his important and refreshing analysis on the problematic of revolution today. Finally, Hardt and Negri 2000 open the way for what they call ‘commonwealth’. Whatever their strengths and weaknesses, these works leave the strategic question raised by the problematic of capital as enclosing social force in the background, without tackling it directly. In this sense, this paper intends to complement these works.

6 See for example Bonefeld 2001, De Angelis 2001, Federici 1992, Midnight Notes Collective 1992, Perelman 2000 among others. The web journal The Commoner (<http://www.thecommoner.org>) is largely dedicated to pursuing this line of research. For a critique of this approach, see Zaremka 2002 and, for a counter-critique, see Bonefeld 2002a.

7 In De Angelis 2001, I discuss the main horizons of the interpretation of primitive accumulation within the Marxist tradition. I identify a ‘historical primitive accumulation’ deriving from Lenin and a ‘inherent-continuous primitive accumulation’ stemming from Luxemburg. Subsequent more modern interpretations seem to share the basic characteristics of one or other of these two approaches. For example, in his classic Studies on the Development of Capitalism, Maurice Dobb (1963, p. 178) uses the category of primitive accumulation to indicate a well-defined age of accumulation of property rights better known as the mercantile age. According to Dobb, therefore, primitive accumulation is accumulation ‘in an historical sense’. It is worth noticing that Paul Sweezy, Dobb’s main opponent in the famous debate on the transition from feudalism
enclosures from theory by rendering it not just a question of genealogy, but a genealogy within a linear model of development. To simplify, the narrative goes something like this: before capitalism there were enclosures or ‘primitive accumulation’. These processes of expropriation are preconditions of capitalism because they create and develop markets for commodities such as labour-power and land. Once the job is done, we can stop talking about enclosures (or primitive accumulation) and need to talk about ‘capital logic’. ‘Primitive accumulation’ and ‘capital logic’ are thus distinctly separated, and therefore become the subject matter of two distinct Marxist disciplines. Marxist historians debate issues of genealogy and ‘transition’ to capitalism in ways which are linked to the issue of primitive accumulation or enclosures. On the other hand, Marxist economists debate the intricate issues of ‘capital logic’ such as questions of value, accumulation, crises, as if the social practices in front of their noses have nothing to do with real and ongoing enclosures (since, in their framework, these have already occurred some time in the past).

This framework is extremely problematic, both theoretically and politically. Theoretically, because, as I will argue in this paper, enclosures are a continuous characteristic of ‘capital logic’ once we understand capital not as a totalised system, but as a force with totalising drives that exists together with other forces that act as limit on it. This not only at the fringe of capital’s reach, in the strategies of imperialism for the creation of new markets. Even if we conceptualise the domain of capital as not having a territorial outside, as in to capitalism published in Science and Society 1950–3, also acknowledges Dobb’s ‘excellent treatment of the essential problems of the period of original accumulation’ (Sweezy 1950, p. 157). The now historic debate on ‘transition’ (collected in Hilton et al. 1978) and its later developments and transfigurations such as the Brenner debate in the pages of the journal Past and Present of the 1970s (collected in Aston and Philpin (eds.) 1985) and later exchanges in Science and Society (Gottlieb 1984; Laibman 1984; Sweezy 1986; McLennan 1986) is characterised by a general and shared acceptance of this historical definition of primitive accumulation. It is fair to point out however, that the approach by Samir Amin (1974, p. 3) is different from Dobb’s treatment of primitive accumulation as an historically prior period and is closer to the notion of inherent and continuous primitive accumulation that occurs through what Amin defines as transfer of value within the world economy. Another interpretation within this general framework may also include Wallerstein’s notion of a world-system, see Wallerstein 1979. Differently from the approach here taken, the continuous character of primitive accumulation in these accounts seem to stress only ‘objective’ mechanisms of accumulation and circulation of capital.

The capitalism that Marx never refers to, referring instead to the capitalist mode of production. See Smith 1996. This opens the way to conceptualising its coexistence with other modes of production, other modes of doing things and relating to each other, hence to regarding the social field as a strategic field of relations among forces.
There is a theoretical and political need to recognise the central role of enclosures as part of the world we live in. In this world, enclosures are one of the strategic horizons clashing with others. It is either capital that makes the world through commodification and enclosures, or it is the rest of us – whoever that ‘us’ is – that makes the world through counter-enclosures and commons. The net results of the clashes among these social forces Marx called ‘class struggle’, while Polanyi theorised it in terms of the ‘double movement of society’.

The capital-logic framework is also problematic politically, because the confinement of enclosures to a question of genealogy within a linear model of capitalist development paralyses Marxian-inspired contributions on the question of ‘alternatives’. Paralysis is understood here as state of powerlessness or incapacity to act. Indeed, in the linear model of historical development inherited and practised by classical Marxism, the alternative to capitalism can only be another ‘ism’. The ongoing struggles for commons within the current global justice and solidarity movement are thus not appreciated and problematised for what they are: the active development of alternatives to capital. Marxian-inspired thinking cannot add its weight to intellectual and political endeavours to shape alternatives in the here-and-now because its framework is for another ‘ism’ projected onto an indeterminate future, and generally defined by a model of power that needs a political élite to tell the rest of us why power cannot be exercised from the ground-up, starting from now. Thus, while current movements around the world are practising, producing and fighting for a variety of different commons – thus posing the strategic question of their political articulation – traditional Marxist theoreticians cannot conceptualise these movements in terms of categories familiar to them. They thus endeavour to reduce these movements to these familiar categories, and when they do that, their contribution to the rich debate on alternatives is poor indeed – too often a repetition of the simple mantra: ‘one solution, revolution’.

This paper is divided in three sections. First, I propose an alternative reading of Marx’s analysis of ‘primitive accumulation’, one that shows the continuing relevance of ‘enclosures’ as constituent element of capitalist relations and accumulation. In this perspective, enclosures are characteristics of capital’s

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10 For a discussion of this model of power – understood as ‘power over’ or potestas, vis-à-vis another emancipatory model of power, as ‘power to’, or potentia, see Holloway 2002.
strategies at all levels of capitalist development. Second, I briefly propose an analytical framework to study current new enclosures. Third, I offer a few concluding reflections on the question capitalist enclosures as ‘discursive practices’.

II. Marx and the continuous character of enclosures

II.i. Definitions

According to the traditional interpretation, Marx’s concept of primitive accumulation indicates the historical process that gave birth to the preconditions of a capitalist mode of production. These preconditions refer mainly to the creation of a section of the population with no other means of livelihood but their labour-power, to be sold in a nascent labour market, and to the accumulation of capital that may be used for nascent industries. In this conception, the adjective ‘primitive’ corresponds to a clear-cut temporal dimension that separates the past understood as feudalism from the future understood as capitalism. However, by focusing on a definition of capital as social relation rather than as capital as stock, as in Smith, Marx’s definition of primitive accumulation leads to another possible interpretation. For primitive accumulation to be a precondition of accumulation, it must be a precondition of the exercise of capital’s power. The latter is nothing else than human production carried on through the relation of separation that characterises capital’s production. With his discourse on ‘primitive accumulation’, Marx is thus able to point out the presupposition of this capital-relation: ‘the capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realisation of their labour’. From this, it follows that:

the process . . . which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations,

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11 This section is a development and refinement of the argument proposed in De Angelis 2001.
12 In this paper, I use the terms ‘primitive accumulation’ and ‘enclosure’ as interchangeable theoretical terms.
13 See Perelman 2000.
14 Marx 1976a, p. 874.
whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into
capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. 15

Thus, so-called ‘primitive accumulation . . . is nothing other than the historical
process of divorcing the producer from the means of production’. 16

A careful examination of Marx’s definition of primitive accumulation allows
us to argue that although enclosures, or primitive accumulation, define a
question of genealogy, for capital the problem of genealogy presents itself
continuously. There are two reasons why this is the case.

(i) Because of what ‘primitive accumulation’ means within the context of
capital accumulation, that is, *ex-novo separation* between producers and
means of production.

(ii) Because of the fact that this *ex-novo separation*, this qualitative jump,
constitutes itself necessarily as a social force in opposition to other social
forces. The line of confrontation is the limit that capital must transcend,
or, seen from the other side, the space liberated from capital’s priorities,
within which alternatives to capital can emerge and develop.

Let us examine these in more detail.

II.i. *Enclosures* as *ex-novo separation* between producers and means of
production

There are three central points that I believe are key to an understanding of
primitive accumulation which is coherent with Marx’s theory of capitalist
accumulation. The first is that the *separation* of producers and means of
production is a common characteristic of both accumulation and primitive
accumulation. The second is that this *separation* is a central category (if not
the central category) of Marx’s critique of political economy. The third is that
the difference between accumulation and primitive accumulation is not a
substantive one; rather, it is a difference in the conditions and forms in which
this *separation* is implemented. Marx refers to this as ‘*ex-novo*’ separation,
requiring extra-economic force to be carried out. These three points lead to

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15 Ibid.
16 Marx 1976a, pp. 874–5. We can also find indications of Marx’s emphasis on class
relations in the structure of this section of Capital. Marx dedicates two chapters of this
section to the formation of the working class (Chapters 27 and 28) and three chapters
to the formation of the bourgeoisie (Chapters 29, 30 and 31).
a different understanding of the timing of primitive accumulation. Let us briefly review them in turn.

Separation applies to both accumulation and primitive accumulation

Marx is extremely precise on this. In Volume III of *Capital*, he stresses that accumulation proper is nothing else than primitive accumulation – which Marx defined in Volume I in terms of the separation – ‘raised to a higher power’.\(^\text{17}\) In the *Theories of Surplus Value* he is even more precise, writing that accumulation, ‘reproduces the separation and the independent existence of material wealth as against labour on an ever increasing scale’,\(^\text{18}\) and therefore ‘merely presents as a continuous process what in primitive accumulation appears as a distinct historical process’.\(^\text{19}\) Again, in the *Grundrisse*, he states: ‘Once this separation is given, the production process can only produce it anew, reproduce it, and reproduce it on an expanded scale’.\(^\text{20}\)

The meaning and centrality of ‘separation’ in Marx’s theory

What does ‘separation’ mean? In the context of accumulation, the separation of producers and means of production means essentially that the ‘objective conditions of living labour appear as separated, independent values opposite living labour capacity as subjective being, which therefore appears to them only as a value of another kind’.\(^\text{21}\) Through enclosures, in other words, objects rule subjects, deeds command the doing,\(^\text{22}\) and the doing of human activity is channelled into forms that are compatible with the priority of capital’s accumulation. This separation is clear in the fetishised categories of mainstream economics. To call ‘labour’ a factor of production is to call human activity, *life process*, a means, and the objects produced, the end.

At the social level, this separation means the positing of living labour and conditions of production as *independent values* standing in opposition to each other.\(^\text{23}\) This separation, therefore, is a fundamental condition for Marx’s theory


\(^{18}\) Marx 1971, p. 315. My emphasis.

\(^{19}\) Marx 1971, p. 271 and pp. 311–2.

\(^{20}\) Marx 1974, p. 462. My emphasis.

\(^{21}\) Marx 1974, p. 461.

\(^{22}\) See Holloway 2002.

\(^{23}\) ‘The objective conditions of living labour capacity are presupposed as having an existence independent of it, as the objectivity of a subject distinct from living labour capacity and standing independently over against it; the reproduction and *realisation*,
of reification, of the transformation of subject into object. It is through this separation that ‘the objective conditions of labour attain a subjective existence vis-à-vis living labour capacity’\textsuperscript{24} and living labour, the ‘subjective being’ par excellence, is turned into a thing among other things, ‘it is merely a value of a particular use value alongside the conditions of its own realisation as values of another use value’.\textsuperscript{25}

The idea of separation therefore strictly echoes Marx’s analysis of alienated labour, as labour alienated from the object of production, the means of production, the product, and other producers.\textsuperscript{26} The opposition implicit in this definition is, of course, a clash of opposites, expressing a ‘specific relationship of production, a specific social relationship in which the owners of the conditions of production treat living labour-power as a thing’.\textsuperscript{27} These same owners are regarded only as ‘capital personified’, in which capital is understood as having ‘one sole driving force, the drive to valorise itself, to create surplus-value, to make its constant part, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour’.\textsuperscript{28}

The concept of separation enables us to clarify Marx’s reference to capital not as thing (as in Adam Smith), but as a social relation and consequently, of capital accumulation as accumulation of social relations: ‘The capitalist process of production . . . seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer’.\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Ex-novo separation as extra-economic force}

Having defined the common character of both accumulation and primitive accumulation, we must turn to what constitutes their distinctiveness. This is

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} See Marx 1975.
\textsuperscript{27} Marx 1976b, p. 989. For a more detailed analysis of the connection between reification and commodity fetishism in Marx’s analysis, see De Angelis 1996.
\textsuperscript{28} Marx 1976a, p. 342.
\textsuperscript{29} Marx 1976a, p. 724.
located in the genealogical character of ‘primitive’ accumulation. As opposed to accumulation proper, what ‘may be called primitive accumulation . . . is the historical basis, instead of the historical result, of specifically capitalist production’.30 While sharing the same principle – separation – the two concepts point at two different conditions of existence. The latter implies the ex-novo production of the separation, while the latter implies the reproduction – on a greater scale – of the same separation:

It is in fact this divorce between the conditions of labour on the one hand and the producers on the other that forms the concept of capital, as this arises with primitive accumulation . . . subsequently appearing as a constant process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, before it is finally expressed here as the centralisation of capitals already existing in few hands, and the decapitalisation of many.31

The key difference thus resides, for Marx, not so much in the timing of the occurrence of this separation – although a sequential element is naturally always present – but rather in the conditions, circumstances and context in which this separation is enforced. In the Grundrisse, for example, Marx stresses the distinction between the conditions of capital’s arising (becoming), and the conditions of capital’s existence (being). The former, ‘disappear as real capital arises’, while the latter do not appear as ‘conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence’.32 Marx is emphasising here a simple but crucial point: ‘Once developed historically, capital itself creates the conditions of its existence (not as conditions for its arising, but as results of its being),’33 and therefore it drives to reproduce (at increasing scale) the separation between means of production and producers. However, the ex-novo production of the separation implies social forces that are posited outside the realm of impersonal ‘pure’ economic laws. The ex-novo separation of means of production and producers corresponds to the ex-novo creation of the opposition between the two, to the ex-novo foundation of the specific alien character acquired by labour in capitalism.

This is the element of novelty, of ‘originality’ that Marx seems to indicate when he stresses that while accumulation relies primarily on ‘the silent

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30 Marx 1976a, p. 775.
33 Marx 1974, p. 459.
compulsion of economic relations [which] sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker’, in the case of primitive accumulation the separation is imposed primarily through ‘[d]irect extra-economic force’,\(^{34}\) such as the state\(^{35}\) or particular sections of social classes.\(^{36}\) In other words, primitive accumulation, for Marx, is a social process in which separation appears as a crystal-clear relation of expropriation, a relation that has not yet taken the fetishistic character assumed by capital’s normalisation, or the ‘ordinary run of things’. In other words, borrowing from Foucault, it is a separation that has not been normalised . . . yet, or a normalisation of separation that has not been challenged . . . yet.

**Timing of the ex-novo separation and the strategic character of enclosures**

When does ex-novo separation occur? If you believe in capitalism the answer is very simple: it occurs before capitalism. However, the fact is that people do not live in capitalism. People live in life-worlds, often overlapping. For example: the factory, the school, the neighbourhood, the family, cyberspace – the realm of significant relations to objects and to other people. What capital (not capitalism) does is that it attempts to create life-worlds in its own image (such as the factory) or to colonise existing ones, to put them to work for its priorities and drives. And it has done this since the beginning of its history to different degrees, and, at any given historical moment, different life-worlds are subject to different degrees of colonisation. Capital will not stop in its attempt to colonise until either some other social force will make it stop – such as, for example, socialised humanity – or until it has colonised all of life. So, paradoxically, the true realisation of capitalism coincides with the end of life (and, therefore, of any alternative to capitalism!)

Enclosures bring about the ex-novo character of separation as capital’s entry point for the commodification of new spheres of life. Ex-novo separation occurs in two instances. (i) Either when capital identifies new spheres of life that it may colonise with its priorities. The list here is endless, from land enclosures, to the enclosures of water resources through privatisation, to enclosures of knowledge through enforcement of intellectual property rights. (ii) Or, when there are other social forces that are able to identify social spaces that have

\(^{34}\) Marx 1976a, pp. 899–900.

\(^{35}\) Marx 1976a, p. 900.

\(^{36}\) Marx 1976a, p. 879.
been previously normalised by capital’s commodity production as a possible space of an alternative to commodities, such as commons. For example, the definition of global eco-system as a global common arises out of a contested process of identification of nature as a commons and not simply as an exploitable resource. In other words, it is through the process (albeit contradictory) of the political constitution of humanity as global community that it is possible to identify the eco-system as global commons. This, of course, opens the political space that allows us to problematise the forms of interaction within the global social body.

In both cases, capital has to devise strategies of enclosure, either by promoting new areas of commodification in the face of resistance, or by preserving old areas of commodification against ex-novo attacks launched by ‘commoners’. In both cases, capital needs a discourse of enclosures and consequent discursive practices that extend and/or preserve commodity production. Therefore, around the issue of enclosures and their opposite – commons – we have a foundational entry point to a radical discourse on alternatives.

II.ii. Continuity, social conflict and alternatives

The interpretation of Marx’s analysis of primitive accumulation presented thus far has revealed two basic and interconnected points. First, primitive accumulation is the ex-novo production of the separation between producers and means of production. Second, this implies that enclosures define a strategic terrain among social forces. The actual playing out of these strategies in given forms depends, of course, on the historical, geographical, cultural and social context.

The reduction of the category of primitive accumulation to a historical (rather than political-theoretical) category is a confusion certainly due to the fact that primitive accumulation also occurs before the capitalist mode of production is established as dominant mode of organising social reproduction. But the political-theoretical understanding of the concept emphasises that, if a temporal dimension exists, it lies in the fact that enclosures are the basis, the presupposition, and the necessary precondition for accumulation of capital to occur. It must be noted that this last definition is Marx’s own and it is

37 In the case of environmental commons for example, the discourse of carbon credits and the creation and consequent development of markets in ‘pollution rights’ stands in opposition to the discourse of the environment as global commons.
more general than the one adopted by the classical ‘historical interpretation’, and therefore includes it.

This is because, if primitive accumulation is defined in terms of the preconditions it satisfies for the accumulation of capital, its temporal dimension refers to two things. First, it indicates the period of the establishment of a capitalist mode of production as a dominant mode of production. Second, at the same time, it refers to the problematic of the preservation and expansion of the capitalist mode of production any time the producers set themselves up as an obstacle to the reproduction of their separation from the means of production, a separation understood in the terms described above.

In other words, capital’s overcoming of barriers must not be seen as the necessary result of its dynamic, but both as conditioned result and necessary aspiration embedded in its drives and motivation as well as in its survival instinct vis-à-vis emerging alternatives to capital. History is open, both for capital and for the rest of us who are struggling for a different life on the planet.

Another way to put it would be in terms of Karl Polanyi’s concept of ‘double movement’.38 On one side, there is the historical movement of the market, a movement that has no inherent limits and that therefore threatens society’s very existence. On the other, there is society’s propensity to defend itself, and therefore to create institutions for its own protection. In Polanyi’s terms, the continuous element of Marx’s primitive accumulation could be identified as those social processes or sets of strategies aimed at dismantling those institutions that protect society from the market. The crucial element of continuity in the reformulation of Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation arises, therefore, once we acknowledge the other movement of society. Of course, unlike Polanyi, we believe the agents of this ‘double movement’ are the grassroots, not simply ‘states’.

Thus, within Marx’s theoretical and critical framework, the divorce embedded in the definition of primitive accumulation can be understood not only as the origin of capital vis-à-vis precapitalist social relations, but also as a reassertion of capital’s priorities vis-à-vis those social forces that contest this separation. Thus, precapitalist spaces of autonomy (such as the common land of the English yeomen or the economies of African societies targeted by slave merchants) are not the only targets of primitive accumulation strategies.

38 See Polanyi 1944.
Enclosure strategies also target any given balance of power among classes that constitutes ‘rigidity’ – that is, a resistance against the further process of capitalist accumulation, or a reversal of that process. If we conceive social contestation as a continuous element of capitalist relations of production, capital must continuously engage in strategies of primitive accumulation to recreate the ‘basis’ of accumulation itself.

This element of the continuity of primitive accumulation is not only consistent with Marx’s empirical analysis of processes of primitive accumulation, but seems also to be contained in his theoretical framework. This is because accumulation involves primitive accumulation ‘to a higher degree’, and ‘once capital exists, the capitalist mode of production itself evolves in such a way that it maintains and reproduces this separation on a constantly increasing scale until the historical reversal takes place’.39 Thus, just as the ‘historical reversal’ poses itself as a limit to accumulation, so strategies of enclosures pose themselves as a challenge – from capital’s perspective – to that ‘historical reversal’. To the extent that social conflict creates bottlenecks in the accumulation process by reducing the distance between producers and means of production, any strategy used to reverse this movement of association can rightly be categorised as ‘primitive accumulation’ – and this is consistent with both Marx’s definitions and with his theory.

Marx’s text is quite enlightening on this. The key difference between what he calls ‘the ordinary run of things’40 – that is, the normalised silent compulsion of economic relations – and ‘primitive accumulation’, seems to be the existence of ‘a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws’.41 Therefore, insofar as the working class accepts capital’s requirement as natural laws, accumulation does not need primitive accumulation. However, working-

40 Accumulation relies on ‘the silent compulsion of economic relations [which] sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker’. In this case, ‘[d]irect extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases. In the ordinary run of things, the worker can be left to the “natural laws of production”, i.e. it is possible to rely on his dependence on capital, which springs from the conditions of production themselves, and is guaranteed in perpetuity by them’. Things are different ‘during the historical genesis of capitalist production’. In this case, ‘[t]he rising bourgeoisie needs the power of the state, and uses it to “regulate” wages, i.e. to force them into the limits suitable for making a profit, to lengthen the working day, and to keep the worker himself at his historical level of dependence. This is an essential aspect of so-called primitive accumulation’, Marx 1976a, pp. 899–900.
41 Ibid.
class struggles represent precisely a rupture in that acceptance, a non-conformity to the laws of supply and demand, a refusal of subordination to the ‘ordinary run of things’, the positing of ‘an outside’ to capital’s norm, an ‘otherness’ to the already codified. This also implies a rupture in the economic discourse, understood as discursive practice that constructs capitalist economic action and acts as a factor in the (re-)establishment and maintenance of the normalised rationality embedded in the ‘ordinary run of things’, or the ‘natural laws of capitalist production’. It is against this concrete and discursive challenge of the normality of capital that ‘extra-economic means’ are deployed:

Every combination between employed and unemployed disturbs the ‘pure’ action of this law. But on the other hand, as soon as adverse circumstances prevent the creation of an industrial reserve army, and with it the absolute dependence of the working class upon the capitalist class, capital, along with its platitudeous Sancho Panza, rebels against the ‘sacred’ law of supply and demand, and tries to make up for its inadequacies by forcible means. It follows, therefore, that not only is ‘primitive accumulation,... the historical basis, instead of the historical result, of specifically capitalist production’, but it also acquires a continuous character – dependent on the inherent continuity of social conflict – within capitalist production.

III. Enclosures: an analytical framework

If enclosures are a continuous element of capital accumulation, what tools do we use to analyse them? In this section, I suggest an analytical framework with which to study and understand the relevance of new enclosures based on three components: processes of identification, types and modes of enclosure. By ‘processes of identification’, I mean to raise the question of how and what social forces are behind the need to enclose new areas of social life. By ‘types

42 ‘[a]s soon as the workers learn the secret of why it happens that the more they work, the more alien wealth they produce...as soon as, by setting up trade unions, etc., they try to organize planned co-operation between the employed and the unemployed in order to obviate or to weaken the ruinous effects of this natural law of capitalist production on their class, so soon does capital and its sycophant, political economy, cry out at the infringement of the “eternal” and so to speak “sacred” law of supply and demand’, Marx 1976a, p. 793.

43 Marx 1976a, p. 794.

44 Marx 1976a, p. 775.
of enclosure’, I mean to raise the question of their taxonomy. Finally, by ‘modes of enclosure’, I intend to draw attention to the plurality of methods used by capital to carry on enclosures and the plurality of social agents involved in these processes.

III.i. Processes of identification of the space of enclosure

As we have seen, the emphasis on the ‘divorcing’ of people from the means of production opens the way for understanding ‘primitive accumulation’ as part of the continuous process of capitalist accumulation, rather than simply at one point in time in the past. It is a continuous process that is rooted in capital’s drive to continuous expansion – accumulation proper. Both accumulation and ‘primitive’ accumulation pose capital as a social force that must transcend a limit. But while, for accumulation, the limit is merely quantitative, for primitive accumulation or enclosure, the limit that capital must transcend is qualitative. With enclosure, a new social space for accumulation is created, and this creation begins with the identification of a concrete limit and the deployment of strategies for its transcendence. The force identifying this limit may either be capital – in its attempt to colonise new spheres of life – or other social forces set in opposition to it. In either case, enclosures emerge as strategic problem for capital every time capital sets itself to transcend a limit, whether this limit is identified by capital itself or by those life-reclaiming forces that attempt to decommodify spheres of life. If capital must identify a limit in order to transcend it, our critique must identify capital’s processes of identification in order to expose them and devise strategies to limit capital’s transcendence of these limits, and also in order to root political practices and projected alternatives in the space thus opened.

There are two main types of limits that capital identifies in its drive to transcend them. One that we may call, the limit as frontier. The other we may call the limit as political recomposition.

(i) Limit as frontier. The frontier presents itself as the border dividing the colonised from the colonisable. Capital’s identification of a frontier implies the identification of a space of social life that is still relatively uncolonised by capitalist relations of production and modes of activity. From this perspective, it is indifferent whether this space is clearly posed ‘outside’ existing capital’s domains – as in the definition of a potential colony in the discursive practice of imperialism, or within its interstices, inside
'Empire' – as Hardt and Negri believe. In either case, it is capital that identifies a frontier, and the identification of this frontier implies the creation of a space of enclosures, a horizon within which policies and practices promoting further separation between people and means of production in new spheres of life. In this case, the initiative of the identification of the limit and of the setting out of concrete strategies of enclosure comes from capital. The strategic character of this identification is clearly due to the fact that the identification of a space of enclosure implies the attempt to overcome necessary resistance by what capital regards as 'enclosable' subjects. All classical examples of enclosures, such as land enclosures, as well as those enclosing entitlements won through past battles fall in this category. Other more insidious practices also fall in this category: for example, enclosures of cultural commons or a hegemonic redefinition of discourse. The successful deployment of strategies of enclosure results here in a process of deepening of capital's relations of production across the social body.

(ii) Limit as political recomposition. Here, the limit is identified for capital by a social force that poses its activity in opposition to it. Any time movements constrain the capitalist process of production by raising a social barrier to the endless drive to commodify and accumulate, by opening up a space of entitlements and commons disconnected from market logic, capital is faced with the need and strategic problem of dismantling this barrier (or co-opting it). In this case, the limit emerges as a political problem for capital. It is, in a sense, what Polanyi referred to as ‘dual movement’ of modern liberal society, although Polanyi saw this movement mainly through its institutionalisation.

In the first case thus, the limit that capital must transcend is defined by capital itself. In the second case, it is defined for capital by a force that opposes it. In either case, the fact that enclosures represent a limit that capital must overcome for its survival, opens an important chapter for the thinking of alternatives beyond capital. The space of alternatives to capital has to go through the opening up of counter-enclosures, of spaces of commons. The alternatives to capital pose a limit to accumulation by setting up rigidities and liberating spaces. In a word, alternatives, whatever they are, act as ‘counter-
enclosures’. This, of course, opens up the question of capital’s co-optation of alternatives, something it is not possible to discuss here.

III.ii. Types of enclosures

In the context of contemporary dynamics, the many types of ‘new enclosures’ are defined through both of these two processes of identification. Enclosures are identified both by processes of commodification and by processes of decommodification; by strategies that go under the name, for example, of ‘privatisation’; or by class strategies that roll enclosures back through practices that produce commons and reinvent communities. In the first case, they include attacks on conditions of life by a World Bank-funded dam in India threatening hundred of thousands of farming communities; cuts in social spending to pay for servicing international debt in a country of the global South; cuts in social expenditures in the UK threatening hundreds of thousands of families. In the second case, as in St George’s Hill during the English Civil War, or currently in Brazil in the waves of land occupations, or in the de facto mass illegal bypassing of intellectual property rights in music and software production and the establishment of ‘creative commons’, it is possible to identify enclosures as an external limit, posed by capital, to the production of

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47 On Sunday 1 April 1649 a small group of poor men collected on St. George’s Hill just outside London, at the edge of the Windsor Great Forest, hunting ground of the king and the royalty. They started digging the land as a ‘symbolic assumption of ownership of the common lands’ (Hill 1972, p. 110). Within ten days, their number grew to four or five thousand. One year later, ‘the colony had been forcibly dispersed, huts and furniture burnt, the Diggers chased away from the area’ (Hill 1972, p. 113). This episode of English history could be consistently added to Marx’s Chapter 28 of *Capital*, Volume I, entitled ‘Bloody Legislation against the Expropriated’. Yet, while most of that chapter deals with Tudor legislation aimed at criminalising and repressing popular behaviour induced by the expropriation of land (vagrancy, begging, theft), the Digger episode goes a step further, by making clear that primitive accumulation acquires meaning vis-à-vis patterns of resistance and struggle. This episode entails the active and organised activity of a mass of urban and landless poor aimed at the direct re-appropriation of land for its transformation into common land. Paraphrasing Marx, it was an activity aimed at ‘associating the producer with the means of production’.

It is clear therefore that the force used by the authorities to disperse the Diggers can be understood, consistently with Marx’s theory, as an act of ‘primitive accumulation’, because it reintroduces the separation between producers and means of production. Although Marx did not include this episode in his treatment of primitive accumulation, in Chapter 28, he does refer to a handful of cases in which struggles are counterposed to state legislation which either represent a ‘retreat’ of capital with regard to these struggles or an attempt to contain them.

48 See Branford and Rocha 2002.
commons. It is this barrier that political and social movements need to overcome through the production of commons, and often this production is the result of practices of civil disobedience and direct action, rather than of traditional party politics. Also, it is clear that these productions of commons, in the context in which capital aims at pervading the entire social field, are at the same time struggles against enclosures. The awareness and de facto identification of enclosures thus arises either because the production of commons problematises existing established property rights (as past enclosures), or because the struggles to defend commons established in the past problematise the threat of new enclosures attempted by states. In other words, the extent to which we are aware of enclosures is the extent to which we are confronted by them. In all other social interactions still rooted in commons of different types (take, for example, language), in commons that are not immediately threatened by enclosures, we live our lives undisturbed. Here, we are only preoccupied by the question of how we relate to each other within these commons (say, how do we speak to each other), and not whether the ‘what’ that constitutes the material basis of this ‘how’ is a common or not. We take that for granted.

As we have seen, there is a vast critical literature on processes of privatisation, marketisation, cuts in entitlements both North and South, effects of structural adjustment policies, biopiracy, intellectual property rights, resource privatisation, and so on. However, not much effort has been devoted to pulling together these and other types of enclosures into a coherent whole, rooted in a critique of capital. The broad picture which I present derives from an understanding of the role of enclosure from a capitalist-systemic point of view, that is from the role which enclosures play in the accumulation of surplus-value by capital (the M-C-M’ process). From this perspective, all these different types of enclosures, and the consequent enclosure strategies, share a common character: the forcible separation of people from whatever access to social wealth they have which is not mediated by competitive markets and money as capital. Where such access exists, it empowers people in that it gives them a degree of autonomy and independence from the corporate sharks of the world economy and from competitive market relations. New enclosures thus are directed towards the fragmentation and destruction of ‘commons’, that is, social spheres of life whose main characteristic is to provide various degrees of protection from the market.

On the other hand, a typology of new commons is starting to be debated. Various advocates are proposing different kinds of commons as solutions to
a variety of problems and issues arising in the world economy. These, for example, include, civic commons, environmental commons, natural resources commons (such as water), common heritage resources, and so on. Often, the identification of these types of commons is made possible by the acknowledgment of struggles against their enclosure, so that these struggles have begun to be seen in their positive and constituent content, as struggles for new commons. For example, natural commons are set in opposition to the privatisation of water. Life and knowledge commons are set in opposition to patenting and targeting the genetic structure, indigenous knowledge of plant variety, and bioprospecting. Finally, public services as commons are posed in opposition to privatisation and GATS.

Although the counterposing of enclosures and commons emerges from the current literature, I do not think the radicalism of its implications is sufficiently theorised. This for two reasons. First, because the enclosing force is generally discursively identified merely in terms of policies (such as neoliberal policies), rather than these being seen as a particular historical form of capital’s inherent drive. In saying this, I am not dismissing the importance of recognising this distinctive dimension of neoliberalism – on the contrary. Those Marxists who, in the many public fora of social movements and civil society (such as the World Social Forum or the European Social Forum), remind us that the problem is not neoliberalism but ‘capitalism’, often make a doctrinaire connection, not a political-strategic one. Because the term ‘neoliberalism’ does identify a capitalist strategy in a particular historical moment, an effective and intelligent discourse on alternatives to capital must be able to articulate the historically contingent with the immanent drive of capital, which is common to various historical periods. While the ‘doctrinaire’ Marxists fail to make this articulation by dismissing the historical forms of strategies in preference to ‘contents’, many other approaches within the movement emphasise instead historical forms with no articulation to ‘content’. Thus, secondly, in this latter approach, commons are often seen as alternative ‘policies’, and not as social practices that are alternatives to capital (in the first place by posing a limit to it, that at the same time open a space for alternatives and their problematisation).

49 See McMurtry 2002.
50 See IFG 2002.
52 See IFG 2000.
Third, as modes of accessing social resources that are not mediated by the market, currently emerging discourses on commons can be the entry point for broader discourses that help redefine the priorities of social reproduction. But, in order to do so, these political discourses must be open to the possibility of opposing all types of enclosures, both old and new, both those stratified and normalised to different degrees by economic discourse as well as those recently emerging. This requires a process of identification of capital’s enclosure through political recomposition, as discussed above.

In any case, as a way of illustration, let us confine our attention to types of new enclosures. In the first column of Table 1, I offer a non-exhaustive list of types of enclosures that I will discuss in the next section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Modes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land and resources</td>
<td>• land policies: through direct expropriation (e.g. Mexico’s ejido) or indirect means (e.g. use of cash-tax);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• externality: land pollution (e.g. Ogoni land in Nigeria; intense shrimp production in India);</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• against re-appropriation (e.g. against MST in Brazil);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• water privatisation (e.g. Bolivia);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• neoliberal war.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban spaces</td>
<td>• urban design;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• road building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social commons</td>
<td>• cuts in social spending;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• cuts in entitlements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp; life</td>
<td>• intellectual property rights;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• marketisation of education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III.iii. Modes of enclosing

*How* does this ex-novo separation occur? I think that there are two general *modes* of implementation of enclosures. (i) Enclosures as a conscious imposition of ‘power over’. (ii) Enclosures as a by-product of the accumulation process.

In the first case, we are talking about conscious strategies that go under many names (privatisation, export promotion, budget austerity, and so on). The enclosure by Act of Parliament that become common in eighteenth-century England is the archetypal example of this type of enclosure. In the second case, enclosures are the unintended by-product of accumulation. In the language of mainstream economists, this kind of enclosure may go under the name of
‘negative externalities’, that is costs that are not included in the market price of a good, because the costs are incurred by social agents who are external to the producing firm. Pollution is an example of an externality cost, to the extent that producers are not the ones who suffer from the damage caused by pollution. Others have referred to these as ‘the power of splitting’ that accompany processes of accumulation due to the fact that

industrialization is not an independent force . . . but the hammer with which nature is smashed for the sake of capital. Industrial logging destroys forests; industrial fishing destroys fisheries; industrial chemistry makes Frankenfood; industrial use of fossil fuels creates the greenhouse effect, and so forth – all for the sake of value-expansion.53

In terms of this analysis, it is not only the question of resource depletion and pollution, but of the role that resource depletion and pollution and all other so called ‘externalities’ have in promoting the bankruptcy of communities of independent producers, from indigenous people to farmers: resource depletion seen here as means of enclosure. Also, ‘negative externalities’ have an archetypal model in the English enclosure of land in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the landed aristocracy took their horses and dogs across fields while hunting foxes and ruined the crops of small farmers.54 These agents of ‘negative externalities’ and destroyers of small farmers’ livelihoods were the ancestors of those that in Britain today claim to defend the ‘traditional way of life of the countryside’ in the face of a parliamentary bill against foxhunting.

There are, of course, many concrete instances and ways in which these two modes are implemented. The second column in Table 1 provides a synoptic list of examples.

Land can be (and has been) expropriated in different ways; by direct means, as in the classic case of English and colonial enclosures, or by indirect means. In the latter case, for example, in many countries in the South, where the population is largely dependent on farming, the imposition of a tax payable in cash may act as an instrument of expropriation, by forcing mostly self-sufficient farmers into allocating part of their land to the production of so-called ‘cash crops’ – a good produced for the sole aim of acquiring cash –

53 See Kovel 2002.
54 See Perelman 2000.
instead of products that would serve for people’s subsistence. The same result is attained in many of the large development projects such as the construction of dams (as in Malaysia, India, China), or other means to promote cash crops. Another form of new land enclosure, is that which results from environmental damage caused by multinationals. Another example is the intense shrimp production occurring in some Indian and other East Asian regions. Shrimps are produced for the world market using the intensive industrial methods of aquaculture. These consist of large pools of salt waters in the vicinity of coastal regions. In time, the salt water penetrates the soil, thus polluting the water supplies and making the land of local farmers unusable for subsistence crops. Again, in this case of modern enclosures, the result is pressure to abandon the land.

Just as the old enclosures were accompanied by struggles, so also in the face of these new types of enclosure, people organise themselves and build forms of resistance. Two important examples are the Zapatistas’ struggle in Mexico, catalysed by the attempt by the government to sell the common land traditionally held by the indigenous population [ejido], and the movement for re-appropriation of land in Brazil by the ‘Sem Tierra’ movement. War and, in particular, recent forms of ‘neoliberal’ war have also been discussed in terms of their effect not just as enclosure of land, but of many other types of resources as well.

In order to show the pervasiveness of the new enclosures, I will also mention here some cases of urban enclosure. Urban design, in fact, is a site of important attempts to enclose human and social behaviour in forms and patterns compatible with the accumulation process and the profit motive. For example, the lack of public benches in public sites such as the large main hall of Waterloo

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55 For example, petroleum extraction by Shell in Nigeria has been condemned as the source of land pollution and consequent endangering of the livelihood of villagers and farmers, given the effect of spillages in damaging crops and sources of drinking water (streams), reducing soil fertility, polluting ponds thus threatening animal livelihood, destroying biodiversity, and so on. For a general background discussion of this case, see the resources in Web 7. For a general discussion of the link between oil production and environmental damage (and consequent threat of enclosure for those who depend on the ruined resources and their struggles), see the resources in Web 8.


57 See Branford and Rocha 2002.

station in London can be puzzling, unless we understand it in terms of the attempt to control vagrants (which takes us back to the rationale of Tudor ‘bloody legislation’ following the early enclosures), the marginalisation of vagrants to an ‘invisible site’ – or simply as an attempt to turn tired passengers into consumers by forcing them into nearby cafes. Even the satisfaction of human primary biological functions has become the object of enclosure in train stations and other public spaces in the West. To get access to a toilet we either have to become customers in local establishments, or pay up directly for the privilege. (The alternative here is of course to reclaim McDonald’s and other fast-food outlets for conversion into public toilets). Also, public benches ‘enclosed’ by arm-rests as in London, or with a convex surface as in Los Angeles as noted by Mike Davis, find a rationale as instruments of social engineering, preventing our modern ‘vagrants’ (especially the homeless) from stretching out their legs and reinforcing the ‘correct’ and ‘acceptable’ social behaviour, even when sitting and resting. Enclosing the space of benches keeps the city moving.

By ‘social commons’, I mean those commons that have been erected as a result of past social movements and later formalised by institutional practices. A classic example is the body of rights, provisions and entitlements universally guaranteed by the welfare state in spheres such as health, unemployment benefits, education, and pensions. Although these social commons served at the same time as a site for administrative regulation of social behaviour, they also, to a certain extent, allowed access to public wealth without a corresponding expenditure of work (that is, access to it directly). This principle has been under increasing attack by the neoliberal policies of the last twenty years. In the North, enclosure of these social commons have taken the form of transformation from welfare to workfare (as in the US and in Britain); of the imposition of strict ‘convergence criteria’ which limit social spending in the European Union; and, in the countries of the South, by massive programmes of privatisation and structural adjustment linked to the neoliberal policies of the ‘Washington Consensus’ in which the leverage of international debt is used to impose social spending cuts and trade liberalisation in goods and, especially, in services. On all these issues, there is, of course, a massive literature.

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59 Davis 1990, p. 235.
60 See Piven and Cloward 1972.
61 See Costello and Levidow 2001 for casualisation strategies. See Bonefeld 2002b for a class analysis of EMU. See also the anthology edited by Abramsky 2001 on...
The enclosure of knowledge-commons includes the attempt to direct and shape the creation of knowledge, and control access, content and modes of delivery. Here, of course, there is a vast array of policies involving privatisation of education, the selling of public libraries and schools, the link between scarcity of public resources channelled into education and the costs of debt servicing in the South, and wide array of other strategies for the subordination of education and knowledge to the perpetuation of competitive markets.62

In most cultures in the history of humanity, knowledge has been accumulated and passed on to further generations as a matter of human social interaction. Just as language, agricultural and farming methods and skills of any kind, are the cultural basis of any society, without which any society would not survive, so genes are the building blocks of life itself. Yet there are increasing pressures by large multinational corporations to introduce legislation that ‘enclose’ the ‘knowledge’ built into life: genes. Intellectual property rights on life itself have contributed to opening a debate over the question of enclosure of knowledge and life in general. In addition a debate over the meaning of investment and research has been initiated. For example, despite the claim by drug companies that patenting is necessary in order to guarantee that investment in the sector is maintained, thus allowing further research, many researchers argue that, by promoting secrecy, and the channelling of funds into what is commercially profitable rather than the public good, patenting will threaten future research. Patenting of life legitimates biopiracy and the appropriation and subsequent privatisation of knowledge built up collectively by generations of anonymous experimenters, especially at the expense of the people of the South. It would provide industry with new means of establishing control over areas of nature previously held in common by communities in the South. What these enclosures of life are showing is the completely arbitrary character of private property claims over what are essentially social and historical processes of knowledge creation. What these debates reveal is that Marxist thinking urgently needs to reconceptualise enclosure and contribute to the emergent political discourse based on life and knowledge as commons.

struggles in Europe, many of which can be easily be identified in terms of anti-enclosures struggles. See also the references indicated in note 1.

IV. Enclosure as discourse: preliminary notes and concluding remarks

If capital encloses, it cannot do it without a corresponding discourse. This discourse however, is not crystal-clear, but fuzzy and takes many names. While it has to reflect the telos and objectives of capital by promoting separation, at the same time, it has to discourage alternative projects and objectives, especially those that are based on a movement of direct association between waged and unwaged producers and social wealth. The discourse of enclosures, in other words, must present itself not as a negative force, one that separates, brutalises, and disempowers; but, on the contrary, it also has to wear the mantle of rationality, and project a vision of the future that makes sense to a multiplicity of concrete subjects. Thus, we may understand enclosure in terms of a rationale of capital accumulation and indifference to social needs (such as common access to entitlements or knowledge). But enclosure is endorsed in the meta-discourse of economics, through talk of ‘trade liberalisation’, ‘anti-inflation’ policies, ‘fiscal responsibility’, ‘debt management’, and so on. We can also cite ‘growth prospects’, ‘democracy’, ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’ and ‘good governance’. This, I would argue, is not simply a smokescreen. Enclosures are not just about taking resources away from people, but the first step towards attempting to define new subjects normalised to the capitalist market. Capital does not enclose simply in order to rob, but also so as to integrate the social body in particular ways. The integration of the social body predicated on enclosures requires the constitution of social subjects who are normalised to the commodity-form, that is to stratified enclosures. The construction of ‘economic man’ normalised to markets and enclosures is the result of policies emerged from theoretical frameworks such as economics which work on the assumption of such a normalised subject.

To illustrate this, let us briefly consider another kind of enclosure, the enclosure of medieval women in monasteries. In her study on the representation of women in the discourse of monastery enclosure in Old English literature, Shari Horner\(^6[3]\) shows how ‘the discourse of enclosure prescribes, regulates, and thereby normalises the female subject of early English literature, differentiating her from her male counterparts, and providing a historically and culturally specific matrix through which to view this subject’. Just as the

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discursive practices of medieval enclosures attempted to construct femininity, so the meta-discourse of economics is based on continuously re-constructing rational economic man, that is fragmented individuals (excluded from common access to resources) normalised to market and competitive interaction. This normalisation, this construction of rational economic man, in the same way as the construction of medieval femininity, is based on the definition of boundaries. Just as for the early medieval church, ‘the boundaries of the cloister were as important for containing those within (active enclosure) as for keeping the rest of the world out (passive enclosure),’64 so too the boundaries of resource enclosure, creating commodities and property rights, are as important for shaping capitalist social relations (active enclosure) as for keeping out social interactions that are alternatives to capital (passive enclosure). This double principle embodied in enclosures should be kept in mind, because it is here, in the concrete identification and strategic possibility of shifting the boundaries, that resides the starting point for the thinking and construction of alternatives to capital.

Finally, just as in the middle ages ‘women’s “enclosure” is a broad organising system of thought’ and ‘this discursive system defines, limits, regulates, and authorises the feminine within Old English literature’ so in the meta-discourse of trade liberalisation, market and competitiveness, the commodity (that is the enclosed commons!) is the broad organising system of thought. In this sense, enclosures represent what Michel Foucault calls a ‘discourse formation’65 – that is, a theme that circulates in many texts, not only specialised texts of economics, but in policy discussions, in literature, films, media, even in the language of trade unions and NGOs concerned to maintain their legitimacy and a reputation as realistic organisations. It is also for this reason that the beginning of alternative political discourses based on commons is very much to be welcomed,66 and will, one hopes, represent the beginning of a direct challenge to the pervasiveness of enclosures and the world of commodities and competitive social interaction.

However, we must be fully aware of the implications of this discourse on commons. As we have seen, since commons emerge out of a relational social field, they are defined in opposition to enclosures. In other words, just as

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64 Horner 2001, p. 7.
65 Foucault 1972.
66 For example, it is possible to find elements of this discourse in Esteva and Suri Prakash 1998, Klein 2001, and MacMurtry 1998, 1999, and 2002.
capital’s drive for accumulation must identify a common as limit for its expansion and thus outline strategies of new enclosures, so the building of alternatives to capital must identify a strategic space in which current enclosures are limiting the development of new commons. To be able to identify, so to speak, ‘them’ as the limit of ‘our’ project would be a great strength, a strength that is based on processes of political recomposition and constitution of projects that pose the concrete question of alternatives here and now, and not in a distant future. In other words, life despite capitalism and not life after capitalism. How can we politically invert capital’s strategies and identify enclosures as limits for non-market social interactions and as a strategic space for new commons? This is the true strategic challenge faced by the many articulations of today’s global justice and solidarity movement. As I have argued elsewhere, to be viable and desirable, a process for the definition and constitution of alternatives requires nothing less than participatory, inclusive and democratic forms of organisation that found their political practice on formulating and addressing questions such as ‘What do we want?’, ‘How do we go about getting it?’ and ‘Who is “we”?’. Raising and addressing these naïve questions as part of our political practice implies that we participate in the production of a discursive inversion of the ‘ordinary run of things’, and the opening up of the many spaces for alternatives and the problematisation of their articulation.

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Abramsky, Kolya 2001, Restructuring and Resistance: Diverse Voices of Struggle in Western Europe, (contact <resresrev@yahoo.com>).


68 In De Angelis 2000 this discussion is carried out in light of the Zapatistas’ experience.
69 All web addresses referred to were accessed during December 2003 and found working.


Midnight Notes Collective 2001b, Aurora of the Zapatistas. Local and Global Struggles of the Fourth World War, Jamaica Plaine: Autonomedia.


**Other Web resources**

Web 1, India’s Greatest Planned Environmental Disaster: The Narmada Valley Dam Projects: <http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/Jones/narmada.html>.


Web 3, GATS Campaign, Stop the GATSastrophe!, WDM’s campaign on the General Agreement on Trade in Services: <http://www.wdm.org.uk/campaign/GATS.htm>.


James Furner

Marx’s Critique of Samuel Bailey

Introduction

The theory of value developed by Karl Marx in Capital has been the subject of much debate and controversy. This paper examines the validity of one distinction within this theory, the distinction between exchange-value and value, by reconstructing Marx’s much less debated critique of the anti-Ricardian political economist Samuel Bailey.\(^1\) Despite the relative obscurity of Bailey as a political economist and as an influence on Marx, the advantage of turning to Marx’s critique of Bailey is that it clarifies where the strengths and weaknesses lie in Marx’s account of value. An investigation of Marx’s critique of a forerunner of marginal utility theory also makes it easier to meet later criticisms of Marx’s theory of value common amongst non-Marxists.

Many discussions of Marx’s theory of value focus on a couple of pages in Section One of Chapter One of Capital. In these passages, Marx is quick to distinguish between exchange-value and value as a

\(^1\) I would like to thank Andrew Chitty for discussions, which helped me develop the argument of this paper, as well as Chris Arthur and an anonymous referee for instructive comments on earlier drafts.
purely social aspect of commodities and to identify its source in (abstract) labour. A number of contemporary advocates of Marx’s theory of value stress that neither issue can be resolved at this point. With regard to the distinction between exchange-value and value, one is typically directed to Section Three of Chapter One in which Marx sets out from value and demonstrates that its expression requires the development of money.²

With regard to the relation between value and ‘abstract’ labour, a difference emerges between Patrick Murray’s turn to Section Four of Chapter One on commodity fetishism,³ in which Marx sets out from a system of production organised in private yet materially dependent units in order to demonstrate why commodities acquire an ‘objectivity as values [Wertgegenständlichkeit]’,⁴ and Chris Arthur’s account turned towards the category of capital.⁵ Differences aside, one advantage of such accounts is to have stressed that value is connected in two directions, both to exchange-value and to labour.

To approach the relation between exchange-value and value via an examination of Marx’s critique of Bailey is not, however, to belittle the importance of these sections of Chapter One. Marx’s critique of Bailey can even provide them with a degree of support due to its very different form. Insofar as Marx tracks Bailey’s conception of value from the initial context of commodity exchange to a whole range of categories within the space of twenty-six manuscript pages, the critique that emerges provides a general overview of the connections between value in its forms as commodity, money and capital impossible within the confines of Chapter One.

Although rooted in different texts, the following argument is broadly compatible with recent accounts of Marx’s ‘systematic dialectic’. The implications of the latter for Marx’s theory of value are to guard against its evaluation as either an axiom or piece of analytical reasoning and instead to insist that value is grounded in later, more concrete categories.⁶ Although vulnerable in the context of a discussion of commodities torn apart from later categories, the distinction between exchange-value and value is justified in that value is later shown to gain independent form in money and to provide production with its overriding purpose. The approach followed here may be said to share this methodological position.

² See, for example, Arthur 1998b and the first three essays in Moseley 1993.
³ See Murray 2000.
⁴ Marx 1976, p. 166.
Marx came across Bailey’s work at least as early as the Summer of 1845 during a short stay in Manchester. The first evidence that he read Bailey is provided by his copying, with little annotation, of sections of Bailey’s *Money and Its Vicissitudes in Value* (1837) between mid-December–February 1851. This notebook was to provide the source of all Marx’s future references to *Money*, concentrated in the *Grundrisse*, the *Urtext* of 1858 and *Capital*. Of greater importance is Bailey’s other main work, *A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measure and Causes of Value* (1825). One can infer from a reference to the *Critical Dissertation* in the *Verzeichniß zu dem Citatenheft* (‘Bailey’s False Theory of Value Refuted by the Circulation of Capital’), written between 1859–60, that Marx had also read and noted this earlier work by then. Marx’s discussion of the *Critical Dissertation* is concentrated in Notebook XIV of his 1861–3 manuscripts, later published in Part III of the *Theories of Surplus Value*. This discussion is the source not just of later references to the *Critical Dissertation* in Chapter One of *Capital* but also of parts of its argument. It is upon this discussion, by far Marx’s most extended critique of Bailey, that this paper will focus.

Few have been prompted to offer an extended discussion of Marx’s critique of Samuel Bailey, despite the five references to Bailey in later versions of *Capital’s* first chapter, more separate references than any other thinker bar Marx himself. Marx’s characterisation of Bailey as a ‘fool’ and his *Critical Dissertation* as ‘definitely worthless except for the definition of the “measure

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8 From now on referred to as *Money*.
9 Marx & Engels 1983, pp. 385–405. This date is given in the introduction to the MEGA volume, pp. 36–7.
10 From now on referred to as *Critical Dissertation*.
11 Marx & Engels 1980, p. 268. Where reference is made to German texts, translations are my own.
13 Rubin seems to have been the first to attribute importance to Marx’s reading of Bailey, noting a greater sharpness in Marx’s distinction between exchange-value and value in *Capital* in comparison to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Rubin 1982, pp. 108–9). Subsequent discussion of Marx’s critique of Bailey can be found in the work of the Projektgruppe 1975, pp. 523–41, Kliman 2000, pp. 94–9 and Dussel 2001, pp. 124–30. However, their main drawback is that they have been as protective of Marx as the main study of Bailey – neither quoting from the other side nor, in the case of the Marxist literature, questioning Marx’s account. Later argument will show in what way Rubin’s claim (1982, pp. 108–9; 1994, pp. 60–1), followed by Kliman 2000, p. 94, that Marx’s ‘third thing argument’ did enough to refute Bailey is rejected. On Bailey see Rauner 1961.
14 Marx 1971, pp. 144, 154, 159.
of value'" (inconsistent with his acknowledgement of Bailey's criticisms of Ricardo,\textsuperscript{15} Mill,\textsuperscript{17} and Bentham\textsuperscript{18}) together with Bailey's repetitive style and the slackness in his argument have no doubt discouraged many. The account of Marx's critique of Bailey given here has chosen neither to repeat the abuse nor some of the more obvious points in Marx's favour. The assumption of such a procedure is that what remains of Bailey's argument demands some sort of an interpretative response.

**Marx's 'third thing argument'**

In order to appreciate the significance of Marx's critique of Samuel Bailey, it is first important to consider Marx's attempt to distinguish exchange-value and value in the first section of Chapter One of *Capital*. Having stated that his is an investigation of capitalist production that will begin by analysing the commodity and having explained the sense in which commodities are objects of use or 'use-values', Marx continues

\begin{quote}
Exchange-value appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind. This relation changes constantly with time and place. Hence exchange-value appears to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value, i.e. an exchange-value that is inseparably connected with the commodity, inherent in it, seems a contradiction in terms.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

Given that exchange-value is a relative expression subject to constant change, the suggestion that commodities have an 'intrinsic value' seems odd. Nevertheless, this is what Marx intends to establish. To talk of intrinsic value at this early stage is minimally to say that the social relation between owners of use-values produced and offered for exchange bestows a social aspect on those products expressed in their exchange. Although three earlier versions of the following argument were published in the first and second editions of *Capital* and in *Wages, Prices and Profits*,\textsuperscript{20} the final version of Marx's argument is the fullest. Marx continues

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} Marx 1971, p. 125.
\item \textsuperscript{16} Marx 1976, pp. 155, 177, 675.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Marx 1971, p. 87.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Marx 1976, p. 759.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Marx 1976, p. 126.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Marx & Engels 1983, p. 19; Marx & Engels 1987, p. 71; Marx 1968, p. 201.
\end{itemize}
A given commodity, a quarter of wheat for example, is exchanged for \( x \) boot-polish, \( y \) silk or \( z \) gold, etc. In short, it is exchanged for other commodities in the most diverse proportions. Therefore the wheat has many exchange values instead of one. But \( x \) boot-polish, \( y \) silk or \( z \) gold, etc., each represent the exchange-value of one quarter of wheat. Therefore \( x \) boot-polish, \( y \) silk, \( z \) gold, etc., must, as exchange-values, be mutually replaceable or of identical magnitude. It follows from this that, firstly, the valid exchange-values of a particular commodity express something equal, and secondly, exchange-value cannot be anything other than the mode of expression, the ‘form of appearance’, of a content distinguishable from it.\(^{21}\)

This passage begins by considering the fact of a given commodity’s exchange with many other commodities. These exchange-values are said to be exchange-values the wheat ‘has’. To say that the exchange-values belong to the wheat is taken to imply that there is something of which the wheat is further possessed by virtue of which it has exchange-values. To grant the wheat such an intrinsic property allows one to say that there is a constancy that \( x \) boot-polish or \( y \) silk or \( z \) gold each represent and which makes them ‘of identical magnitude’. There is thus more to Marx’s reference to equality than the fact that a diverse set of commodities exchange for the same amount of wheat. There is said to be some intrinsic aspect to a commodity that any number of other commodities may represent such that in representing it they are equal.

The following paragraph then proceeds in somewhat reverse fashion. Marx takes the form of a single exchange between two commodities and proceeds directly from the equality in which two commodities may now be said to stand to the consideration of a third thing, value:\(^{22}\)

Let us now take two commodities, for example corn and iron. Whatever their exchange relation may be, it can always be represented by an equation in which a given quantity of corn is equated to some quantity of iron, for instance 1 quarter of corn = \( x \) cwt of iron. What does this equation signify? It signifies that a common element of identical magnitude exists in two different things, in 1 quarter of corn and similarly in \( x \) cwt of iron. Both are

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\(^{21}\) Marx 1976, p. 127.

\(^{22}\) That the phrase ‘third thing’ refers not to a further commodity but to value is clear from Marx’s subsequent comment that ‘the common factor in the exchange relation, or in the exchange-value of the commodity, is therefore its value’. Marx 1976, p. 128.
therefore equal to a third thing, which in itself is neither the one nor the other. Each of them, so far as it is exchange-value, must therefore be reducible to this third thing.  

Unfortunately, assuming A to prove B and then taking B to prove A does not get one very far. However, representing the structure of Marx’s argument in this way does at least allow one to question interpretations of the last two paragraphs, both positive (Rubin’s) and negative (including the joint critique of Anthony Cutler, Barry Hindess, Paul Hirst and Athar Hussain as well as Anthony Brewer), that take Marx simply to have proceeded from the assumption that exchange involves an equality:

Thus Marx starts from the fact of manyfold equalization of all commodities with each other, or from the fact that every commodity can be equated with many other commodities. . . . Marx says . . . let us take exchange in the form in which it actually takes place in a commodity economy. Then we will see that every object can be equalized with all other objects. In other words, we see an infinity of proportions of exchange of the given product with all others.

Exchange must be conceived as an equation if the discourse of Capital is to produce its particular concept of value and that concept is necessary to the theory of surplus value. . . . The notion of an equation necessitates a third term and hence opens the discursive space for labour-time as that term.

The argument for the use of labor values presented in the first chapter of Capital is almost unbelievably weak . . . though Marx’s trick of representing exchange by an equation may have helped to give it some superficial plausibility.

As the above discussion hoped to show, Marx actually begins his ‘third thing argument’ by supposing exchange-values to be had by a commodity. However, it is also necessary to mention one further piece of textual evidence used in support of the suggestion that Marx’s argument concerning value assumed a certain conception of exchange. It is to this effect that Marx’s short commentary on Aristotle was to be cited in Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk’s famous

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25 Cutler et al. 1977, p. 16.  
26 Brewer 1995, p. 117.
critique. Marx quotes approvingly the statement that “‘there can be no exchange’, he [Aristotle] says, “without equality, and no equality without commensurability’”. By adopting Aristotle’s comment and then proposing his own conception of value as the solution, it might seem that Marx formulates his conception of value as a solution to the problem of exchange. It is not until the end of Marx’s short commentary on Aristotle that such an interpretation is undermined:

Aristotle’s genius is displayed precisely by his discovery of a relation of equality in the value-expression of commodities. Only the historical limitation inherent in the society in which he lived prevented him from finding out what ‘in reality’ this relation of equality consisted of.

The important point to note here is that a relation of equality is found in the ‘value-expression of commodities’. With this phrase, exchange can no longer be seen as the logical starting-point of Marx’s argument. Instead of inferring value from an equality of exchange, it is equality that is found in the expression of value. As Marx put it in the section of his 1861–3 manuscripts devoted to Samuel Bailey, ‘it should be noted that it [commodity A] always exchanges at its value, consequently for an equivalent’. If the interpretation offered so far is valid, Marx is not to be understood as proceeding from a certain conception of exchange but from a claim about commodities having exchange-values.

**Defences of Marx’s ‘third thing argument’**

It is one thing to identify a gap in an argument and quite another to try to fill it. One recent attempt to defend Marx’s ‘third thing argument’ as here understood is provided by Andrew Kliman in *Historical Materialism* 6. Kliman attempts to defend Marx’s premise that commodities “‘have’ exchange-value” by arguing that this premise is a ‘fact’ of everyday experience in capitalist society. Once this premise is granted, one can talk about commodities possessing their exchange-value on account of an intrinsic value.

27 Böhm-Bawerk 1975, p. 68.
29 Marx 1976, p. 152.
30 Marx 1971, p. 126.
31 Kliman 2000, p. 102.
Kliman argues that an intrinsic conception of value lies at the basis of our everyday patterns of thought and behaviour that take commodities to have a worth independent of their actual exchange.\(^{32}\) What lends this argument a certain strangeness is that, at no point in Chapter One of *Capital*, could Marx be construed as providing a principled claim about extending validity to commonplace ideas. If anything, the way in which the idea of an intrinsic value is first introduced in contrast to what exchange-value ‘appears to be [scheint]’ suggests the inappropriateness of such an attempt.\(^{33}\)

Moreover, placing this objection aside still leaves Kliman’s argument stretching commonplace thinking too far. It is by no means automatic that, in order to think in terms of an exchange-value for a commodity different from its actual price, one must think that this commodity in some sense possesses or has exchange-value. With regard to Kliman’s first example, in which one thinks of commodities as having a value different from the price at which they are offered to the point of buying them on this basis, one might instead believe that the price at which a commodity is offered for sale is a ‘bargain’ (or a ‘rip-off’), in consequence of some violation of normal conditions of supply and demand. In effect, one would simply carry out a mental comparison between the current asking price for a commodity and the price of an identical (or nearly identical) commodity in the past or elsewhere. Marx specifically pictures thinking of this kind when commenting in the course of his critique of Bailey that ‘[t]he most ordinary merchant does not believe that he is getting the same value for his £1 when he receives 1 quarter of wheat for it in a period of famine and the same amount in a period of glut’.\(^{34}\) It is perfectly possible for the merchant to think both that the actual price of the wheat is not a true price (in the sense of what she may reasonably be expected to pay) and that wheat does not ‘have exchange-value’ (this instead being relative to supply and demand in a given place at a given time).

Thus, with respect to Kliman’s first example, the only distinction that needs to be made is the distinction between actual price and average price over a certain period. One does not need to think of average price as something a commodity ‘has’. The same sort of objection can be made in response to Kliman’s second example, that of calculating the value of one’s assets. An

\(^{33}\) Marx 1976, p. 126.
\(^{34}\) Marx 1971, p. 150.
estimate of the price one’s possessions might fetch can base itself upon a knowledge of past exchanges. A given estimate may therefore prove to be good or bad depending upon the degree to which it manages to anticipate market conditions at time of sale. It is neither desirable nor possible to rescue Marx’s ‘third thing argument’ by appealing to commonplace patterns of thought.

Although Kliman’s argument fails, it might still be claimed that Marx’s ‘third thing argument’ finds sufficient support from the wider context of relations of commodity production and exchange at which Chapter One operates. It is true that Marx highlights there the fact that the organisation of production into private, materially dependent units provides the specific precondition of exchange as the general form through which private labour is confirmed as social. It is not clear, however, how such a claim could justify an intrinsic conception of value any more strongly than providing no reason for its positive rejection. It is not enough, in other words, either to refute or to exclude all rival conceptions of value. With regard to the issue of refutation, acceptance of Marx’s claim that value-expressions presuppose a particular organisation of production does not, by itself, provide a perspective from which one may criticise alternative conceptions of value, such as Samuel Bailey’s, whose sole precondition is the occurrence of exchanges. For example, the inclusion under the latter precondition of more kinds of things (such as land) within what are deemed value relations can only be faulted as erasing the distinction between value and price that Marx upheld (together with the understanding of society allowed by such a distinction) once the concept of surplus-value has been introduced. With regard to the issue of exclusion (from being a theory of Marx’s chosen object), claiming that there is nothing about an alternative conception of value such as Bailey’s that prevents it from being applied beyond the reach of capitalist production does not, by itself, invalidate it as potentially explanatory of features of capitalist production.35

If it is true that the general framework of Chapter One provides insufficient justification for Marx’s ‘third thing argument’, then neither can one accept John Rosenthal’s argument for value, which shares certain similarities with Marx’s ‘third thing argument’. In the course of his discussion of the extrinsic and intrinsic measures of value, Rosenthal claims that ‘the issue of what determines exchange-value arises immanently from a consideration of the

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35 I return to this issue at the end of the next section.
value-expression’.36 Having introduced two hypothetical expressions of the
worth of commodities, 1 coat = 20 yards of linen and 1 lb. of tea = 2 yards
of linen, Rosenthal goes on to argue.

So, the comparison tells us that with a coat we can obtain ten times more
commodities of any and every sort then with a pound of tea: that we can,
in effect, obtain a portion of the total social product which is ten times
greater. Whereas, however, comparisons of different amounts of linen are
straightforward, a relevant unit of measurement being ready to hand: how
exactly are the ‘amounts’ of physically heterogeneous bundles of commodities
to be compared? With respect to what does one bundle represent a ‘greater’
portion of the social product than another?37

The problem with Rosenthal’s argument is the move between saying (i) a
coat exchanges for ten times the quantity of linen or of any other commodity
or set of commodities than 1 lb. of tea, to saying (ii) one obtains with a coat
a ten times greater portion of the total social product than with 1 lb. of tea.
Whilst (i) involves a comparison of quantities of the same use-value, (ii), in
its talk of ‘portions’ of a ‘total social product’, already implies the availability
of a measure of value distinct from a third commodity in exchange and
intrinsic to commodities. It is therefore of little surprise that Rosenthal can
move from (ii) to an intrinsic conception of value determined by labour time.
Rather than showing an intrinsic measure of value to emerge ‘immanently’
from a consideration of the expression of value, Rosenthal’s choice of terms
already assume an intrinsic conception of value. Marx’s ‘third thing argument’
has not been rescued.

**Samuel Bailey’s theory of value**

It is possible to move from the task of criticising particular defences of Marx’s
‘third thing argument’ to underscoring why such defences necessarily fail by
examining Marx’s critique of Bailey in Notebook XIV of the 1861–3 manuscripts.
A textual shift is at once justified by the passage in which Marx makes note
of Bailey’s argument that a commodity may simply be said to exchange with a
variety of different commodities in incommensurable proportions:

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37 Ibid.
But according to Bailey there is no value of A that could be expressed in B, because neither A nor B have a value apart from that expression. The value of A expressed in B must be something quite different from the value of A in C, as different as B and C are. It is not the same value, identical in both expressions, but there are two relations of A which have nothing in common with each other, and of which it would be nonsense to say that they are equivalent expressions.38

According to Bailey, value would belong to neither commodity. Instead, value would refer to the relation in which two commodities exchange: ‘[v]alue denotes consequently nothing positive or intrinsic, but merely the relation in which two objects stand to each other as exchangeable commodities’.39 Clearly, such a view is wholly incompatible with Marx’s attempt to understand the different exchange-values that a commodity ‘has’ as expressions of a unity, value. Yet Marx does not consider the position he had attributed to Bailey in the course of his ‘third thing argument’ in Capital. Marx does not refer to Bailey until the third section of Chapter One, where he criticises Bailey for only concerning himself with the ‘quantitative aspect’ of the exchange relation between commodities.40 If Marx’s latter comment were fair, there might seem to be no need to consider Bailey’s argument any further, since the exchange of commodities in given proportions could not proceed if it were not underpinned by some sort of qualitative homogeneity. Moreover, Marx’s intrinsic conception of value would be justified by default in so far as it provided an account of qualitative homogeneity.

Neither of the above conclusions, however, can be upheld. Bailey can indeed be said to provide an account of the qualitative homogeneity presupposed by commodity exchange in his theory of ‘esteem’. All exchanged items are objects of ‘esteem’ or ‘preference’ which agents may have a greater or a lesser desire to possess:

When, however, we regard two objects as subjects of choice or exchange, we appear to acquire the power of expressing our feelings with precision. . . . But this is not the expression of positive, but of relative esteem; or, more correctly, of the relation in which A and B stand to each other in our estimation. This relation can be denoted only by quantity.41

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38 Marx 1971, p. 150.
40 Marx 1976, p. 141.
41 Bailey 1967a, p. 3.
Bailey’s approach is, therefore, quite different from that of Marx. Even if Bailey’s account of qualitative homogeneity neither hinges upon a factor intrinsic to exchangeable goods nor allows for quantitative equality, only quantitative specification, it is nevertheless an account. Just as a previous quote from Bailey showing that it is possible to refuse Marx’s claim that a quarter of wheat ‘has’ a variety of exchange-values removes that part of Marx’s ‘third thing argument’ earlier described as assuming A to prove B, the possibility of providing an account of the qualitative homogeneity of commodities without resorting to Marx’s intrinsic conception of value removes that part of Marx’s ‘third thing argument’ earlier described as taking B to prove A.

Of course, Bailey’s position involves no more convincing an assumption than Marx’s. At a push, one could even claim that there is one respect in which Marx’s approach is already superior. This is less a matter of Marx’s fetishism theory, which, in its simplest context, explains why value appears to be the equivalent although the latter only expresses value, thus providing a diagnosis of the problem in a procedure such as Bailey’s. Bailey also possessed a diagnostic account of other approaches in that he sought to explain how the presence of money encouraged one to talk of value as though it were an intrinsic property of commodities. It is, rather, a matter of Bailey’s use of a transhistorical category such as esteem to explain a historically specific phenomenon. However, although it is true that there is a real slackness about the way in which Bailey jumps from using transhistorical to historical terms and that Marx used such opportunities to ridicule Bailey, in practice, Bailey used the concept of esteem in connection with terms particular to commodity production such as market competition. Thus, the following discussion hopes to show that the way in which value is to be justified is revealed by Marx’s pursuit of Bailey’s theory of value within the context of what, for Marx, were the more complex categories of money and capital.

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42 Bailey 1967a, pp. 6–9; Bailey 1967b, p. 53.
43 For example, between ‘object’ and ‘commodity’. Marx 1971, p. 140.
44 Declaring in Chapter XI, titled ‘On the Causes of Value’, that esteem ‘may be the result of a variety of considerations connected with exchangeable commodities’ (p. 180) Bailey goes on to list factors such as cost of production, competition, monopoly and demand. Bailey 1967a, pp. 182, 185, 187.
Marx and Bailey on money

If what have been drawn out so far are the negative implications of Bailey’s position for Marx’s approach to value, it is now time to turn to the positive. One of the positive aspects of Marx’s critique of Bailey concerns the question of money. An initial starting-point can be found in the following comment:

But if he [Bailey] had analysed money as a ‘measure of value’, not only as a quantitative measure but as a qualitative transformation of commodities, he would have arrived at a correct analysis of value. Instead of this, he contents himself with a mere superficial consideration of the external ‘measure of value’.45

Although the direct claim of this passage is that Bailey’s failure to push his analysis of money beyond a superficial concern with its role in providing a quantitative measure of value prevented him from arriving at a correct, intrinsic conception of value, it is clearly plausible to read it the other way, namely as implying that Bailey’s failure to arrive at a correct, intrinsic conception of value would prevent him from fully understanding money. To evaluate such a claim one must turn to Bailey’s theory of money itself.

Bailey’s account of the functions of money and their inter-relation can be found in the opening chapter of Money. Bailey begins by stating that money is ‘in the first place’ the instrument with which everyone exchanges, what he calls the ‘medial commodity’.46 Although, by fulfilling this role, money aids the ‘readiness of interchange and bargaining’,47 Bailey does not try to present a version of the (unconvincing) argument from barter that money is a technical necessity but, rather, states it as a given fact or ‘circumstance’.48 From this ‘circumstance’ a second function, its use as the ‘commodity of contract’, becomes ‘general’.49 Thirdly, it is ‘necessary’ that the medial commodity functions as the ‘measure of value’.50 In the Critical Dissertation, Bailey’s discussion of money had focused on this third function and it is against this latter discussion that the above comment from Marx was directed.

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46 Bailey 1837, pp. 1–3.
47 Bailey 1837, p. 5.
48 Bailey 1837, p. 3. For arguments why barter cannot explain the necessity for money, see Arthur 1998b, p. 454 and Campbell 1997, p. 100.
49 Bailey 1837, p. 3.
50 Bailey 1837, pp. 3–4.
According to the Critical Dissertation, value was measured by establishing the ‘mutual relation of two commodities by their separate relations to a third’.\footnote{Bailey 1967a, p. 152.} If one knew the C-value for A and the C-value for B, one could calculate the B-value for A and the A-value for B.\footnote{Bailey 1967a, p. 9.} The process of measuring value could thus provide a given commodity with ‘as many kinds of value as there are commodities in existence’.\footnote{Bailey 1967a, p. 39.} Clearly, such a process of inference from given facts about the proportions in which commodities exchange logically presupposes the actual existence of money. It was with this in mind that Marx was to continue his criticism of Bailey’s account of money: ‘[b]ecause he finds it [a relation of value] reflected in the monetary expression, he does not need to “understand” how this expression becomes possible, how it is determined, and what in fact it expresses’.\footnote{Marx 1971, p. 155.}

Although it may be admitted that Bailey is able to provide an account of the functions which money fulfils, to note the beneficial effects of these functions for production and exchange\footnote{Bailey 1837, pp. 46–75, 5–6.} and to recognise that, owing to certain physical qualities, a particularly commodity – gold – is particularly suited to fulfil the role of the money-commodity,\footnote{Bailey 1837, pp. 5–11.} Marx claims that Bailey cannot say what money is an expression of and thus why it exists at all. If true, and if Marx’s conception of value were capable of providing such an explanation, one would have found a way of showing the superiority of Marx’s conception of value.

That Bailey is vulnerable on this point is shown by the poverty of his account of the relation between the different functions of money. Although Bailey could appreciate the practical dependence of the third function upon the first, that is that the commodity functioning as the instrument of exchange for this reason necessarily functions as the medium for the comparison of exchange relations, he simply assumed the existence of a commodity fulfilling the first monetary function. In the Critical Dissertation, this assumption is perhaps understandable in that it is kept within the context of discussing what Bailey took to be the third, derivative function of money as the measure of value.\footnote{Bailey 1967a, pp. 97–8.} *Money*, however, shares this assumption:
Such are the functions which money performs and the purposes which it serves, whatever may be the material of which it is constituted. In rude nations various commodities have been used in this capacity, but in civilized countries the precious metals have superseded every other.58

It is important to stress that this absence is supported by Bailey’s account of value as a relation between commodities in exchange. Since it is a fact that exchange concerns two commodities, value can be further specified as a relation between two commodities. Any such exchange will do: ‘[s]uppose that at some former period, when the value of commodities was determined by the quantity of labour required to produce them, A and B were the only exchangeable commodities in existence, and that they were of equal value’.59 Rejecting Bailey’s approach, Marx was to insist that a system of commodity exchange cannot be represented in terms of exchanges between two commodities. Commodity exchange presupposes a division of labour within private yet materially dependent units. If one instead supposed that there were only two products of labour, ‘the products would never become commodities’ because a large proportion of the product would be consumed by its immediate producers.60 On Marx’s terms, such a scenario cannot lead to an adequate expression of value since value is bound up in a particular form and cannot yet be shown to be the universal aspect ‘common to all commodities’.61 Of course, within the framework of Bailey’s conception of value, it is sufficient to point to the remaining exchanged portion of products A and B in order to identify a value relation. The point to be grasped is that Bailey is incapable of advancing from such a conception of value to explaining the necessity of money. The conceptual inadequacy in Bailey’s treatment of money is not just compatible with but also encouraged by his conception of value.

That Marx addressed the question as to why a commodity fulfilling what Bailey designated as the first function of money exists at all is the result of his identification of the logical dependence of this ‘first’ function upon the measure of value function and the derivation of the latter from the opposition between use-value and value within the commodity. After all, it is the need

58 Bailey 1837, p. 5.
59 Bailey 1967a, p. 6.
60 Marx 1971, p. 144.
61 Marx 1976, p. 158.
for value to gain an expression distinct from use-value appropriate for representing products of social labour that drives Marx’s discussion of money in Section Three of Chapter One, rather than any concern with money in its function as an instrument of exchange. The existence of a money-commodity is a development of the opposed use-value and value aspects of the commodity, in the sense that only the singling out of a particular commodity provides an identical and thus fully adequate representation of the value dimension that all commodities share. In the money-commodity, value is represented in a form distinct from all manner of use-values as the abstraction from all use-value that it is. As Chris Arthur and Martha Campbell have pointed out, and in contrast to Bailey’s procedure, it is only once one reaches the general form of value with its important characteristics of all-inclusiveness and identity of measuring unit allowing quantitative comparison that Marx claims value is really expressed: ‘by this form [the general form], commodities are, for the first time, really brought into relation with each other as values, or permitted to appear to each other as exchange-values’.

Marx and Bailey on capital

Marx’s criticism of Bailey’s conception of money is not the only positive aspect of his critique. Moreover, whilst showing Marx’s conception of value to allow an explanation of money’s necessity where Bailey is silent may persuade few non-Marxists, Marx follows what he takes to be Bailey’s erroneous conception of value beyond the category of money to that of capital and hence profit, whose explanation is of undoubted importance:

This absurd argument against Ricardo is quite futile... It merely amounts to a repetition by Bailey of his proposition that value is the quantity of articles exchanged for an article. In dealing with profit he was bound to find himself in an embarrassing position. For here, the value of capital is compared with the value of the product. Here he seeks refuge in taking value to mean the value of an article estimated in labour (in the Malthusian manner).

In this passage, Marx suggests that, far from being able to explain profit, the confusion between use-value and value that arises within Bailey’s discussion...

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63 Marx 1976, p. 158.
64 Marx 1971, p. 154.
at the level of the commodity is carried over to his discussion of capital, forcing him to seek ‘refuge’ in estimating the value of profit in terms of the labour it can command in exchange. Bailey’s conception of value would be further undermined, in so far as it required him to take up an indefensible view of profit.

Just as Bailey took commodities to be both quantities of something and things exchanged for something else, he distinguished between profit as a quantity and as something exchanged. As a quantity, profit is the ‘proportion’ of the total product received by the owner of capital.65 In asking whether profits have risen, Bailey claims that ‘we do not mean whether a definite portion of some article called profits will exchange for a greater quantity of other things than before, but whether the gain of the capitalist bears a higher ratio to the capital employed’.66 How much of something else one exchanges it for is, instead, a matter of the value of profit. To ask if the value of profit has increased is to ask

2. Whether the aggregate value of his share is greater, estimated in some of the commodities produced? 3. Whether the aggregate value has risen, estimated in labour?67

Although Bailey answers both suggestions affirmatively, it is easily shown that only the latter allows one to claim that a rise in ‘profit’ necessarily entails a rise in the ‘value of profit’. If one supposes profit to rise, that is a rise in the proportion of the product appropriated by the owner of capital, the amount of other articles for which it is exchanged need not rise. The presence and extent of a change in this amount depends upon the article chosen for the comparison. It is only by assuming that the articles providing the comparison undergo the same alteration in productivity as those representing the aforementioned profit that Bailey affirms 2.68 It is left unsaid that, if the articles chosen for the comparison experience no change in productivity or even undergo a fall in productivity, the value of profit so estimated will not rise but remain unaltered or fall. On Bailey’s terms, and with regard to question 2, ‘profit’ can rise but the ‘value of profit’ in a given commodity, including

65 Bailey 1967a, p. 62.
66 Bailey 1967a, p. 63.
the money-commodity, can remain the same or even fall. Such expressions get one no further than the purported owner of a ‘rise’ in profit nevertheless unable to recommence production on the same scale due to a fall in the amount of raw materials which his profit allows him to command.

As Marx was quick to spot, it is only 3 which provides Bailey with a theoretical escape route. A representation of an increase in the proportion of the total product appropriated by the owner of capital in terms of labour commanded must increase, given that a proportional increase in the quantity of the product so appropriated requires that the proportion going to labour decreases (even if this latter proportion represents an absolutely greater quantity of the product than before). However, such an estimate is as impractical as it is true by definition.

The problems in Bailey’s discussion derive, on the one hand, from his use of the term profit to describe a mere quantity of goods without reference to exchange-value and, on the other, from his conception of value. Whilst the former presents Bailey with the task of fixing changes in profit and the value of profit to parallel one another, the latter permits little more than a solution cast in labour-commanded terms.

For Bailey, remember, value is a relation between commodities in exchange. Since it is a fact that only commodities contemporary with one another can be exchanged, Bailey can further specify value to be ‘a relation between contemporary commodities’. This inference has important implications for intertemporal comparisons of value and hence profit. What one can consistently do is compare the relations in which a given commodity exchanges with other commodities at different points in time, for example compare the amount of commodity y commodity x exchanges for at T0 and T1. Ruled out, however, are comparisons resting on the assumption that commodities of different periods can stand in a relation of value to each other. This sort of comparison assumes that one is equipped with a common measure of value in different periods. But nothing can mediate things incapable of mediation. Indeed, Bailey goes as far as to say that there is no need for such a function to be performed: ‘[i]t is obvious then, that if no relation of value can exist between objects in different ages, there can be no measurement of it, nor consequently can there be any measure or medium of comparison required’.

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69 Bailey 1967a, p. 72.
70 Bailey 1967a, p. 115.
It is exactly at the level of capital, however, that the importance of the comparison Bailey denies becomes clear. Breaking from Bailey’s conception of value as simply an exchange relation between contemporary commodities is legitimated by the concern to provide a more realistic account of the significance of profit for the reproduction of capital: ‘[i]s it not a fact that, in the process of circulation or the process of reproduction of capital, the value of one period is constantly compared with that of another period, an operation upon which production itself is based?’ 71 To thereby adopt an intrinsic conception of value in explaining profit as the accumulation of value over a given period of time would be, for Bailey, to proceed from a false assumption. The argument against this is, surely, that its truth is demonstrated in the development of a superior explanation of capital, one in which the distinction between use-value and value is important for distinguishing value as providing production with its overall purpose.

Conclusion
In highlighting the relevance of Marx’s critique of Samuel Bailey for understanding Marx’s theory of value, the argument of this paper has been that the proof of an intrinsic conception of value is to be found in the later development of more complex categories. From this perspective, it is possible to shed light on one of Marx’s more frequently cited yet elusive methodological comments, as well as to offer positively and negatively couched guidelines for approaching Marx’s value theory. With regard to the first claim, it is fair to say that Marx’s critique of Bailey fills out what his letter to Dr. Kugelmann dated 11 July 1868 only hinted at.72 It is now understandable why, in response to a review in the Leipzig Centralblatt claiming that he took the determination of value by labour time as an ‘axiom’ from which the whole of the rest of his discussion proceeded with ‘the most rigorous logic’,73 Marx considered the latter part of the above statement to grant him the ‘greatest possible concession’, stating ‘[t]he unfortunate fellow does not see that, even if there were no

71 Marx 1971, p. 154. As Arthur (1998a, p. 97) and Kliman (2000, p. 97) have shown, Marx repeats this point in the second volume of Capital. The advantage of focusing on Marx’s critique of Bailey in the manuscripts of 1861–3 is that this critique can follow Bailey’s own awkward manoeuvres more closely.
72 Marx 1988, pp. 67–70.
73 ‘h’ 1868, pp. 754–5.
chapter on “value” at all in my book [Capital], the analysis I give of the real relations would contain the proof and demonstration of the real value relation.\textsuperscript{74} It should, by now, be clear that it is Bailey who follows an axiomatic procedure and how different this is from Marx’s approach. It would therefore be surprising if Marxists were to continue to give much positive weight to the ‘third thing argument’.

Of course, it is not claimed that following Marx’s critique of Bailey’s conception of money and capital provides the magic formula for refuting all subsequent utility theory. Such a task would have to include an explanation of the place of Marx’s discussion of supply and demand in the third volume of Capital. Nevertheless, certain swipes by later representatives such as Böhm-Bawerk do lose their force as well as their originality. Other critiques of rival approaches to political economy might focus on different categories altogether or on different aspects of money and capital, but the method of approach is clear.

Nor can the above argument be met with a systematic shrug of one’s dialectical shoulders. This is not just a matter of the fact that, without an account of Marx’s critique of Samuel Bailey in the 1861–3 manuscripts, textual support for such an approach beyond that allowed by the density of Marx’s argument in Capital is reduced. It also reflects an under-researched but potentially fruitful difference in procedure between the first three volumes of Capital and the ‘historical reviews\textsuperscript{75} forming part of the 1861–3 manuscripts. Whilst, in the former, Marx takes great care when introducing new, relatively more complex categories into his discussion, his historical reviews require him to shift level of abstraction in following the theorist under discussion (as unpublished drafts of an earlier period of investigation, they also register the development of Marx’s own categorial system).\textsuperscript{76} Although making them difficult to unpack, such bursts of discussion often do much to reveal the relations between categories. It is in this sense that Marx’s critique of Bailey was said to provide an overview of value in its forms as commodities, money and capital. That the manner in which systematic dialectics urges one to evaluate Marx’s theory of value can draw sustenance from that part of Capital

\textsuperscript{74} Marx 1988, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{75} Marx 1975c, p. 345. For a qualified defence of the ‘historical review’ interpretation of the 1861–3 Manuscripts against Enrique Dussel (in Dussel 2001) see Furner 2002, pp. 118–21.
\textsuperscript{76} See Dussel 2001.
evidently not following a systematic dialectical method of presentation is apparently paradoxical but, ultimately, a strength.

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I read with great interest Mike Haynes’s criticism of my book *The Marxian Concept of Capital and the Soviet Experience*. His valuable and forceful criticisms concern, most importantly, three issues: the correct methodological approach to the study of the Soviet economy; the nature of the revolution of 1917; and the nature of the Russian economy during the period from 1917 to 1928. The three sections of the present paper correspond to these three issues. The paper ends with a short conclusion.

**USSR: opposing approaches**

Haynes starts by questioning my studying the Soviet economy in abstraction from international economic relations. He asks whether the ‘USSR can be analysed independently of its insertion in the world economy’. In support of his position, Haynes cites Trotsky: ‘Marxism takes its point of departure from the world economy’. Which ‘Marxism’ is in question here? And ‘point of departure’ for what? If, by ‘Marxism’, Trotsky...

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1 Haynes 2002, p. 335.
means his own ideas or those of other ‘Marxists’, it does not bother me too much. For me, what is of singular importance is the position of Marx (himself), whose stated objective was to ‘reveal the economic law of motion of capital’ and, consequently, to ‘investigate the capitalist mode of production and the relations of production and exchange corresponding to it’. His explicitly stated ‘point of departure’ in relation to this fundamental objective is very different indeed. Thus, after stating that commodity is the ‘elementary form of wealth’ of bourgeois society Marx adds, ‘Therefore our investigation begins with the analysis of a commodity’. Marx nowhere refers to ‘world economy’ as his ‘point of departure’ for his investigation.

Indeed, Marx, far from taking as the ‘point of departure’ capital on a world scale, specifically mentions, in the French edition of Capital, that his analysis of the genesis of capital and its subsequent development is in the context of a very small part of the globe – to wit, Western Europe in which it was, again, only in one country, England, where the process of expropriation of the immediate producers – the foundation of capital – took place in a radical manner. Later, in his letter to Vera Zassulitch, Marx emphasises this point. Thus, England, being ‘till now the classic location of the capitalist mode of production and the corresponding relations of production and exchange’, served for Marx as the ‘principal illustration’ of his ‘theoretical development’. Though England’s ‘insertion into the world economy’ was, in all probability, more dense than what the USSR’s was, the former’s ‘national’ capitalism, growing and establishing itself out of the original expropriation of its own immediate producers within its own socio-economic context could adequately illustrate Marx’s ideas about capitalism, without the need of his taking the ‘world economy as the point of departure’.

Haynes is, of course, right in saying that there is no ‘national capital’. It is, indeed, a contradiction in terms. Capital’s aim being not use-value but exchange-value and, correspondingly, production for production’s sake, capitalist production involves ‘interlacing all peoples in the net of the world economy’.

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2 Marx 1962a, pp. 12, 15–16.
5 Marx 1968, p. 1558.
6 Marx 1962a, p. 12.
market, whence the international character of the capitalist regime'. However, the entanglement of a country in the world market does not engender, nor does it determine, the specificity of its social relations of production which is in question. Hence, in order to study the specific character of the process of genesis and development of capitalism which takes place through the ‘expropriation of the self-sustaining peasants and their transformation into wage labourers’ within a country, conditioned by the country’s history, taking the ‘country’s (own) colour’ and ‘creating the country’s home market’ for its capital, it is necessary, for methodological reasons, to leave aside the foreign economic relations which do not really belong to this inner process and would, rather, obfuscate it. Having said this, after I had analysed the specific form of the social relation of production of the USSR, I did take account of its rivalrous competitive relations with the ‘Western’ capitalist countries, including the relevant quantitative data, to which Haynes seems to have paid little attention.

Haynes ascribes to me the idea that one could ‘derive the basic features of capitalism from the activity of two enterprises competing with one another’. In its place, he wants ‘a concept of capitalism as a larger totality . . . based on competitive relations across state boundaries’, because ‘to abstract from this is to abstract from [the] core process’ of capitalism which is a ‘system’ in ‘development’. First of all, I submit that, in this rather discursive-descriptive long essay, Haynes rarely makes clear the concepts he uses – most of all the central concepts like ‘capital’ (capitalism), and ‘competition’ (of capitals). I start my book by devoting two full theoretical chapters clarifying the basic concepts rigorously, following Marx’s texts. Haynes’s statements clearly show my basic difference with Haynes regarding ‘capital’ and ‘competition of capitals’. Contrary to Haynes, I do not ‘derive’ capital’s basic features from competition of capitals, nor do I make the concept of capital dependent on the size of the geographical area. Competition of capitals itself is one of the ‘basic features of capitalism’, all of which arise from the ‘inner nature’ of the capitalist mode of production itself which shows capital’s ‘necessary tendency’, its ‘tendency to draw out [ausspinnen] infinitely the value of surplus labour’.

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7 Marx 1962a, p. 790.
Thus, the ‘inner nature of capital, its essential determination’, ‘appears and is realized’ in competition as the ‘reciprocal interaction of many capitals’.\(^{11}\) It is through competition that capital realises surplus-value after having produced it. Competition executes and realises the ‘inner laws of capital, but does not create [erfindet – invent] them. Wishing to explain them simply from competition is to confess that one does not understand them’.\(^{12}\) Hence, for competition of capitals to exist, it is necessary and sufficient that more than one unit of production based on ‘free’ wage-labour exist and confront one another as functionally independent and competing commodity producers.\(^{13}\) Given these conditions, geography here plays no role whatsoever for the existence of the competition of capitals. Geography becomes important only insofar as the spatial extension of the operation of capital helps the realisation of surplus-value of individual capitals on a bigger scale. ‘Competitive relations across state boundaries’ is relevant insofar as the competition between capitals takes place across the globe, irrespective of boundaries – given capital’s free movement – which simply means the extension of competition already existing inside the boundaries, demonstrating that capital does not accept any spatial barrier to the realisation of surplus-value produced within the boundaries. Haynes also wants to posit a positive ‘role of the state as part of the competitive process’ and ‘competitive leverage’ as ‘a mixture of economic, political and military power’.\(^{14}\) This looks like a terrible mixing-up of issues. The relevant question in connection with capital as a mode of production is the competition of capitals, economic rivalry of the different independent units of production striving for maximum profit, not to be mixed up with political/military rivalry of states. For one thing, the political/military rivalry of states was very much present in Marx’s days without his taking account of this rivalry while analysing the competition of capitals. Indeed, this rivalry of states plays an important role insofar as each state promotes and helps the movement of ‘national’ capital across the globe and tries to obstruct the same movement for ‘foreign’ capital. But it plays little role in the explanation of the existence of competition of capitals itself, and bringing in this element would only obstruct a clear view of capital’s competitive process and thereby the nature

\(^{11}\) Marx 1953, pp. 316–17.
\(^{12}\) Marx 1953, p. 638. My emphasis.
\(^{13}\) Marx 1953, p. 323; Marx 1962a, p. 654.
of capital itself (as a relation of production). When state enterprises compete with ‘private’ enterprises inside or outside of a country as their economic rivals, they do so as units of capital, observing the rules of capitalist game, and not as units of a state.

Haynes refers to the ‘core process’ of capitalism. Now, ‘core’ signifies the hard central part (of fruits containing seeds). If the ‘core process’ signifies fundamental process, then capitalism’s core process is the historically specific process of separation of the immediate producers from the conditions of production, and the development of capitalism as a ‘system’ is simply the enlarged reproduction of this separation where capital, naturally, does not accept any barrier. To explain this ‘core process’, what is relevant is not so much the extension of the geographical area as the expansion of what Marx calls the ‘home market.’

Following the ‘Cliff formulation’ of considering the Soviet economy as a ‘single workshop’, Haynes is ‘puzzled’ by my argument that the Soviet enterprises had ‘effective control’ over their operation and thereby acted as competing capitalists, adding, a contrario, that they enjoyed only ‘constrained freedom’. Let me first remark that the ‘single workshop’ argument would automatically, following Marx, contradict the reality of commodity production and, given wage-labour, the corresponding competition of capitals in the USSR. In order to maintain the capitalist character of the USSR, this contradiction is ingeniously overcome by assuming that this whole process was simply imposed on the USSR from outside by the ‘global economy’ in order to be ‘transmitted internally . . . by the centre’!

The ‘puzzle’ evaporates as soon as we realise that, for competition of capitals to exist, the relations between ‘centre’ and particular units of production is of little importance. It is not a question of centre versus unit, it is question of unit versus unit. What is fundamental is the functional autonomy of each unit

15 Conceiving competition of capitals – as Haynes does (Haynes 2002, p. 338) – as something imposed on the USSR by the ‘global economy’ from outside – acting like the demiturgos – seems to be a way of escaping the dilemma: on the one hand characterising the USSR as capitalist, which would imply the existence of autonomous units of capital competing with one another, while, on the other hand, denying the autonomy of the units of production in the USSR on the basis of the assumption of single state ownership over the means of production. The ‘orthodox’ Trotskyists seem not to face up to this dilemma by their consistent denial of the existence of capitalism in the USSR.

17 Marx 1962a, p. 376.
in relation to the other units, independently of the question of the juridical ownership of the means of production and of the question of control from the ‘centre’. It should be stressed that the essential reality of capitalism is social capital as a totality. Social total capital has a ‘real existence different from particular capitals’, a particular capital constitutes only an ‘autonomised [verselbständigte] fraction of social total capital just as each individual capitalist is only an element of the capitalist class’. Hence, each singular capital, as an organic part of the social total capital, is dependent – by definition – on the latter. But the singular capitals themselves are reciprocally independent and, as such, ‘confront one another as competing commodity producers’.

Capitalism in the USSR was not an exception to this rule. The enterprises were, of course, under the thumb of the ‘centre’, that is, social total capital juridically owned by the party-state. But, as fragments of this totality, they confronted one another as autonomous units based on wage-labour, whose products took commodity form. Their chiefs, though not juridically owning the means of production, were the ‘bearers’ or ‘functionaries of capital’ in Marx’s profound sense and, ‘as brother-enemies shared the booty of the appropriated alien labour, so that on the average the one appropriated as much unpaid labour as the other’, and ‘competition is nothing but the striving of the individual capitalists to divide among themselves the quantity of the unpaid surplus labour that the capitalists (together) have squeezed [auspressen] out of the working class’. In Marx, we find a telling example of competition of capitals without there being a separate owner of each capital – five separate capitals ‘belonging to one man’ that is, as fractions of ‘one single capital’ – competing with one another and sharing the total surplus-value among themselves, each one ‘getting one’s distinct aliquot part’.

Put in a somewhat different way, the ‘puzzle’ disappears as soon as we understand capital’s totality-singularity configuration ‘neither recognized nor understood by the usual (ordinary) political economy’ – and set ourselves free from the juridical ownership fixation. It should be mentioned that, inside the USSR itself, voices were raised questioning the ‘single workshop’ image

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19 Marx 1953, p. 353.
21 Marx 1962a, p. 654.
22 Marx 1959, p. 21.
24 Marx 1953, p. 353.
of the Soviet economy. A very significant contribution in this respect we find in the unduly neglected Soviet economist V.P. Shkredov who, already in 1960s, following Marx’s ideas closely, battled the Soviet establishment economists for ‘mixing up the economic and juridical relations’ and faulted their conceptualisation of ‘property’ as a ‘separate relation [osoboe otnoshenie], independent of the historically determined forms of social production’. He affirmed the reality of relative (reciprocal) independence of the soviet enterprises based on the ‘existence of commodity relations [tovarnikh otnoshenii] within the state sector’.25 Returning to the theme two decades later – in the context of Gorbachev reform of the law of enterprises –, Shkredov reaffirmed the (reciprocal) separateness and relative independence of the Soviet enterprises and specifically ridiculed the image of ‘[Soviet] socialism as one giant factory’.26

**The Russian Revolution**

Haynes ascribes to me the idea(s) that ‘Russia remained substantially unchanged after 1917’, that I ‘wrote the popular base of the Russian Revolution out of history’, and that I ignored the ‘authentic’ character of the popular revolution in 1917 where the Bolsheviks gained mass support.27

The first point is a palpable misrepresentation of my position. *A contrario*, I speak specifically of ‘precapitalist’, ‘semi-feudal’ Russia which the Bolsheviks inherited and of the development of *capitalism* under their rule right from 1917.28 As regards my alleged ‘writing the popular basis of the revolution out of history’, I would hold, on the contrary, that this phrase far from representing my position, perfectly represents the position of ‘communism’s false brothers’ in Russia – to cite Marx’s phrase29 – the Bolsheviks in the first place (more on this below).

Let me elaborate somewhat on the ‘Russian Revolution’. This rather bland expression short-circuits two qualitatively different moments of the revolutionary process that emerged in Russia in 1917 – February and October. The revolutionary mass upsurge in February sallied forth spontaneously without any organised direction from above. As Trotsky writes in his

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26 Shkredov 1988, p. 32.
29 Marx and Engels 1972, p. 96.
monumental history: ‘The February revolution was begun from below, nobody summoned the masses from above to insurrection’. The first soviets arose immediately after the political victory, towards the end of the famous ‘five days’ (February 23–7) and spread rapidly all across Russia. This was, again, a spontaneous mass phenomenon of the workers and soldiers. It was sometime before the peasants – without any directive from above again – launched the agrarian revolutionary movement whose basis was the old demand for the transfer to ‘people’ the ownership of land, and this meant the expropriation and distribution of lands belonging to the crown, the state, the church and the landlords. The peasants’ insurrection acted as a powerful lever to the Bolshevik seizure of power in October. Peasants’ soviets came later. Additionally, the soviet movement comprised more than these two kinds.

The inaugural ‘moment’ of the Russian Revolution in February 1917, initiated and dominated entirely by Russia’s toilers without any party guidance, had all the basic features of the great popular revolutions of the past such as those of 1789–93 and 1871 in France. Targeting mainly the precapitalist social order, this revolution started out as an immense democratic mass movement in an open-ended, plural revolutionary process which the different political parties increasingly tried to bring under control advancing their own agenda as the agenda of the toilers. In fact, the demands of the workers emanating from factory committees in March 1917 mainly concerned their economic conditions of existence – an eight-hour working day, higher wages, better sanitary conditions and opposition to piece rates. As to their political demands, they wanted most of all a democratic republic and the convening of the Constituent Assembly. In their turn, the peasants wanted most of all the seizure of land of the state and the landlord – and not nationalisation – and, as to their political demands, they wanted a democratic republic and a rapid and equitable peace. To the extent that the Russian labourers aimed above all at the destruction of the precapitalist institutions of the country, February inaugurated a bourgeois revolution in a vast context of mass spontaneity and initiative with a plural character.

How very different was the ‘second stage of the revolution’, as Lenin called it in April 1917! From a tiny party of twenty odd thousand in the spring of

1917, the Bolsheviks grew into a gigantic party of 300,000, obtaining a majority in many soviets, most importantly in the big urban and industrial centres by October. They continuously gained popular support because, more than most other parties, they could sense the profound revolutionary strivings of the increasingly radicalised workers, and captured in their popular slogan – ‘land, bread, freedom’, (formulated by Lenin in early March) – what the workers wanted. Lenin well understood the very close links, infinitely stronger than the influence of his party, connecting the workers and soldiers to the soviets. With the formula of the Bolshevik programme ‘All power to the workers and poor peasants’ he united the popular formula ‘All power to the soviets’. Indeed, whatever I have said in my book about the 1917 events in no way contradicts either the ‘authenticity’ of the ‘popular character of the revolution’ or the increasing ‘mass support’ for the Bolsheviks who undoubtedly ‘counted on ruling by mass support’. What I have contested (without elaborating) is the contention of the proletarian character of the revolution, of the mass character of the Bolshevik seizure of power and the claim of establishing a proletarian dictatorship. It could not be a proletarian (socialist) revolution (at least, not in the sense of Marx) in the absence of the necessary material and subjective conditions. As to the material conditions in which the country was summoned to plunge into ‘socialist revolution’, with only one-sixth of the population living in urban areas, ‘the conditions of rural life and the whole labour process remained at a level which prevailed at some earlier century in Western Europe, maybe at the level of French rural life sometime in the 16th century’.

Again, the (economic) historians have found little support for Lenin’s contention about irreconcilable class antagonism in the countryside of the epoch between petty capitalist ‘kulaks’ and poor peasants and hired labourers. In fact, in 1913, the share of rural households relying mainly on hired labour counted less than 0.1 per cent and a landless rural proletariat engaged only in hired labour in agriculture barely existed. In short, there seems to be little evidence to support the view of a full-blooded differentiation in the peasantry

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33 Shapiro 1960, p. 168.
34 Anweiler 1958, p. 203. ‘Offering their party as a vehicle for the most uncompromising popular demands, the Bolsheviks were rewarded with a great spurt of growth’. See Daniels 1967, p. 34.
in the period before 1914. As regards the industrial proletariat, working dominantly under foreign capital, it constituted barely two per cent of the total population.

Even abstracting from the absence of the material conditions (in a situation of socio-economic backwardness) and considering only the subjective factor, Lenin himself stated in 1919 that Russia’s ‘labouring masses’, being at a ‘low cultural level’, were ‘incapable of participating in the (country’s) administration’. If we take the October seizure of power, an extremely negligible part of the industrial proletariat – itself a drop in the vast ocean of the population – really participated in it, as confirmed by most historians. The October insurrection in no way signified a real popular uprising with the active participation of the toiling masses – in sharp contrast with February. Trotsky writes on October: ‘The final act of the revolution seems too brief, too dry, too businesslike. There is no action of the great masses’. Most people in Petrograd were unaware that this ‘popular’ insurrection was taking place. ‘Even the members of the Provisional Government did not see that power had (already) slipped from their hands’.

Lenin, while openly proclaiming ‘All power to the soviets’ had, in fact, no faith that the soviets could wield power. This is clear from his pronouncements of the period. With a tiny minority in the soviets in June, Lenin declared that his party was ready to take power by itself, adding, in August, that, once in power, his party would not leave it. Even when his party commanded a majority in the soviets of the principal urban centres, Lenin showed his deep distrust of, if not utter disdain, for the soviet democratic process. ‘Waiting for the soviet congress,’ he affirmed, would be ‘utter idiocy, sheer treachery, a childish and disgraceful game of formalities and a betrayal of the revolution’. Ultimately, in conformity with this Leninist position, power was seized by the Bolsheviks, on the decision of a handful of persons – independently of the toilers’ organs of self-rule and behind their back – in fact ‘not from Kerensky but from the soviets’. Indeed, far from being the workers’ own creation, the

41 Taylor 1977, p. xvii.
‘Bolshevik Party was Lenin’s creation. . . . He was irreplaceable as that party’s leader. . . . When sharp differences arose [about the seizure of power] Lenin’s threat to resign from leadership was more effective than all other arguments’.42 That the October seizure of power had nothing to do with the toiling masses seizing power on their own collective initiative (à la 1871 Commune) comes out starkly in Trotsky’s statement in his Diary in Exile: ‘If neither Lenin nor I had been present in 1917 in Petersburg there would have been no October Revolution’.43 If this is the reality of the October insurrection – passing for a ‘proletarian revolution’ – then it is clear that it was Lenin and his comrades themselves who were, in Haynes’s words, ‘writing the popular base of the Russian Revolution out of history’. It is clear from Trotsky’s own account that even the ardent supporters of the Bolsheviks, including the party members, wanted the seizure of power by the soviets and not by the party.44 ‘The idea of a Bolshevik monopoly of power never crossed the minds of the overwhelming majority’.45

The last democratic obstacle on the Bolsheviks’ road to power was the Constituent Assembly; the convening of which the Bolsheviks had been loudly championing till the seizure of power, and, in fact, even immediately after this victory (October 26), Lenin reaffirmed this stand and added that, even if the Socialist Revolutionaries were elected there as the majority, the Bolsheviks would accept it. However, when the Assembly met at the beginning of January 1918, on the basis of ‘Russia’s first, last and only universal, free and democratic election’,46 with the SRs gaining absolute majority, the body was declared ‘counterrevolutionary’ by the Bolsheviks and their allies and was dissolved by the government on the initiative of Lenin. ‘Six months later every political party but the Bolsheviks . . . had been outlawed, terror had commenced, and the new phenomenon of totalitarian dictatorship was beginning to take over the future of Russia’.47

After the initial period of ‘triumph’ and the post-war massive demobilisation and rapid socio-economic decline of the country in winter, 1918, workers’ dissatisfaction with the nouveau régime began to grow rapidly with increasing

45 Schapiro 1960, p. 170.
46 Daniels 1967, p. 212.
protests and demonstrations by thousands against the authorities. ‘A third stage began to unfold in the Bolshevik-labor relations leading to open conflict, repression and the consolidation of the dictatorship over the proletariat’. At an ‘extraordinary’ meeting on 3 March 1918, the delegates of the biggest factories of Petrograd, railway workshops, electric power stations, printing presses said in a declaration, sent to the All-Russian Congress of Soviets, that ‘We, the workers of Petrograd in our majority, have accepted the change of regime effected (in October) in “our” name, without our knowledge and without our participation. The new power, declaring itself as the government of workers and peasants, promised to realize our will and respect our interest. After four months we see that a laughing stock has been made of our faith, our hopes trampled underfoot’. The turn of the masses away from the Bolsheviks, as Medvedev calls it, was shown in the elections to the soviets in spring and summer 1918 – the Bolsheviks were losing ground.

People’s dissatisfaction with the installed power reached new heights towards the end of the Civil War in 1920–1, coming to the fore in different urban centres. It had particular breadth and intensity in Petrograd, especially in the factories, earlier Bolshevik strongholds. Even boots were not delivered to the Red Army soldiers lest they join the demonstrators. ‘February 1921 in Petrograd astonishingly reminded one of February 1917’. Referring to the situation globally, Deutscher writes that the ‘bulk of the working class, not to speak of the peasantry, unmistakeably turned against the Bolsheviks. If the Bolsheviks had now permitted free elections to the Soviets, they would almost certainly have been swept from power’.

The last scene in the drama of ‘writing’ the people ‘out of history’ was enacted in Kronstadt in February–March 1921. Reacting to the Petrograd events and in view of the widespread repression of the regime in response to the popular grievances, the soldiers, sailors and workers of Kronstadt, at a meeting of about 15,000 on 1 March 1921, adopted ‘almost unanimously’ a fifteen-point resolution demanding, among other things, new elections to the

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48 Rosenberg 1987, p. 117.
49 Heller and Nekrich 1982, p. 47. My emphasis.
50 See Medvedev 1979, pp. 148–9 for some election details.
51 Heller and Nekrich 1982, p. 89.
53 Perhaps the best documented book on Kronstadt is by the noted historian Israel Getzler (Getzler 1983) on whose account the following is largely based. See also Wade 1993, pp. 202–6 for a brief review of the documents.
soviet by secret ballot; freedom of speech, press and assembly for the toilers as well as all left organisations; liberation of all political prisoners of the left parties and the toilers, peasants’ right to cultivate their own land without hired labour. The Bolsheviks denied all legitimacy to the demands and denounced the movement as counterrevolutionary and led by the White generals, for which, of course, there was no shred of evidence. Lenin himself admitted at the Eleventh Party Congress that ‘they did not want the Whites and they did not want our power either’. However, ‘it was essential for the Communist Party to suppress the idea of Kronstadt which defended the idea of a “third revolution”’. Thus ended the ‘Red Kronstadt’ which had ‘produced a bustling, self governing, egalitarian and highly politicized soviet democracy the like of which had not been seen in Europe since the days of the Paris Commune’.

Russia 1917–28

Criticising me, Haynes observes that it makes little sense to present NEP Russia as ‘a simple expression of capitalism’, that there was ‘no immediate ascendancy of capitalism in Russia’ between 1917 and 1928 and that (rather) there was ‘a complex array of forces’. This refusal to face reality seems strange inasmuch as Lenin himself asserted at the party’s Eighth Congress (1918) that ‘even in Russia capitalist commodity economy exists, is functioning and developing’. And, in more than one text of the period, Lenin affirmed the desirability of the development of capitalism in Russia at least ‘to some extent and for some time,’ of course, under the ‘proletarian’ state. The reality of the period 1917–28 vindicated Lenin’s position. A government decree of 10 September 1921, described the wages system as a fundamental factor of industrial development, wages and employment being considered as a matter of relation based on freely consented contract between the workers and the concerned enterprise. ‘In less than a year NEP had reproduced the characteristic essentials of a capitalist economy’. The data also support this. Thus, while the share of independent commodity producers – in handicrafts and agriculture – in the total population (including non-working dependents)

54 Daniels 1960, p. 144.
remained constant at 75 per cent level between 1924 and 1928, the share of ‘workers and employees’ – that is, wage and salary earners – rose from 15 per cent to 18 per cent between the two dates.\textsuperscript{58} As a particular indicator of the early phase of capitalist development, I could note that, in metallurgy and coal mining, the share of workers originating from the peasant families increased from an average of 43.4 per cent for 1918–25 to 53.5 per cent in 1926–7. Taking industrial production as a whole, its index rose from 39.5 in 1922–3 to 119.6 in 1927–8 (1913: 100). The number of industrial workers doubled, increasing from 1.4 million to 2.8 million during the same period.\textsuperscript{59} The total value of output of large-scale industry, at 1926–7 prices, grew from 1.9 milliard in 1921 to 15.7 milliard in 1928.\textsuperscript{60} The development of the industrial economy was, of course, based on wage-labour.

As an index to ‘qualitative change after 1928’, which I allegedly neglected to deal with, Haynes stresses that the post-1928 régime found it ‘necessary to clear out factory committees . . . and to turn trade unions into transmission belts’.\textsuperscript{61} I would submit that the factory committees were firmly set on the road to being ‘cleared out’ and the trade unions turned into ‘transmission belts’ in the pre-1928 period, the process initiated by Lenin himself. On 26/27 October 1917, the ‘Project of Rules on Workers’ Control,’ composed by Lenin, laid down that the decision of the elected representatives of workers could be cancelled by trade unions and their congress (Point 5) and that, in all enterprises of state importance, the owners as well as the representatives of workers would be answerable to the state for maintaining order and discipline and for protecting property (Point 6). In February 1918, a joint meeting of the factory committees and the trade unions agreed upon the subordination of the former to the latter. Indeed, the Bolsheviks saw for the first time the danger of radical democracy confronting them at the level of enterprise following literally Lenin’s earlier words on workers’ self-administration through factory committees. To help themselves, the Bolsheviks called on the trade unions where they now had a majority. The trade unions not only prevented the convening of the All-Russian Congress of Factory Committees but also simply annexed them as their lowest-level organ.\textsuperscript{62} This process of

\textsuperscript{58} Narkhoz 1987, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{59} Prokopenchuk 1952, pp. 279, 283.
\textsuperscript{60} Baykov 1970, p. 121; Narkhoz 1982, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{61} Haynes 2002, p. 347.
\textsuperscript{62} Anweiler 1958, p. 277.
'clearing out the factory committees' has to be studied along with the measures undertaken in parallel by the authorities to 'discipline' labour, such as forced labour camps, one-person management, the Taylor system, piece wages, labour books. At the Ninth Party Congress (1920), Lenin spoke about the necessity of fighting against 'notorious democratism' and of the need to sweep away 'all these shoutings against appointees, all this old, pernicious trash'.

As to the trade unions, they were already 'turned into transmission belts' by none other than Lenin himself. Thus repeating and elaborating what he had said about one year earlier, Lenin, in a draft resolution on the trade unions (12 January 1922), compared the trade unions as the 'transmission belts from the Communist Party to the masses' with transmission belts linking motors and machines. Dobb notes that, by the beginning of the 1920s, 'The trade unions had come to be looked upon as little different from any ordinary state department'.

Conclusion
Towards the end of his life, Marx had envisaged the possibility of the rise of a higher form of society in Russia by skipping the capitalist stage provided that the process of decomposition of its rural communes, already started by the tsarist policies, could be thwarted by a popular revolution in the country against Tsarism coinciding with a proletarian revolution in Western Europe. However, by 1917, Russia’s rural communes were sufficiently decomposed – coupled with the non-occurrence of a proletarian revolution in the West in spite of some cases of armed uprising, notably in Germany, by a minority of the working class, viewed by Lenin and Trotsky as the beginning of a proletarian revolution – virtually excluding such a possibility. In this situation, there remained for Russia only the second possibility envisaged by Marx – Russia could realise its social transformation only by traversing ‘all the vicissitudes of the capitalist regime’. In other words, in this situation, it is only the development of capitalism which would create the ‘material conditions of existence’ of the new society.

63 Carr 1963, pp. 198–216.
64 Dobb 1966, p. 118.
66 Marx 1968, pp. 1552–73.
As opposed to Marx’s materialist perspective, Lenin and Trotsky advanced the thesis of the possibility of socialist revolution breaking out in a backward capitalist country, the ‘weakest link’ in the chain of world capital, contrary to what Marx had thought. This ‘weakest link’ argument became a canon of the dominant Left beginning at least with Gramsci.67 However, they dismissed Marx too rapidly. Lenin quickly realised that there was no other way to go forward, to ‘catch up and surpass [dognat’ i peregnat’] the advanced capitalist countries – to use his expression of September 1917 – but precisely through the development of capitalism in a largely precapitalist country where there was no possibility of the rise of socialism for a long time to come. The measures undertaken by the new régime, as well as Lenin’s own pronouncements of the period, clearly showed that Russia was following the capitalist path.68

This only confirmed Marx’s profound materialist prognosis: ‘If in the society as it is we do not find in a latent [verhüllt] form the material conditions of production and corresponding relations of circulation for a classless society, all attempts at exploding it would be Don Quixotism’.69 Marx, indeed, had the last laugh.

References


67 Gramsci 1973, p. 130.
68 Outside of Russia, within the Leninist tendency, Bordiga seems to have been about the only one who understood this. See Bordiga 1980.
69 Marx 1953, p. 77.


Mike Haynes  

Rejoinder to Chattopadhyay

While I welcome Paresh Chattopadhyay’s attempt to extend the discussion of the nature of capitalism generally and Soviet state capitalism in particular in his reply to my review of his book, I remain unconvinced by his arguments. Since writing my review article, ‘Marxism and the Russian Question in the Wake of the Soviet Collapse’,¹ it has become increasingly clear to me that a capitalist/state-capitalist view of the USSR is becoming a major paradigm on the Left. My own book-length study along these lines was published in 2002,² and, in a joint study with Rumy Husan, we have tried to extend a class analysis of the history of the USSR/Russia to its demographic history.³ In the US, Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff have also produced an extensive discussion based on the idea that the Soviet social formation was a form of capitalism.⁴ More importantly, perhaps, in Russia and the successor states to the USSR, the issue is being widely discussed amongst sections of the independent Left. It is true that the

¹ Haynes 2003.  
² Haynes 2002.  
³ Haynes & Husan 2003.  
⁴ Resnick and Wolff 2002.
best known representatives of the Russia Left in the West, such as Boris Kagarlitsky, do not have such a perspective, but they themselves would recognise that their view is but one point on a spectrum of debate on the Left in Russia. What is interesting about the Russian discussion is that it not only involves abstract theorisations about the nature of capitalism, value relations and the like, but also that discussions are developing which not only see the USSR as a form of state capitalism but try to use this idea as a basis for a sustained engagement with the USSR’s past and the transition in the present. While much of this discussion has occurred independently of that in the West, it has not been hermetically sealed off from that debate. Thus, a Russian edition of Tony Cliff’s State Capitalism in Russia was published in the early 1990s, and, while it has been circulated unevenly, its basic ideas appear to be widely known; moreover, my own book has also been the subject of a review article in the journal Alternativy. But, outside Russia, we can only glimpse the more occasional forms of a debate that is taking place in journals and pamphlets with small publication runs. Any attempt to bring together the different perspectives on this issue and engage in wider discussion is therefore important and welcome.

This is all the more so as the Russian discussion is reproducing many of the elements that can be found in the debate in the West. The most notable are differences over whether October 1917 was a genuine revolution followed by degeneration towards some form of capitalism/state capitalism. This is then closely related to the way in which capitalism is theorised and its relations to Russia before and after 1917.

The position I have argued is that Russia before 1917 was a capitalist society. October 1917 was a genuine revolution which briefly opened the possibility for a wider international socialist revolution. But this possibility was closed down by the Civil War and western intervention which led to a process of degeneration that was finally consolidated into a form of state capitalism by Stalin’s counterrevolution after 1928. In contrast, Chattopadhyay argues that Russia before 1917 was not properly capitalist. The revolution in October was not a genuine revolution but rather a step in the process of consolidation of capitalism. From this starting point, it follows that there is no qualitative

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5 See Kagarlitsky 2002.
6 See, for example, Zdorov 2003.
7 This edition was based upon a KGB translation secretly made in the 1950s.
8 Gafurov 2003.
difference between what I would see as the ambiguous and contradictory forms of the 1920s and the capitalist forms of the 1930s and after. Chattopadhyay sets these arguments against the background of disagreement over where the analysis of modern forms of capitalism must begin. Since this latter disagreement underpins much of the discussion, I will start with it and move to the more specific issues raised by the experience of Russia.

**How do we analyse capitalism?**

Paresh Chattopadhyay argues that we must start an analysis of any particular society from Marx’s method as set out in *Capital* where, in Marx’s words, ‘our investigation begins with the analysis of a commodity’. It is true that many who write about Marx share this view. But there are, equally, others who take the same view as I do, namely that this is to misunderstand both the nature of Marx’s enterprise in *Capital* and how it should be applied to the analysis of any particular part of the capitalist world. There seem to me to be several common mistakes in this focus on the issue of the commodity.

The first is the mistake of trying to construct an analysis of capitalism as a dynamic mode of production from the conditions of its first emergence, as if this can capture the essence of the whole. It is true that capitalism did develop first in one part of the world. But it is also true that, over time, it developed in depth, through a process of intensification, and in breadth, through a process of geographical expansion. Both these processes helped to change the manner of its development in other parts of the world and to create a global system in which the whole came to dominate the parts. The need to understand this historical dynamic and to analyse the changing forms that continue to result seems to me to be at the heart of Marxist political economy.

Secondly, there is the mistake that arises from the failure to distinguish between Marx’s method of presentation of his argument in *Capital*, where he begins by trying to unravel the mystified character of the commodity, and his analysis of capitalism as a functioning system. It is true that many Marxists reduce the one to the other. I once heard this described as ‘the fetishism of commodity fetishism’. But that two different things are involved ought to be clear from a consideration of the difference between what Marx was trying to sketch out in the *Grundrisse* and the first volume of *Capital*.

Thirdly, we must surely question the idea that Marx’s analysis was complete. Even in its own terms, it was not. We know that he intended *Capital* to have
several other volumes and that these volumes would gradually take us closer to an analysis of ‘really existing’ capitalism. The fact that he spent so much time giving a factual basis to his analysis in the first volume of Capital was not because he thought that its argument was a total analysis of capitalism. Rather, he was anxious to show that his abstractions were not, like those of classical political economy, ones that might throw the ‘baby out with the bathwater’. My understanding is that he did indeed see the need to extend his analysis both to a more serious consideration of both the nature of the state and the world economy.

This becomes all the more important when we add the process of capitalist development into our analysis. Because capitalism is a much more dynamic system than any previously known mode of production, it is also more flexible in its forms. It can seize hold of old and new forms, mutating them and turning them to its advantage. These elements of ‘really existing capitalism’ cannot simply be overlaid on a narrow theoretical analysis deriving from commodity relations. They form part of the dynamic essence of capitalism as a system and must, I would suggest, be grasped as such. What I find attractive in what I understand to be Marx’s real method is not that it maps out all of the answers but that it provides a way of approaching them which treats central features of the capitalism I see around me as integral to the system. The problem with Chattopadhyay’s approach is that not only does he seem to me to misunderstand Marx but, in doing so, he limits what he can say about the real pattern of capitalist development. This is because he must bring crucial elements of modern capitalism in almost as if they were afterthoughts, detached from what I am not embarrassed to call the core dynamic of the system.

Elements of this have long been recognised on the Left. Nikolai Bukharin, for example, pioneered the analysis of capitalism as a world economy and much of his discussion, despite some qualifications, was taken on board by Lenin in his discussion of imperialism (which he never intended to be conflated with a narrow discussion of colonialism). It was also taken up by Trotsky, before he became a Bolshevik, in his analysis of combined and uneven development, and the way that this fed into an embryonic development of a theory of permanent revolution. For Rosa Luxemburg, it was also a basic starting point which she defended in an extensive discussion that is perhaps insufficiently well-known. Indeed, for all their faults, many theorists in the

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7 See Haynes 1985 for a discussion of this.
Second International saw the importance of this and the need to build on Marx and go beyond him to analyse the capitalism on the eve of the First World War.

This is especially important in the Soviet context. As my review made clear, there were autonomous units within the Soviet economy throughout its history and, over time, their role grew. But Chattopadhyay goes beyond this and argues that

for the competition of capitals to exist the relations between ‘centre’ and the particular units of production is of little importance. It is not a question of centre versus unit, it is a question of unit versus unit. What is fundamental is the functional autonomy of each unit in relation to the other units, independent of the question of the juridical ownership of the means of production and of the question of control from the ‘centre’.

But there was also a unified core whose dynamic cannot be reduced to internal commodity relations with the state sector. This was the military-industrial complex in its widest sense and it was central to development after 1928 up to the end in 1991. But does ‘the (reciprocal) separateness and relative independence of Soviet enterprises’ explain its operation? Did the rockets and tanks that rolled through Red Square and the industries that created them move at the behest of ‘commodity relations within the state sector’, or was their production a function of global militarised competition? Did an ‘internal logic’ of ‘separateness and relative independence’ explain the Soviet space effort? Were Kalashnikovs and the terms of their production set by the enterprises producing them confronting other enterprises as ‘competing commodity producers’?

Moreover, and this is a point that Chattopadhyay continues to neglect, this is not a question that is peculiar to the former USSR, save in degree. The same problems have recurred the world over as capital becomes centralised on a global scale. To see capitalist relations the world over as being determined by the economic and military competition of huge state capitals is not some peculiar sleight of hand designed to account for the experience of the USSR – it is necessary to understand modern capitalism globally. But the implication, which Chattopadhyay draws explicitly, is that we do not need a theory of state capitalism. The state is dissolved in economic terms into a myriad of units. But this argument must also dissolve

10 This would also seem to push the state into a purely superstructural phenomenon.
the idea of monopoly capitalism too in favour of an analysis of ‘unit versus unit’.

This seems to be both theoretically and practically disabling. It produces an abstract categorisation quite disconnected from any analysis of real capitalism. It is also a retreat from the Marxist political economy developed by those who followed Marx and wanted to confront the way that capitalism was generating both monopoly and state forms. This is not a question of a ‘juridical fixation’ but, rather, a concern to map both the effective disposition of the means of production and to understand how, as capitalism develops, so commodity and value forms also change and become distorted. By contrast, the stress on ‘unit versus unit’ seems (I hope Chattopadhyay will forgive the brutal comparison), to be a Marxist equivalent of the theory of perfect competition in which all issues of power and concentration are dissolved because everything really has commodity relations and competes with everything else.

Russia and the Revolution

A second issue that divides us is the nature of the Russian Revolution. Here, it is important to alert readers not familiar with the detailed historiography of 1917, and Soviet history more generally, to a difficulty in the secondary literature. Whilst it would not be scientific (in the best sense of the term) to reject an argument because of its political provenance, readers do have to be aware of the way in which political issues might affect the emphasis and interpretations of historians. It is disappointing, therefore, to find some writers on the Left uncritically adopting arguments from strands of conservative historiography. They do so, apparently, on the grounds that, since we need to ask questions about our past and since the Right has been doing this for decades, we can trust such historians as a guide to both the questions to pose and the answers that follow. Chattopadhyay seems to me to fall into this trap at a number of points, when he tries to form a seamless argument that echoes arguments that are familiar in both Western Cold-War writing on Russia and its Stalinist inversion.\footnote{To put it crudely, the Stalinist said everything flowed from Lenin through the Bolsheviks to Stalin and that it was good. The Western Cold-War conservatives said that everything flowed from Lenin to the Bolsheviks and Stalin and that it was bad.}
The first difficulty that I have here is Chattopadhyay’s argument that, before 1917, Russia was ‘“precapitalist”, “semi-feudal”’. This allows him to suggest that, in 1917, the revolution ‘could not be a proletarian (socialist) revolution (at least not in the sense of Marx) in the absence of the necessary material and subjective conditions’ and that, in 1917, workers, so far from posing revolutionary-socialist demands, aimed more at the ‘destruction of the precapitalist institutions of the country’. We will deal with the latter point in a moment. Before doing so, we need to challenge this understanding of Russia in 1914. It is true that, judged from the perspective of Britain, Western Europe or the USA, the Russian economy was weak (but, of course, the size of the Tsarist Empire allowed it to compensate to a degree for this weakness against more developed states). But, viewed in global terms, Russia was still one of the world’s more developed states. Its per capita income was low compared to Western Europe and the United States, but its industry was still the fifth largest in the world and its merchandise exports were the seventh largest in the world (measured in constant prices).\(^{12}\) It is important to realise therefore that if Russia was still ‘precapitalist’ and ‘semi-feudal’ in 1914, then how much more true was this of the rest of the world at this time. The logic of this position in comparative terms is therefore to reduce the sense of the dynamism of capitalism across the world.

Fortunately, a proper consideration of what was happening in Russia suggests that this is not necessary. The value of thinking in terms of a globalising capitalist economy which produces a pattern of uneven and combined development is that it points our attention to the transformative powers of capitalism and the way that, even as it appears to maintain elements of the old order, so it also transforms them. This can be seen in Russia. The overall pattern of Tsarist economic growth is well known and has been summarised by Paul Gregory in several publications.\(^{13}\) I have elsewhere criticised Gregory for suggesting that, left to its own devices, the Tsarist economy had the capacity to close the gap with the advanced West.\(^{14}\) But I share the view that capitalism in Russia was sufficiently dynamic both to create a significant modern sector and to begin to change what appeared to be the more traditional sectors from within.

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\(^{12}\) Maddison 2001, p. 361.
\(^{14}\) Haynes and Husan 2002.
The output of larger-scale industry grew 11 times between 1860 and 1914, based especially on cotton, metals and engineering with the development of coal and oil in the background. Although growing factory production caused the collapse of some small-scale production, there was also a parallel expansion of the small-scale sector too. By 1914, Russia had also become the world’s greatest grain exporter. It is true that these exports and also sales on the internal grain market came from landlord estates and larger peasant holdings, but this does not mean that there was a simple dual economy. Peasant society as a whole was being tied increasingly into a set of market relations and this was reflected not only in the economic basis of the village but also in changing social and cultural forms and the widening of horizons.

The important point here is not that the average level of the economy was high: development was uneven. But, even where it was low, the wider population was being sucked into more modern relations. I have no sense of this complex functioning as a ‘precapitalist economy’ or ‘semi-feudal’ economy, nor do such terms help me to understand the actual relations of the Tsarist economy. Rather, what interests me as a historian is the way that old and new were coming together (a process of interaction evident across the world). The fact that the Tsars, for example, claimed to stand at the head of an apparently ‘feudal’ monarchy did not stop them becoming sufficiently modern to experiment with the first railway in Russia; it did not stop the father of Nicholas II having an Otis elevator built in the Winter Palace; and it did not stop Nicholas himself having a fleet of cars, and taking up, first, photography, and then film photography with enthusiasm. At one level, these examples might be dismissed as fads, but they are illustrative of the deeper process, evident even amongst the peasantry, of how old and new was coming together in a way that is quite inadequately captured by the term ‘semi-feudal’ or, indeed, ‘semi-capitalist’.

But this mistake then feeds into Chattopadhyay’s account of social relations, first in respect of the rural situation and then, the working class. Chattopadhyay argues that

historians have found little support for Lenin’s contention about irreconcilable class antagonism in the countryside of the epoch between petty capitalist ‘kulaks’ and poor peasants and hired labourers. In fact in 1913 the share of rural households relying on hired labour counted less than 0.1% and a landless rural proletariat engaged in hired labour in agriculture barely existed.
This argument mixes up several different things.

The fundamental antagonism in 1917 arose from control of large quantities of land by the state, church and large landowners, especially (but not exclusively) the nobility. Overlaid on this was the bitter heritage of serfdom and the manner of the emancipation that had required peasants to pay for their liberation after 1861 through redemption payments that had only been ended, under pressure, in 1907. It is true that, in the years between 1863 and 1914, noble land ownership had fallen by a half, but this still left the nobility with many large estates. Lenin had estimated that the average landholding of the 30,000 largest landowners could support some 330 average peasant families each. It was also here, on these bigger estates and farms (some certainly run by owners failing to adjust to the international markets in which Russian agriculture was increasingly entangled, but others more adaptive and innovative), that a significant hired labour force was developing. The figure of 0.1 per cent of the rural households relying on hired labour is, in these terms, quite misleading. The 1897 census had identified nearly 2 million hired labourers and several million more offered themselves for work at harvest time. By 1914, the numbers of both groups had grown and their role can be traced in a number of historical accounts as well as in, for example, some of Gorky’s stories which deal with migrant agricultural workers.

So far as internal differentiation within the peasantry is concerned, there are indeed serious arguments here about how far it had gone. But it is quite wrong to take the debates of the years after 1917 as a guide to those before 1917. After 1917, through land redistribution, there was a process of equalisation that may or may not have been reversed under NEP. But, before 1917, there was clearly a process of increased differentiation and the Stolypin reforms (even with their failures) speeded this up, which is why peasant bitterness grew against those who took advantage of the reforms.

The land seizures that took place were not inspired by the Bolsheviks, but a more basic peasant dream and they had the classic elements of a peasant revolution. They were directed both against big landowners and richer peasants who had benefited from the differentiation which had occurred before and after the Stolypin reforms as the following, by no means untypical account on a land seizure in January 1918 shows:

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15 Waldron 1997, p. 58.
16 See, for example, Mixter 1991.
17 My views on this are set out elsewhere. Haynes 1985 and 2002.
Yesterday, 26 January, at 12 noon the entire commune of Kolybelka, led by the chairman of the village committee, appeared at my khutor. They arrested me and my family, as well as two policemen who happened to be at my house, and left a guard with us with a warning not to go to the house. They also placed armed guards around my farm and made threats to my labourers. Then they took away all my grain and seed, except forty pud of rye, and locked up my barns, I asked them to weigh the grain they had taken, but they refused as they loaded up their fifty-six carts until they were overflowing. . . . That night some of the peasants returned, broke the lock on the barn and took away my scales and tubs with weights of five pud measures. 18

Chattopadhyay then unwittingly compounds his mistaken analysis of the countryside with an equally erroneous analysis of the working class. The industrial proletariat, he says, was ‘a drop in the vast ocean of the population’. It is true that some Western conservative historians make this point. A figure of the industrial proletariat representing less than 2 per cent of the population in 1917 is commonly quoted. 19 But this is simply a mistake, born of a desire to diminish the revolution. Extensive calculations, begun by Strumilin in the aftermath of the Revolution, have been undertaken to estimate the size of the working class in both 1914 and 1917. I have quoted in detail one of the most authoritative of these elsewhere. 20 The simple point is that the familiar figure of three million or so workers represents the factory inspectorate’s data for those workers in larger factories. It excludes workers in uninspected factories; it excludes workers in craft industry, construction, transport, agriculture, services and the like. If we add these together then we get a working class several times the size of three million. But what share did it make up of the population? This is not a proper question. The population includes dependents and to compare the wage-labour force with it will diminish the apparent size of the working class. The proper way to do the calculation is to calculate wage-workers as a share of the total labour force, or, if you wish to calculate

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18 Quoted in Figes 1989, pp. 52–53. A khutor was an enclosed farm with a house on it much like an English farmstead. It therefore embodied both the separation of peasant land from the village open fields and separation of the homestead from the village. It was thus the most comprehensive form of enclosure for individualised agriculture. Note, in this instance, that the khutor had both hired labourers and substantial grain stocks and equipment.

19 See, for example, Grossman 1976, p. 493.

the working class as a share of the population, you have to add their dependents to the number of wage-workers. It is still the case that the workers remain a minority class but not the tiny minority that Grossman and others have sometimes suggested.21

From this starting point, Chattopadhyay then follows those who argue that February was somehow a more authentic revolution than October. Although this is not an unusual argument these days, it remains most peculiar. February was a genuine revolution that produced a seismic shift in the political spectrum in Russia. But, geographically, it was restricted to one city with the rest of the country following behind it. Politically, it involved mass action on the streets with attempts at the top to stitch together a new government to exclude any direct influence from below. Indeed, immediately after 1917, right-wing and pro-Tsarist commentators were sometimes just as happy to condemn it as a coup as they were to condemn ‘the October coup’; indeed, the historian George Katkov developed a long book around this thesis.22 It is ironic, therefore, to find that one of the best defences of February as a revolution, despite its limits, came from the pen of Trotsky

It would be no exaggeration to say that Petrograd achieved the February revolution. The rest of the country adhered to it. There was no struggle anywhere except Petrograd. . . . The revolution was carried out upon the initiative and by the strength of one city, constituting approximately about 1/75 of the population of the country. You may say, if you will, that this most gigantic democratic act was achieved in a most undemocratic manner. The whole country was placed before a fait accompli. The fact that a Constituent Assembly was in prospect does not alter the matter, for the dates and methods of convoking this national representation were determined by constitutions

21 Given the role of migration in the formation of the working class and the way that some workers maintained ties to the village, there is scope for debate about the exact contours of the working class. But this is often presented as a peculiarly Russian problem, when the retention of rural ties is a common part of the global migration process. The estimate of the proportionate size of the working class in 1914 also depends the devisor used. This will depend on which definition of the Tsarist Empire is used and how the semi-detached fragments of the empire are dealt with. It also depends on whether the official figures are accepted or adjusted as many demographers feel is necessary. The most sensible way to do the calculation is probably to focus on European Russia, though a critic might suggest that this will overstate the size of the working-class minority. The obverse of the confusion over the size of the working class is confusion over the size of the peasantry. Here, there is a very helpful article by Moon 1996.

22 Katkov 1967.
which issued from the victorious insurrection in Petrograd. This casts sharp light on the question of democratic forms in general, and the revolutionary epoch in particular. Revolutions have always struck such blows at the judicial fetishism of the popular will, and the blows have been more ruthless the deeper, bolder, and more democratic the revolutions.23

The suggestion that what followed February was an attempt, in which the workers were complicit, to establish a democratic capitalist state is also strange. It is true that workers raised specific demands, but, when these specific demands clashed with the immediate possibilities set by the capitalist structure of Russia, then they were forced to go beyond abstract formulations. I find nothing unusual in this, nor do the social historians who have examined this. People do not come to a revolutionary consciousness by means of some immaculate conception. Indeed, if Ferro’s pioneering analysis of the demands of peasants, soldiers and workers immediately after February is examined, it will be seen that, judged against some template of appropriate slogans, the workers appear not the most revolutionary but the least.24 But this contradiction is more apparent than real. The revolutionary-democratic slogans put forward in the soldiers’ and peasants’ motions to the first meetings and soviets most likely came from the intelligentsia who happened to be present and reflected a tokenism not apparent in the workers’ motions. If I ask for a ‘democratic republic’ in the most general terms, this may sound revolutionary but it poses no concrete demands – I may even get my employer’s support. If I ask for a wage increase, shorter hours, demand that a foreman be sacked and so forth, then these are real things with immediate consequence and, if I do not get them, then I may have to draw the political consequences. Indeed, it was exactly this process that historians such as Mandel, Smith, Koenker, Rosenberg and many others have shown to be at work in 1917 and it was this process that led to consciousness going beyond bourgeois-democratic limits.25 Indeed, it was this process that led to the famous demand, ‘Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers!’ – a demand that becomes inexplicable within Chattopadhyay’s framework.

Thus, the impossibility of confining the revolution to a bourgeois-democratic one did not arise from any Bolshevik adventurism. It was set partly by the

23 Trotsky 1968, p. 143.
24 Ferro 1972, pp. 112–36.
25 See the summary of much of this work in Kaiser 1987.
difficulty created by the uneven development of global capitalism and the lack of any guarantee that Russian capitalism could develop the country to Western European levels. This problem then reappeared internally in the balance of forces between the different groups at the top of Russian society and the tendency of the bourgeoisie to compromise with Tsarism, a tendency captured in Struve’s well known argument that ‘the further to the east one goes in Europe, the weaker in politics, the more cowardly, and the baser becomes the bourgeoisie’. This produced the paradox in radical thought that a bourgeois revolution was only possible if it was carried out by the ‘revolutionary dictatorship of the workers and peasants’. Before 1917, this looked like the height of good sense. Today it looks like nonsense.

At the level of theory, Trotsky’s concept of ‘permanent revolution’ and its effective adoption by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party (and, to an extent, by the Left SRs) broke through this limited vision of what was possible. But this theoretical breakthrough only had historical meaning because it made sense of the way that the logic of events in 1917 broke these limits at the level of practice.

The idea that any revolution could not stop at bourgeois political forms was sensed by the conservative P.N. Durnovo, in the famous memorandum he drew up in February 1914 warning against possible war with Germany:

It will start with all disasters being attributed to the government. In the legislative institutions a bitter campaign against the government will begin, which will result in revolutionary agitation throughout the country. There will immediately ensue Socialist slogans – which alone are capable of arousing and rallying the masses – first the complete reapportionment of land and then the reapportionment of all valuables and property.26

This quickly became manifest after February. Sukhanov put the dilemma of those who wanted to limit the revolution.

The Soviet democracy had to entrust the power to the propertied elements, its class enemy, without whose participation it could not now master the technique of administration in the desperate conditions of disintegration, not deal with the forces of Tsarism and of the bourgeoisie united against it. But the condition of this transfer of power had to ensure the democracy a

complete victory over the class enemy in the near future. Consequently, the gist of the question was whether propertied Russia would consent to take power in such conditions, and the task consisted of compelling it to embark on this risky experiment as the least of the evils lying before it.27

I have set out elsewhere some of the processes which led to the failure of a bourgeois-democratic alternative to develop in 1917 and the pressures that constrained the ruling class to act as it did in refusing to end the war, agree to national self-determination, relinquish control of the land, and answer the demands for improvements from the working class.28 It was their determination to limit the revolution that pushed radicalism forward and then forced them to begin to follow through the logic of restraining the revolution. Pavel Riabushinskii expressed this in August:

We ought to say... that the present revolution is a bourgeois revolution, that the bourgeois order which exists at the present time is inevitable, and since it is inevitable, one must draw the completely logical conclusion and insist that those who rule the state think in a bourgeois manner and act in a bourgeois manner.29

This was the dilemma that forced sections of the ruling class towards Kornilov. The first Kornilovshchina failed and pushed the revolution even further to the left, but, sooner or later, a second attempt would have been made and (we should know this even more given the subsequent history of revolutionary crises being resolved by the Right) would probably have succeeded.

October did not involve the Petrograd-style street protests of February but, contrary to the arguments of the Right, it does have a greater claim to democratic legitimacy. It was preceded by a sustained mass mobilisation of the population. This gave rise to democratic institutions in the form of the soviets of which, by October, there were some 1,400 with well over 200,000 deputies within them.30 The soviets were themselves joined together through

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30 It is disappointing to find Chattopadhyay repeating familiar and long-contested arguments about Lenin’s position. It is true that, in the summer, he briefly took the view that the soviets might be becoming less revolutionary. It is not true that he abandoned them. It is quite wrong to take arguments from the Civil War period about the soviets or the working class and transpose them to 1917. This is simply bad history. Whatever conclusion one comes to about Lenin’s thought or anyone else’s, it needs
the national All Russian Congresses of both urban and rural soviets, in which the number voting on reached extraordinary levels, comparable to parliamentary elections. Democratic legitimacy was also reflected negatively in the paralysis of the Provisional Government in its attempts to establish and popular base for itself and the increasingly shaky collations. The ‘seizure of power’ itself (or perhaps the chasing away of the Provisional Government) was certainly the act of a minority, but how could it have been any different? And it was legitimated not only by the meeting of the All Russian Congress of Soviets in October but also by the All Russian Congress of Peasant Deputies in November – a Congress which was elected on a more properly representative basis than the subsequent Constituent Assembly because – a point that whose significance is too often minimised – the Left SR split was properly reflected in the lists and they had a majority of SR delegates, unlike in the Constituent Assembly, where the right wing in the SR party manipulated the situation to their advantage and therefore did not properly reflect the views of the people they claimed to speak for. None of this is to diminish the arguments and conflicts of the time, but it is to say that anyone coming from the Left should beware of too easily going along with an historical agenda which obscures the history of 1917 with the conscious/unconscious aim of not simply linking 1917 to Stalin’s later dictatorship but, in the process, of discrediting the possibility of change from below anywhere.

Russia between 1918 and 1928

In the event, the hopes apparent in 1917 and early 1918 proved unsustainable. The coalition of the Bolsheviks and the Left SRs broke up; Brest Litovsk isolated one part of revolutionary Russia; Western intervention then helped to reinforce counterrevolution and both society and the new embryonic political
to be understood in its evolution. Lenin above all analysed things in terms of the concrete situation, which is why, when some critiques draw spurious consistencies, others denounce him for inconsistency. Ironically, it was not Lenin who abandoned the soviets but his ‘socialist’ opponents. They were doing so in September 1917 when they began to speculate that they had outlived their usefulness and then they abandoned them in practice by walking out in October when they lost their majority and in elections whose democratic legitimacy has never been seriously questioned. I have elsewhere quoted Sukhanov’s response to this, which few historians have chosen to notice because it undermines claim of those who opposed the revolution to democratic legitimacy in soviet terms (Haynes 2002, p. 54).
structures collapsed. The scale of the tragedy of the Civil War years still needs to be understood to make sense of the subsequent development of Soviet Russia. It is disappointing that Chattopadhyay therefore continues to ignore it. In his reply, we move effortlessly from the limited discontent in the spring of 1918 to Kronstadt in 1921, which suddenly becomes a potential rerun of February, a position which is suggested not only by Heller and Nekrich, as Chattopadhyay but also Figes, but which I do not believe is supported by any serious detailed account of its potential including those cited.

Chattopadhyay wishes, however, to make the more substantial argument that production relations in the years 1918–28 were authentically capitalist. I beg to differ. 1917 did not produce a socialist society in Russia, nor did any revolutionary claim that it would. The chains of capitalism were forged too strongly at the level of the factory, the national economy and the international economy for them to be broken so easily. Indeed, in Russia in early 1918, many companies continued to operate in the old way. Pick up a Russian economic magazine from this period and you will often find an article by a leading revolutionary at the front and companies reporting their annual profit figures at the back. The expectation of the revolutionaries was, rather, that, by a twin and mutually reinforcing processes of international revolution and continuing internal change, the basis for a development towards a more genuine form of socialist society would be laid. Some limited elements of this began to appear, creating the mixture of forms whose character gave rise to well-known debates in the spring of 1918. But the Civil War interrupted this process with ambiguous results.

The Civil War fundamentally dislocated the economic process. The role of old industrial section of the ruling class was destroyed by nationalisation decree of 28 June 1918, and that of the aristocracy by the continuing takeover and redistribution of their lands. Russia was further isolated from the international economy by the blockade and war to such an extent that foreign trade collapsed to a mere 1 per cent of the 1913 level while, internally, the economic mechanism also collapsed as production plummeted and elements of a natural economy began to appear. Production took place on a hand-to-mouth basis, with the priority being to meet immediate military needs. So chaotic was this process that

we fought without supplies. As early as 1919 there was nothing left in the central depots. Shirts were being sent to the front direct from the workshop. But the supply of rifles and cartridges was most difficult of all. The Tula munition factories worked for the needs of the current day. Not a cartload of cartridges could be sent anywhere without the special authorization of the Commander-in-Chief. The supply of munitions was always taut as a string. Sometimes the string would break and then we lost men and territory.32

The dislocation also had social effects that weakened capitalist forms. But the Civil War also halted the development of more democratic forms below and not least because many workers left to join the Red Army while the economic collapse forced huge numbers out of the cities. It also forced power upwards with the new state encouraging the first steps towards degeneration.

In these terms, it makes some sense to use Trotsky’s idea of a degenerating workers’ state to characterise the ambiguity of relations in this period. Here, we have a society with no clear dynamic and with elements of the revolution surviving at different levels and to different degrees in the context of economic and social collapse, which prevented a clear and simple reconsolidation of capitalism. Where Trotsky erred was in thinking that this situation could continue indefinitely. What the 1920s represented was not simply a political battle over the fate of the Revolution but a struggle over basic economic forms in which the possibility of a reconsolidation of capitalism through the development of market and private forms distracted attention from a possible development towards state capitalism.

To support his argument that NEP was an example of unrestrained capitalism, Chattopadhyay quotes various data relating to the increase in production and numbers of workers. But this is seriously misleading. At the end of the Civil War, large-scale industrial production was running at 13 per cent of the 1913 level. In a key sector like iron and steel, it was only 4 per cent. Even small-scale production had been cut in half and grain output was down by a third. Moreover, these problems were then compounded in the short term by the famine of 1921–2. The apparently spectacular growth rates of the 1920s therefore do not reflect the imposition of higher levels of exploitation, but rather the process of recovery. There was little new investment save in oil. As Davies puts it, ‘recovery depended on bringing back into use pre 1917 factories,

32 Trotsky 1975, p. 433.
mines, shops and offices, reassembled, patched up and put to work’. 33 This process is vividly described in Gladkov’s famous novel *Cement*. Net investment in 1926–7 was, on one estimate, still at 90 per cent of the 1913 level (though it was higher in industry) and other parts of the Tsarist pattern of expenditure were missing most notably the relatively huge expenditure on the military.34 Foreign trade also had recovered only to around a third of the 1913 level.

The fact that the Revolution was degenerating means, of course, that, over time in the 1920s, more and more of the gains of 1917 were lost, but this does not mean that there was not a qualitative break after 1928. The essence of the turning point, as Cliff put it, is that

> It was now for the first time, that the bureaucracy sought to create a proletariat and to accumulate capital rapidly. In other words, it was now that the bureaucracy sought to realise the historical mission of the bourgeoisie as quickly as possible [through] a quick accumulation of capital . . . industrialisation and the technical revolution in agriculture (‘collectivisation’) in a backward country under conditions of siege transforms the bureaucracy from a layer which is under the direct and indirect pressure and control of the proletariat, into a ruling class, into a manager of ‘the general business of society: the direction of labour, affairs of state, justice, science, art and so forth’.

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Few would disagree that something significant did happen in these years, and I remain impressed by the way Chattopadhyay economically sets out the basic contours of some of the key changes in his own book. But his own approach makes it difficult for him to see that what is at stake here is more than a toughening of the terms of labour. It was the final change in the nature of the state machine, the consolidation of the bureaucracy into a class, the imposition of a clear and unambiguous accumulation drive in which workers and peasants were both politically and economically subordinated to the new régime and lost even the most minimal control over their fate. But Stalin did recognise this, which is why he sought to draw a line in blood between his régime and that which went, for all its inadequacies, before. In these terms, he could not have rendered a better service to the survival of capitalism not only in Russia but the world over. Chattopadhyay evokes the spectre of Marx

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33 Davies 1998, p. 25.
having the last laugh. I fear that he is mistaken. Much as I appreciate many of the points he makes in his book and elsewhere, I fear that the differences between us are serious and that, in his anxiety to expunge the spectre of the Soviet experience as a whole, he risks ensuring that it is Stalin who will have the last laugh and we will all be the poorer for it.

References


I know what you want. You want a story that won’t surprise you. That will confirm what you already know. That won’t make you see higher or further or differently. You want a flat story. An immobile story.

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi: A Novel*

‘In Brecht what is fatal is always the failure to learn’, notes Fredric Jameson.¹ The revolution hinges, for Brecht, on the capacity of the oppressed to undertake a unique kind of self-learning. At his best, this preoccupation makes Brecht a superb dialectician. After all, for both Marx and Hegel, dialectics pertains not to the study of objects and events ‘out there’, in the independently existing objective world, but also to self-understanding, to the ways in which we, as human agents, are already out there (and the ‘out there’ in us), the ways in which knowledge of self and world coincide. Dialectics accomplishes this by grasping human activity as the moment of intersection and interpenetration of subject and object. This is why world-changing and self-changing are moments of a single process. Revolutionary transformation of society simultaneously entails tremendous processes

¹ Jameson 1998, p. 91.
of individual and collective learning in which masses of oppressed people rid themselves ‘of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew’. At the heart of dialectics, therefore, is the dynamic relationship between subjects and objects, self-transformation and world-changing. To theorise this requires forms of thought that break down rigid dualisms, destabilise static, classificatory approaches, and grasp the dynamic movement that is experience. Yet, this dialectical approach has been repeatedly lost within the history of Marxism: one need only think of the efforts of Gramsci, Lukács and Korsch, during the revolutionary wave of 1917–23, to reaffirm dialectics in the face of vulgar materialism.

Undialectical ‘Marxism’ freezes historical materialism into a set of static axioms about the world ‘out there’, axioms that are resistant to the living pulse of real struggles. Rather than a dialectics immersed in concrete historical activity, schematic thought prefers transhistorical ‘laws’ that can be applied to any and all situations. Axiomatic ‘Marxism’ has often been the refuge of currents hostile to the open-endedness of materialist dialectics. When new problems of theory and practice – such as mass strikes and workers’ councils – are thrown up by historical events, the schematist refuses them, invoking formulae that recite past positions. Precisely where dialectical theory and practice perceive new challenges requiring the actual development of thought and practice, mechanistic materialism clings to ritualised (and reified) positions, foreclosing dialectical development. In the name of orthodoxy, a refusal to learn is worn as a badge of honour.

These theoretical trends have often been widespread within the radical Left as well, contributing to enduring problems of dogmatism. Indeed, so pervasive are the dominant forms of bourgeois thought that, only a few years after Marx’s death, Engels publicly confronted the axiomatic thinking that many brought to their readings of Marx. Readers, he urged, should not expect fixed, cut-to-measure, once and for all applicable definitions in Marx’s works. It is self-evident that where things and their interrelations are conceived, not as fixed, but as changing, their mental images, the ideas, are likewise subject to change and transformation, and they are not encapsulated in rigid definitions.

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2 Marx and Engels 1976, p. 60.
3 Classic examples are the opposition of mainstream social democracy to Rosa Luxemburg’s enthusiastic reception of the Russian mass strikes of 1905, or social-democratic support of parliament against workers’ councils in Russia and Germany.
4 As quoted by Ollman 1971, p. 4.
In this respect, Marx’s thinking observes Hegel’s insistence that ‘truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made’. Instead, truth resides in the dialectical movement of thought and experience. While dogmatism holds ‘that the True consists in a proposition which is a fixed result’, dialectics seeks to free ‘determinate thoughts from their fixity’, so as to trace the movements of thought and experience. For this reason, dialectics cannot be captured in simple formulae (or preposterous ‘laws’ of dialectics).

As every serious reader of Marx’s *Capital* knows, no category – commodity, value, capital, and so on – can be grasped definitionally. The attentive reader must try to enter into the very movement of Marx’s thought, following the exhaustion of categories that are supplanted by higher ones, attending closely to the dialectical transitions that complicate the story and revise earlier formulations. With respect to the most crucial category – value – this means understanding the ways in which ‘it is constantly changing from one form into the other, without becoming lost in this movement’; indeed, it means grasping it as this movement.

Reading Hegel in response to the capitulation of vulgar ‘Marxism’ to war and imperialism, Lenin remarked on just this point. Thought, he insisted, ‘must be understood not “lifelessly”, not “abstractly”, not devoid of movement, not without contradictions, but in the eternal process of movement’. The watchdogs of orthodoxy, however, are forever resistant to this meaning of dialectics. They prefer, to quote Hegel again, modes of thought drawn to ‘labelling’ and ‘pigeon-holing everything’ so that ‘the living essence of the matter has been stripped away or boxed up dead’.

So it is with Chik Collins and his review of my book, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor and Liberation*. Rather than trace for the reader the movement of thought across my text, Collins simply adopts an uncomprehending position while dishing out officious stamps of approval and disapproval: this is good, that bad. Searching for a ‘minted coin’ bearing the imprint he seeks, Collins is unable to offer even a remotely fair reading of my work. In a demonstration of just how far we are from dialectics, he tells the reader that, in 1995, I wrote an article on language that he liked: ‘It

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6 Marx 1976, p. 255.
7 Lenin 1972, p. 195.
8 Hegel 1977, p. 31.
was a good article’.9 Then came my 2001 book, and it was not good; rather, it was ‘a step backwards’.10 These sorts of judgements remind one of Marx’s pithy observations on Proudhon. ‘M. Proudhon’, wrote Marx, ‘has nothing of Hegel’s dialectics but the language. For him the dialectic movement is the dogmatic distinction between good and bad’.11

Rather than organise this response around Collins’s many confusions, I intend, instead, to reconstruct for the interested reader what Bodies of Meaning is actually about. In so doing, I will pause from time to time to observe just how wrong-headed are various judgements of the book offered by Collins. But my main interest is in outlining how a dialectical approach to issues of language and praxis can be of service to Marxism today.

Dialectics and immanent criticism
A central strategy of dialectics involves the development of theory by way of immanent criticism. Rather than erecting its own set of first principles in opposition to those of other theorists, dialectical criticism traces the self-movement of an object of investigation – be it the commodity, or a system of thought. It thus begins with what is, rather than what the theorist thinks ought to be; it sets out from the actual state of the social world (and its theoretical expressions), rather than from subjective preferences.12 In Hegel’s formulation, philosophy ‘is its own time apprehended in thoughts’.13 Marx expresses the same point, albeit with a revolutionary impulse foreign to Hegel, in his claim that rather than ‘confront the world with new doctrinaire principles . . . we shall develop for the world new principles from the existing principles of the world’.14 Marx’s commitment is not to first philosophy, to the elaboration of a formal set of first principles about being and knowledge, but to the ruthless dialectical criticism of that which is.

This commitment to immanent criticism, which informs Marx’s readings of Hegel, the Young Hegelians, Proudhon and the classical political economists,
has been noted by many commentators. Proceeding immanently, rather than from dogmatic presuppositions, the dialectical critic traces the moves through which a body of thought betrays its own premises and evades issues that are crucial to its own intelligibility. Classical political economy, Marx famously noted, pursues the problem of value, but stops short at the value-form; it never asks ‘the question why’ value assumes its ‘particular form’. For this reason, it is incapable of accounting for its own methods of inquiry and its objects of investigation. Consequently, it naturalises value relations, fetishises the commodity-form, dehistoricises capitalist society, and relinquishes its critical charge. Marx does not apply these criticisms externally, however. Rather, by tracing the multiple forms of the category ‘value’, he is able to show internally those places where the very categories of classical political economy implicitly turn against themselves. This procedure of immanent criticism enables him to conclude Volume One of *Capital* by explicating the socio-historical conditions that make bourgeois political economy possible: by way of a stunning exploration of the very history of primitive accumulation of capital that classical political economy refuses to acknowledge.

It follows that the problem of the value-form is, in Adorno’s terms, an ‘excrescence’ of political economy, something it banishes so as to preserve its liberal bourgeois commitments. Yet, as Adorno rightly observed, it is these very excrescences, the problems internal to a theoretical system that it systematically evades, which ‘show the untruth, the mania, of the systems themselves’. This is why Marx devotes such effort to unravelling the value-form – for here, in a problem excluded by political economy, lies the secret to overcoming it.

Apparently oblivious to all of this, Collins faults *Bodies of Meaning* for its procedures of immanent critique. Because the book begins in an internal criticism of postmodernism, Collins concludes that this allows postmodernism ‘to determine the starting point’. This is about as illuminating as faulting Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* for letting Hegel determine the point of departure, or as attacking V.N. Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy*
of Language for the way central parts of the text are organised around an
immanent critique of abstract objectivism and individualist subjectivism (the
then-reigning perspectives in linguistics).

What, then, is accomplished by the internal critique of postmodernism I
develop in *Bodies of Meaning*? Working through a close reading of key texts
of Nietzsche, Saussure and Derrida in particular, I argue that postmodernism
cannot account for the existence of the very system it elevates to a pre-eminent
position: language. This is so because it systematically avoids the embodied
practices through which language is constituted. As a result, it offers up an
abstracted and fetishised language system divorced from the social-material
activities of language-making and language-using beings. In separating the
ostensibly ‘ideal’ – in this case, the language system – from the material
practices constitutive of it, postmodernism, I claim, rejoins the dominant
traditions of Western philosophy and their subordination of body to mind,
nature to culture, manual labour to intellectual labour. Reading across a range
of texts, I map out the many ways in which postmodernism recoils from its
‘unspeakable threat – the body of nature’, as Vicki Kirby puts it.19 Postmodern
theory, I argue, phobically resists the admission of material bodies, bodies
embedded in nature and history, into the analysis, since to do so would
undermine the sovereign pretensions of language by revealing the ‘others’ –
in this case a manifold of embodied human practices – on which it depends.
In this way, as many readers will have intimated, immanent critique opens
up a dialectical deconstruction of deconstructionism. Then, having exposed
the ways in which postmodernism remobilises ancient dualisms, I use this
critique to set up an alternative account of language as a socio-material
phenomenon.

**Dialectics of nature and history**

As some readers may already have sensed (though, alas, this point eludes
Collins), Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism figures centrally in *Bodies of
Meaning*. In a nutshell, commodity fetishism involves social practices that
abstract the values of commodities from the concrete, embodied activities
(‘concrete labours’) of the human agents who produced them. The result is
a process of real abstraction through which concrete activity becomes

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19 Kirby 1997, p. 120.
subordinated to its abstracted (and alienated) forms of appearance. In the commodified world of capitalism, the system of commodity exchange revolves around the most abstracted form of value – money – while ‘forgetting’ its roots in concrete human labour. As a result, labourers are confronted by a world of commodities which, while of their own making, nonetheless stands over them and dominates them. The great flaw of bourgeois political economy for Marx is its inability to grasp that systematic production and exchange of commodities – and the attendant structures of commodity fetishism – result from historically specific social relations. Liberal economics thus reifies the commodity-form by positing alienated labour and commodity fetishism as natural states of affairs. An analogous sort of fetishisation is at work, I argue, in the ‘economy of language’ characteristic of postmodernism.

One can see this quite clearly in the writings of the linguist with whom all poststructuralist accounts of language begin: Ferdinand de Saussure. As I explain in *Bodies of Meaning*,

Saussure argues that linguistics studies the formal properties of a (static, unchanging) language system, rather than the ever-changing characteristics of language as manifested in speech. Indeed, linguistics arrives at its object of study – the language system – only through a systematic abstraction from its dynamic, living elements: human bodies, concrete individuals and actual speech utterances. . . . Language is [for Saussure] speech dematerialized and dehistoricized, speech stripped of its entanglements in the bodies and lives of real historical actors. Or, put in Saussure’s stark terms, ‘language is speech less speaking’; it is ‘a form and not a substance’.20

In fairly painstaking detail, I document the ways in which this analysis commits Saussure to a reified account of language and how this very reification has been exacerbated in Derrida’s deconstructive philosophy of language. Moreover, I use the immanent critique of Saussure and Derrida to develop a theory of *historical bodies* as a dialectical supersession of the antinomy of nature and history that haunts postmodernism.

In this regard, *Bodies of Meaning* makes a fairly novel move, entering the terrain of evolutionary biology and anthropology – spheres that are anathema to postmodernism – in order to trace the emergence of human language as an integral aspect of a complex of mediated social activities customarily

20 McNally 2001a, p. 47.
designated as *praxis*. I argue that language should be seen not as a discrete intellectual activity but ‘in terms of the primacy of practical activity, of doing in human evolution’.

In this context, I outline how language is bound up with tool-making, heterotechnic co-operation in practical tasks, the dissemination of social knowledge, and the mimetic capacity to map complex relations between self and others. I argue for a view of language as an inherent part of social practices involving *historical bodies*, bodies which, while carriers of unique evolutionary traits, are also ‘the site of dynamic social processes’ and ‘open-ended systems of meaning’.

This analysis, I submit, enables us to overcome the dualistic accounts of nature and history that have dominated Western philosophy, including its postmodern expressions, and which have often played havoc with a variety of Marxisms. By focusing on the way in which human evolution favoured the expansion of food sharing, tool making, memory, foresight, communication, transmission of social knowledge and so on, I depict the human body as the site of *historical powers*. While this fundamental insight is clearly there in Marx – witness his repeated references to the human being as ‘a corporeal, living, real sensuous, objective being with natural powers’ – *Bodies of Meaning* adds something new by relating this insight to the evidence of modern evolutionary biology and anthropology and by showing the ways in which this evidence radically destabilises postmodernist accounts of language. Moreover, the excursion I take through the foreign territory of evolutionary theory adds heft to the claim that ‘body and meaning interpenetrate in dialectical movements through which each makes the other’.

Whatever its deficiencies, then, *Bodies of Meaning* offers a way of thinking about bodies and meanings that powerfully undermines postmodernist approaches. On the one hand, it allows us to see meanings as always socially and materially embodied – rather than as abstracted language systems outside the parameters of human practical activity. On the other hand, it enables us to grasp human bodies as necessarily immersed in (and producing) systems of meaning, rather than as brute things outside history and culture.

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21 McNally 2001a, p. 97.
22 McNally 2001a, p. 7.
24 McNally 2001a, p. 9.
Dialectics and dualism: Voloshinov’s theory of the sign

And here, it seems, we get to the rub of the substantive differences between Collins and myself. For a crucial part of Chapter 4 of Bodies of Meaning involves a sympathetic critique of the theory of the sign developed by Valentin Voloshinov in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language. Not that Collins assumes any responsibility for actually engaging with my views in this area. Instead, he resorts to a series of subjective complaints, claiming that I am ‘rather unsympathetic’ to and ‘perhaps quite impatient’ with Voloshinov, indeed that I ‘drop’ him in favour of another, Walter Benjamin.25

Curiously, Voloshinov and his major book are not treated quite so shabbily in Bodies of Meaning as Collins suggests. In fact, I describe Marxism and the Philosophy of Language as ‘an often brilliant, original and open-ended work’, as ‘a vital point of reference for all radical and revolutionary discussions of language’ and I suggest that its theory of word and utterance are ‘invaluable’.26 At the same time, and here Collins and I clearly part ways, I claim of Voloshinov’s great work that ‘like any utterance, it, too, is meant to be interrogated, explored, amended and built upon’.27 Rather than dropping Voloshinov, Bodies of Meaning proposes a dialectical overcoming [Aufhebung] of various one-sided aspects of the Voloshinovian theory of the sign – an overcoming that preserves its highest achievements. More than this, I urge that this overcoming be an immanent one, one that mobilises Voloshinov’s most powerful lines of argument against the one-sided moments within his own theory. I quote my own argument:

Marxism and the Philosophy of Language generally explores theoretical dualisms in order to transcend them. It pursues one side of a contrastive pair (like langue/parole) to the point at which it breaks down and requires the presence of the other . . .

Encountering philosophical dualisms like material/ideal, and individual/social, Voloshinov similarly strives to overcome them . . . Yet at a number of crucial points, Voloshinov himself falls back upon undialectical antinomies rather than dissolving them through criticism. This is particularly the case where he counterposes nature to history, and the body to consciousness.28

26 McNally 2001a, pp. 112, 118, 231.
27 McNally 2001a, p. 118.
28 McNally 2001a, pp. 118–19.
Now, if I am wrong about this, one would expect Collins to offer something resembling an argument. Instead, he brusquely announces that Voloshinov, according to McNally, ‘does not quite “cut it” on the body’. So disingenuous is this claim, so lacking in the protocols of responsible debate, that one could be forgiven for thinking that Collins has opted for obfuscation. After all, as *Bodies of Meaning* outlines, there are important and substantive issues at stake.

The heart of the matter has to do with the mechanical contrast between signs and things that Voloshinov employs. In the opening pages of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* he tells us, for instance, that a tool is a brute thing, lacking meaning or signification: ‘A tool by itself is devoid of any special meaning; it commands only some designated function – to serve this or that purpose in production’. Even at face value, this is an extraordinary claim. How is it possible to imagine a tool – a product of social labour and knowledge – as devoid of meaning? What does it mean for a thing to have ‘a purpose in production’ without having meaning? As I argue in *Bodies of Meaning*, what makes a hammer a tool (as opposed to a mere object of nature) ‘is its entanglement in a network of human meanings, of shared knowledge and cultural practices that make it recognisable as a tool with specific practical functions’. Yet, Voloshinov fails to see this interpenetration of thing and meaning in the human social world. Rather than a world which is simultaneously natural and social, Voloshinov offers up a dualistic account in which there are two coexisting worlds, one natural (the world of things and production), the other meaningful (the world of signs). Against his best impulses, Voloshinov thus reverts to a naturalistic account of things and of human social production. And this is no odd lapse in his analysis. In a later passage on the same page, he informs us: ‘side by side with the natural phenomena, with the equipment of technology, and with articles for consumption, there exists a special world – the world of signs’.

Having set up the opposition between ‘natural’ objects and signs, Voloshinov then introduces a wider antinomy between nature and human consciousness. ‘Consciousness’, he writes, ‘cannot be derived directly from nature’. Again, this is to proceed dualistically, rather than dialectically. To be sure, the emergence

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30 Voloshinov 1986, p. 10.
31 McNally 2001a, p. 122.
32 Voloshinov 1986, p. 10.
of human consciousness introduces a whole range of phenomena – not the least of them history itself – which cannot be accounted for according to laws of nature (the fundamental error of all forms of mechanical materialism). But it does not follow from this (correct) anti-reductionist observation that consciousness inhabits a sphere of radical alterity vis-à-vis the natural world. Instead, consciousness is a product of nature with the capacity to transform both nature and itself. This makes it both natural and extra-natural. What Marx says of history is equally true of consciousness: ‘History itself is a real part of natural history and of nature’s becoming man’.34 Yet, the historical dimension adds something qualitatively new. It follows that a member of humankind ‘is not only a natural being; he is a human natural being’.35

Not only a natural being: this is the key to any meaningful materialist dialectics. Homo sapiens sapiens is simultaneously human (historical) and natural. Yet, again, Voloshinov refuses this solution. Instead, he persists in his dualisms. In a particularly remarkable passage in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, for instance, he recommends avoiding the term ‘psychology’ entirely as it takes us into the murky world of biology and physical experience:

we should prefer to avoid the word ‘psychology’ since we are concerned exclusively with the content of the psyche and the consciousness. That content is ideological through and through, determined not by individual, organismic (biological or physiological) factors, but by factors of a purely sociological character.36

As I explain in Bodies of Meaning, Voloshinov’s remarkably crude attack on Freudianism pivots on just this rigid distinction between the psychological and the sociological. Indeed, he goes so far in his book on Freud as to claim that psychic conflicts in the lives of individuals do not derive from ‘biological’ problems such as ‘birth, copulation and death’, but, rather, from ‘ideological’ conflicts,37 as if issues related to birth, sexuality and death are simply natural, lacking in meaning (or, in Voloshinov’s terms, pre-ideological). Yet, even a few moments of reflection should make clear the problems with this position: human birth, sexuality and death are all bathed in meaning; they occur under specific social conditions and have social meanings beyond what they share

36 Voloshinov 1986, p. 91.
37 Voloshinov 1987, p. 88; for my commentary see McNally 2001a, pp. 120–1.
with other species. In short, there are no purely natural events in the lives of humans, just as there are no purely social-ideological ones.

For all these reasons, I argue that: ‘This counter-position of biology and history rehearse a dualism that has plagued western philosophy’. At the same time, I suggest that ‘Voloshinov is rightly worried about the predominance of “predialectical materialism” in much Marxist thought’. I insist, however, that the solution to the reduction of consciousness and ideology to laws of nature is not a dualist one. Drawing ‘rigid boundaries’ between the natural and historical in order to avoid confusing the one with the other simply maintains the very undialectical entities that idealists and vulgar materialists then try to relate to each other. Lukács makes an error of this sort in History and Class Consciousness where, in a powerful attack on mechanical materialism, he goes so far as to absorb nature into society (rather than treat them as a differentiated unity). As I point out in Bodies of Meaning, ‘what Gramsci wrote in criticism of Lukács, applies with equal force to Voloshinov’:

> It would appear that Lukács maintains that one can speak of the dialectic only for the history of men and not for nature. . . . If his assertion presupposes a dualism between nature and man he is wrong because he is falling into a conception of nature proper to religion and to Graeco-Christian philosophy and also to idealism which does not succeed in unifying and relating man and nature to each other except verbally.

And this is precisely the error Voloshinov makes too. Remarkably, Collins’s response to this detailed argument is the claim that McNally impatiently criticises Voloshinov because ‘he does not quite “cut it” on the body’. He thus breezily short-circuits any serious engagement with my criticisms. Bodies of Meaning proposes that one way to redialecticise Voloshinov’s theory of the sign is to rework it in relation to Mikhail Bakhtin’s insights on the embodied character of language. Given the great intellectual affinities between Voloshinov and Bakhtin, I suggest that the latter’s richer conception of human embodiment ought to be employed as a way of rectifying Voloshinov’s

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38 McNally 2001a, p. 121.
40 McNally 2001a, pp. 121–2.
41 Gramsci 1971, p. 448; cited by McNally 2001a, p. 122. It is interesting that Lukács subsequently clarified his position in exactly the direction I am proposing (see Lukács 2000, pp. 102–7).
42 Collins 2003, p. 228.
shortcomings in this area. Since the body is at the boundary of nature and consciousness, an adequately dialectical account of it dissolves dualism. But, since Collins would seem to believe that there are no such problems in Voloshinov, he can dismiss my analysis of Bakhtin as a peculiar and impatient dissatisfaction with his hero: ‘dissatisfied with Voloshinov’s treatment of the body, [McNally] simply moves on to Bakhtin’.\textsuperscript{43} This, of course, is a convenient fiction. But, for Collins, it seems to offer a distinct advantage. Having failed to answer my arguments, he proceeds to misrepresent them with great panache. This is especially so when he turns to the book’s final chapter.

\textbf{Revolution in the age of commodification: from Bakhtin to Benjamin}

The closing chapter of \textit{Bodies of Meaning} turns to a sustained engagement with the theories of language and bourgeois culture advanced by the German Marxist Walter Benjamin. This alone seems to offend Collins. Having encountered the presence of Benjamin in my text, he proceeds to attribute to me one increasingly unlikely position after another without worrying himself about such matters as evidence or responsible argument.\textsuperscript{44} Once Benjamin enters the conversation, he informs the reader, ‘the contradictions and conflicts of capitalism’ drop ‘out of the equation’, and ‘we are left with a pretty sure sense’ that emancipatory possibilities ‘will \textit{never} be realised’.\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, he intones, the whole Benjaminian operation seems based upon the idea of developing emancipatory practices ‘among marginal groups and coteries – politicised artists in all probability’.\textsuperscript{46} And so on.

One could do an interesting symptomatic reading of the rhetorical forms employed in these curious passages: ‘we are left with a \textit{pretty sure sense}’ that emancipation is not possible; the theory turns to ‘political artists \textit{in all probability}’; and the like. Rather than engage with actual arguments, Collins simply writes himself one blank cheque after another. Instead of probing the

\textsuperscript{43} Collins 2003, p. 236.

\textsuperscript{44} While I shall deal with a number of these here, I have omitted any discussion of the ludicrous claim that ‘something’ in my argument ‘closely parallels’ the position of Jürgen Habermas (Collins 2003, p. 234). The interested reader will find my critique of Habermas outlined in McNally 2001a, pp. 108–9, 225–6.

\textsuperscript{45} Collins 2003, pp. 234, 235.

\textsuperscript{46} Collins 2003, p. 235.
symptomatology of these passages, however, I prefer to return to *Bodies of Meaning* and what it actually argues.

Suggesting that Bakhtin is important to any serious Marxist account of language (in part for how he overcomes a central problem in Voloshinov), *Bodies of Meaning* pursues a close reading of those Bakhtin texts – many of them from the 1930s – that are particularly fertile for historical-materialist approaches to language and culture. At the same time, I raise a crucial problem related to the Bakhtinian notion of popular culture.

After all, Bakhtin extends Voloshinov’s notion of the multi-accentuality of the sign – mediated by a rich notion of speech genres – into an account of contending cultural traditions, the official and the popular. Official culture is dreary, boring, hierarchical and repressed, but it is regularly contested by a parodic, festive, bawdy, celebratory – indeed, carnivalesque – culture of the people. There is much value in what Bakhtin accomplishes here, but there is also a serious shortcoming: his identification of a carnivalesque culture of opposition with the space of the early-modern marketplace.\(^4^7\) This is not to deny that festive popular practices emerged within these spaces. What *Bodies of Meaning* claims, however, is that capitalism worked both to liquidate and appropriate the carnivalesque – to mobilise its forms, images, speech patterns and utopian longings, drained of oppositional practices, on behalf of commodities. Once capitalism begins to commodify the carnivalesque, I argue, then the location and mobilisation of genuinely oppositional energies and practices becomes a much more complex task than it appears in Bakhtin’s texts.\(^4^8\)

Left at this level, however, my criticism of Bakhtin might be read as a claim that cultures of opposition disappear in a world of totalising commodification. Part of Benjamin’s importance, I argue, is the way he acknowledges the tremendous powers and flexibilities of commodification, while insisting that it also subverts and undermines itself, regularly reopening cracks through which utopian, carnivalesque, indeed revolutionary, energies might escape.\(^4^9\)

While *Bodies of Meaning* advances a series of original arguments in this area – particularly in terms of Benjamin’s Marxist reworking of certain

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\(^4^7\) This is not the only flaw in Bakhtin’s account (see McNally 2001a, pp. 149–55), but it is a central one.

\(^4^8\) McNally 2001a, pp. 156–9.

\(^4^9\) Benjamin’s significance has to do with more than this, however. He is also the architect of a unique materialist account for language built around the concept of mimesis (see McNally 2001a, pp. 219–26).
psychoanalytic themes – the recognition that Benjamin’s critique of bourgeois culture continually pries open the space of hope within a wasteland of commodification is not new. A number of commentators, not least Susan Buck-Morss in, arguably, the most profound reading of Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, have made similar claims on behalf of his writings in this area. Benjamin’s theory ‘is unique in approach to modern society’, writes Buck-Morss, ‘because it takes mass culture seriously not merely as the phantasmagoria of false consciousness, but as the source of collective energy to overcome it’.50 In contrast to one-sidedly pessimistic theories of a totalising culture industry, Benjamin insists on the lack of closure within mass culture. A dialectical marriage of heaven (utopia) and hell (capitalism), mass culture constantly awakens hope and disappoints it. As a result, it mobilises powerful desires for radical change that it cannot satisfy. And there, in the space of continual disappointment, lurk energies upon which revolutionary politics can draw.

For Benjamin, authentic revolutionary politics involves the struggle to displace mass identifications (nurtured in the sphere of exchange) in favour of class identity (of workers as producers).51 Where fascism represents the mobilisation of mass identity, revolutionary socialism counters with class consciousness:

A theater audience, an army, the population of a city comprise masses which in themselves belong to no particular class. The free market multiplies these masses rapidly and on a colossal scale. . . . The totalitarian states have taken this mass as their model. The *Volksgemeinschaft* [People’s Community] aims to root out from single individuals everything that stands in the way of their wholesale fusion into a mass of consumers. The one implacable adversary still confronting the state, which in this ravenous action becomes the agent of monopoly capital, is the revolutionary proletariat. This latter dispels the illusion of the mass with the reality of class.52

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50 Buck-Morss 1991, p. 253. It escapes me how Collins can issue his sweeping pronouncements about his ‘pretty sure sense’ that, on Benjamin’s account, emancipation ‘will never be realised’ without so much as a passing engagement with any of the major Marxist work in the area.

51 Indeed, Benjamin’s criticisms of the Popular Front have to do with the way it obscured class identity (see McNally 2001a, pp. 216–17).

52 Benjamin 1999, p. 371.
This is why the collective awakening from the dreamworld of bourgeois modernity is, as Buck-Morss again notes, ‘synonymous with revolutionary class consciousness’. Predictably, Collins sees and understands nothing of this. So what if Benjamin declares the revolutionary proletariat the ‘one implacable enemy’ of fascism and mass identities? So what if, in a fundamental challenge to the left intellectuals and artists of his times, he pronounced that ‘the revolutionary struggle is not between capitalism and spirit, but between capitalism and the proletariat’? So what if Benjamin boldly insisted that ‘not man or men but the struggling oppressed class is the depository of historical knowledge’? After all, Collins has his own world of interpretation, requiring not a single argument, according to which Benjamin looked to ‘politicised artists in all probability’ (my emphasis).

There is, however, nothing in the least bit probable about this. The best Marxist writing in the area has insisted on Benjamin’s conviction that socialism was only imaginable on the basis of a proletarian revolution. Curiously, in his facile dismissal of this, Collins here joins hands with the very postmodernists who, as I argue in Bodies of Meaning, have constructed ‘a de-clawed Benjamin for the academy’ through efforts ‘to de-radicalise his texts by separating his Marxist politics from his cultural criticism’.

One of Benjamin’s abiding concerns, as Bodies of Meaning argues, is with the construction of a tradition of the oppressed. A commonplace of much far-left theory is that a revolutionary party represents ‘the memory’ of the working class. Benjamin subscribed to an important part of that claim. Yet, he insisted that revolutionary collective memory was not an intact entity – a minted coin – which could simply be pocketed by workers for transformative purposes. Revolutionary memory, Benjamin insisted, lives only through the practice of a unique kind of remembering. As Terry Eagleton puts it, the tradition of the oppressed for Benjamin ‘is the practice of ceaselessly excavating, safeguarding, violating, discarding and reinscribing the past’. Outside that practice, it risks...
reverting to myth, becoming an object for consumption rather than a never-ending activity. And this returns us again to dialectics.

**Dialectics against reification**

*Bodies of Meaning* presents a series of linked studies, which address problems of language, labour and liberation from discrete, but intersecting, angles. My book makes no claim to offer the final word on these matters. Indeed, the philosophy of language it expounds is hostile to such notions of theoretical and political closure. Instead, it emphasises the open-ended, non-dogmatic character of genuinely revolutionary theory, insisting that the ‘dialectical movement cannot be called to a halt or registered in a set of axioms’.\(^59\) I hope – and expect – that others will go beyond it. The book will have served its purpose if it provides some fruitful avenues for doing so, for further developing historical-materialist work on these issues.

Collins, however, does not help us in this regard. His, regrettably, is a thoroughly non-dialectical effort. While he professes Marxism, he forgets Lukács’ warning that every victory, theoretical as well as practical, runs the risk of ‘atrophy into a new form of reification’, and his reminder that ‘theoretical dogmatism is only a special case of those tendencies’.\(^60\) The self-satisfied nature of his thinking, its refusal to do the serious work of engaging with others, is symptomatic of forms of reification that are at odds with the critical traditions of revolutionary Marxism.

During the last decade of his life, for instance, troubled by new problems of theory and practice with respect to prospects for revolutionary change in Russia, Marx taught himself to read Russian, amassed a small library of books on Russian social and economic history, and wrote 30,000 pages of notes on this and other topics. Convinced that this spirit of unceasing intellectual inquiry and self-criticism has become foreign to much of contemporary Marxism, Teodor Shanin remarks:

> In the period directly following the publication of volume 1 of Capital Marx faced critical comments and an increasing influx of ‘stubborn data’ which did not fully fit, and had to be digested. He was rethinking intensively, once more, his theoretical constructs, and moving into new fields.... To give his

\(^59\) McNally 2001a, p. 56.

\(^60\) Lukács 1971, pp. 334, 335.
due to the greatest revolutionary scholar, we should see him as he was as
against the caricatures and icons drawn by his enemies and his worshippers.
To know him is to see him change and to see in what sense he did not. To
be ‘on his side’ is to strive to inherit the best in him – his grasp of new
worlds coming into being, his critical and self-critical faculty, the merciless
honesty of his intellectual craftsmanship, his tenacity and his moral passion.61

These are qualities we desperately need if the Marxist Left is to rebuild as
new opportunities emerge after a difficult period of reversals. As Brecht
reminds us, intensive learning, a learning to think against ourselves, is a vital
part of the revolutionary project.62 Dogmatism and anti-dialogical criticism
do us no services in this regard. If another world is to be possible, it will
require renewing and extending the most genuinely critical traditions of
Marxist theory and practice.

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61 Shanin 1984, p. 333.


And not only did he learn by experience, but instincts long dead became alive again. The domesticated generations fell from him. In vague ways he remembered back to the youth of the breed, to the time the wild dogs ranged in packs through the primeval forest and killed their meat as they ran it down. It was no task for him to learn to fight with cut and slash and the quick wolf snap. In this manner had fought forgotten ancestors. They quickened the old life within him, and the old tricks which they had stamped into the heredity of the breed were his tricks. They came to him without effort or discovery, as though they had been his always. And when, on the still cold nights, he pointed his nose at a star and howled long and wolflike, it was his ancestors, dead and dust, pointing nose at star and howling down through the centuries and through him. And his cadences were their cadences, the cadences which voiced their woe and what to them was the meaning of the stillness, and the cold, and the dark.

Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*
Introduction

On what basis should Marxists seek to grapple with questions of language? While some have seen this to be a crucial question for a number of decades, it undoubtedly gained heightened significance with the challenge posed by postmodernism through the 1980s and 1990s. Hitherto, the predominant tendency has been to look to the works of the Bakhtin Circle, and especially Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, as providing the basis on which to develop a response – and to explore how to link this usefully to the work of other Marxists. Much less has been done by way of serious attempts to use Voloshinov’s work to analyse real struggles and processes of social development. One might think that the priority at this stage would be to continue this line of work, and perhaps especially to make much more use of the ideas in serious empirical work.

David McNally, in *Bodies of Meaning*, offers a radically different proposal. He suggests that Marxists have tended to misunderstand the true nature of the challenge posed by the postmodernists. Instead of counterposing our alternative basis for dealing with language to that of the postmodernists, we should really have been engaging in an immanent critique of their theoretical fashion, in order to identify, and then build our knowledge out of, its ‘excrescences’. Proceeding in this way, McNally argues, we will come to realise that what has hitherto been our preferred alternative is itself lacking in a very significant respect. For, the ‘excrescences’ that ‘escape the imperial ambitions of linguistic idealism’ are bodies, and when we begin to build our knowledge from these, we generate a new criterion against which Voloshinov is found to be significantly lacking. Henceforth, ‘the question of language’ will be seen to be ‘a question of the body’, and, on this basis, the truly dialectical alternative to postmodernism will be seen to lie in McNally’s own reading of Walter Benjamin.

This would be a pretty significant departure in terms of the question with which we began. And it is one that McNally himself has been prepared to make. For, in some of his earlier work, he was himself explicitly reluctant to launch another critique of postmodernism, and sought instead to apply and...

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1 Thanks to John Foster, Peter Jones, John Roberts, Alex Law, Darryl Gunson and David Collins. None of the above are, of course, responsible for what follows but I have tried to take account of some of their very welcome critical comments.

2 Especially Gramsci, but also – and probably no less importantly – the work of Vygotsky and some of his collaborators and followers (see Collins 2000).
build upon the work of Voloshinov by linking it to Gramsci, and by engaging it with the experience of real struggles. But, is the case he makes for this new departure likely to convince the rest of us? In my review of *Bodies*, I suggested that it was not. Ultimately, I suggested, McNally had granted too much to postmodernism even in presuming that it had enough of a ‘rational kernel’ to make it worth extracting and building upon. For, in attempting to do the latter, McNally seemed only to separate language from the real conflicts and struggles of capitalist societies, to mislocate the emancipatory potentials of such societies, and to all but crush those that he did locate.

This provides the context for McNally’s reply. While I had anticipated a robust response, I had hoped that the exchange might prove a productive one. What I did not anticipate was that McNally would reply with such invective. Even less had I anticipated that it would be directed not just against myself, but also against the editors of this journal, who are implicitly charged with uncritically accepting an essay that is not infrequently incompetent, at times rather dishonest, and which generally fails to conform to – indeed explicitly violates – ‘the protocols of responsible debate’. This is a serious charge. But it is also unfounded, and it tends to rebound on its maker. As we will see, this tendency to rebound is a characteristic of McNally’s charges more generally. Unfortunately, it will be necessary to spend a little time in demonstrating this. For, to be able to identify and respond to the substantive points McNally does raise, one has first to try to draw the attention of the reader to at least some of the rather misleading devices with which he seeks to ‘recruit’ (rather than persuade) the reader. But, as the argument proceeds, we will find that, behind the apparently combative front McNally presents, there lurks a rather more timid response – one that is reluctant to address key questions squarely, and which, ultimately, neglects to come to the defence of the ‘central thesis’ of *Bodies* (or indeed even to mention it in his reply). I will suggest that all of this tends to increase the scepticism we should feel towards the departure McNally advocates.

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3 Collins 2003.
Misleading devices

But, first, we must attend to at least some of those misleading devices with which McNally seeks to recruit the reader to his side. The most important part of his reply in this regard is the opening section. Here, he seeks to claim for himself the mantle of Marxist dialectics. Perhaps sensing the implication that he has allowed himself to be a little seduced by the postmodernists, he now wheels out the big guns – in order of appearance, Brecht, Marx, Engels, Gramsci, Lukács, Korsch, Luxemburg, Lenin, and Hegel. McNally seeks to identify himself with the dialectical spirit that animated their thinking. He then proceeds to a rather general discussion of ‘how a dialectical approach to issues of language and praxis can be of use to Marxism today’. There is no mention of the central thesis of his book – nor of the specifics of my own critique.

There are two main points to be made in response to all of this. The first is about the nature of McNally’s exercise. The supposed rationale for the extended polemic on dialectics is McNally’s objection to my stating a preference for the direction of some of his earlier work over that taken in *Bodies*. He portrays this as a ‘dishing out’ on my part of ‘officious stamps of approval and disapproval: this is good, that bad’. It is a story of the insight and intelligence of dialectics versus the static, schematic and dogmatic stupidity of vulgar materialism. It is, in other words, a straight, if not officious, story of the good versus the bad – one in which McNally is to be unproblematically located on the side of the virtuous, and his adversary on the other side. Unless we imagine that McNally, who opens his reply on the theme of self-learning and self-understanding, is really unaware that this seems to exemplify that which he is ostensibly criticising, then we might have to conclude that there is something of a ‘double standard’ here.5

The second point is about the actual content of McNally’s exercise. McNally later claims that I resort to obfuscation regarding his treatment of Voloshinov. I will return to the specific charge below, but here I want to show how McNally’s whole reply is built on a grand obfuscation that emerges in this opening section of his reply. He seeks to achieve this through the power of identification, rather than through proper argument.6 For, when McNally

5 Indeed, were it not for the fact that McNally is so hostile to postmodernism, one might think that all of this reveals an attempt at some very postmodern irony.

6 This, like the ‘double standards’ identified above, is not itself in the closest conformity with McNally’s invocation of those ‘protocols of responsible debate’.
situates himself so squarely in the tradition of what is best in Marxism, then the less alert reader might tend automatically to identify with his cause. The language, perhaps symptomatically, is very stark. On the one side stand McNally and the other defenders of ‘a dialectics immersed in concrete historical activity’, breaking down rigid dualisms to ‘grasp the dynamic movement that is experience’. On the other side stand myself and the other dogmatic anti-dialecticians – ‘confused’, ‘wrong headed’, ‘self-satisfied’, ‘understanding nothing’, ‘resistant to the living pulse of real struggles’, and not just demonstrating a ‘refusal to learn’, but also wearing this refusal ‘as a badge of honour’.

Yet, to the more alert reader, all of this might, prima facie, seem at least a bit strange. For, I make it clear that I propose, in opposition to McNally, the development of a sociohistorical approach to language and social consciousness using Vygotsky, Luria, Leont’ev, Voloshinov and Bakhtin. None of these spring to mind as dogmatic proponents of anti-dialectical orthodoxy, and, in my own work, I make a virtue out of connecting their thinking to ‘the living pulse of real struggles’. How is it that this turns out to be so fundamentally removed from ‘a dialectics immersed in concrete historical activity’? One might hope for some kind of analysis to support the contention. But McNally does not offer that. He just declares that I fail to ‘trace for the reader the movement of thought across [his] text’, and that he will proceed, as we have seen, to outline ‘how a dialectical approach to issues of language and praxis can be of service to Marxism today’. And this is the grand obfuscation – that McNally is defending ‘a dialectical approach to issues of language and praxis’, and the project of ‘renewing and extending the most genuinely critical traditions of Marxist theory and practice’, from someone who is opposed to all of that. In reality, he is defending only his own attempt to do it from someone who wants to do the same thing – but who disagrees about how to do it. By suggesting otherwise, he obfuscates what is actually at issue in our exchange, and avoids the need to respond to the substantive criticisms raised against his work.

In this light, I would like to suggest that the reader consult afresh my review of Bodies. Clearly, this did not dish out officious stamps of approval and disapproval. Rather, it offered an argument that suggests McNally’s new

\[\text{See Collins 1999.}\]
departure turns out to be significantly less productive for the development of his critical materialism than had been his earlier approach. Nor, as we will see below, does it opt for obfuscation regarding his treatment of Voloshinov. But what is already clear is that McNally’s reply seems to exemplify the very failings he wrongly attributes to my review. One might even offer this as evidence of what comes to light when one does ‘trace for the reader the movement of thought’ across this text. It has been necessary to demonstrate at least some of this at the outset in order that in what remains we will be able more effectively to focus on the substantive content of McNally’s reply. But we will be reminded of it still as we proceed.

Postmodernism and immanent critique: the movement of McNally’s thought

The more substantive argument of McNally’s reply develops along the following lines. First and foremost, I have failed to grasp that if we are to renew and extend ‘the most genuinely critical traditions of Marxist theory and practice’, then we must begin from an engagement with postmodernism. This might be because McNally provides very little in the way of an argument to justify the contention. Having pointed this out in my review, one might have hoped for rather more of an argument in McNally’s reply. But he provides no more than a brief rhetorical flourish – which I shall come to below. He sidesteps the problem by again invoking the issue of dialectics. He claims that I fault Bodies for its method of immanent of critique, and that I do so because I understand virtually nothing about that method.

This looks worryingly like another obfuscation. I plainly do not fault McNally for adopting immanent critique. My challenge was, and remains, cast in terms of what it is that McNally chooses to apply that method to, and where that application leads him. As we know, dialectics is not some codifiable procedure that can be applied to provide ‘correct’ answers. The ‘proof’ will

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8 One could continue with further examples. Inevitably, some of these will arise in the remainder of the article, but, as a foretaste, consider McNally’s objection to my ‘ludicrous claim that [his] argument “closely parallels” that of Jürgen Habermas’. What I actually say is that there is ‘something in his argument which closely parallels the latter’s thinking’ (see Collins 2003, p. 234, emphasis added). The editing misrepresents the nature of the claim. We will see that this kind of editing of quotations is a recurring feature of McNally’s reply.

9 See Collins 2003, p. 238.
always be in the ‘doing’, and will not be guaranteed by the formal adherence to ‘the right’ method. McNally’s reply seems at times, as we shall see below, to veer close to implying the opposite of that. This would be at odds with what he says about dialectics more generally, and not least with his comment in *Bodies* that: ‘It should go without saying that the “proof” of materialist criticism cannot be found outside the process and results of critical practice itself’.  

My suggestion is that ‘the process and results’ of McNally’s critical practice imply that something has gone awry with it. And this suggestion was based on nothing other than an attempt to trace for the reader the movement of McNally’s thought. As noted earlier, having argued previously against the need for ‘another critique of linguistic idealism’ and for the need to engage the contribution of Voloshinov with the experience of real struggles, in *Bodies* he now argues something very different – that materialist criticism has to begin from ‘another critique of linguistic idealism’, and that this critique will lead us to more or less abandon the contribution of Voloshinov in favour of Benjamin. One effect of this, as McNally helpfully points out, is that it will no longer be apparent how we are even to begin to connect our main critical theoretical resources to the experience of real struggles. 

This is a significant movement in McNally’s thought, and it would be remiss of a reviewer to fail to draw attention to it. And, as noted above, neither in *Bodies*, nor in McNally’s reply, are we offered an explanation for it. In *Bodies*, it is simply asserted that now ‘the project of emancipatory materialist critique’ has to proceed in this way. In his reply, as explained above, he attempts to side-step by raising the question of immanent critique. On the substantive question of beginning from ‘another critique of linguistic idealism’ he offers only the following rhetorical flourish:

Because the book begins in an internal criticism of postmodernism, Collins concludes that this allows postmodernism ‘to determine the starting point’. This is about as illuminating as faulting Marx’s critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* for letting Hegel determine the point of departure, or as attacking V.N. Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* for the way central parts of the text are organised around an immanent critique of abstract
objectivism and individualist subjectivism (the then-reigning perspectives in linguistics).

The only way to make sense of this as an argument would be to take it as implying that ‘the proof’ of materialist criticism could be assured by a clearly espoused commitment to the method of immanent critique. For, in that case, McNally could quite reasonably stand himself next to Marx and Voloshinov. All commit to the method. But, if we need to focus on ‘the process and results of critical practice’, then it is a different matter. ‘The proof’ is in the doing, and it is precisely here that Bodies is problematic. In his final chapter, McNally concludes with some conviction that henceforth we must see that ‘the road to liberation runs through the language of the body’, and that speaking this ‘language of the body’ must lie ‘at the heart of the revolutionary project’.

What this actually means, briefly, is that we have to find a way to tap into a truly primordial rationality of the body – ‘a reason rooted in the body and its desire for happiness’ – that is held to be, (a) somehow still present in the language(s) we speak today, and (b) a repository of ‘vast and explosive resources of emancipation’.13 Yet, as noted above, it is ‘not in the least clear’ how we are to connect any of this to any form of everyday political practice.14

If these are the results of McNally’s critical practice, then we might want to examine how he arrived at them. Both Marx and Voloshinov selected their starting points on the basis that they contained some ‘rational kernel’. The ‘process and results’ of their critical practice seem strongly to confirm this. McNally is making a similar claim for postmodernism, but the ‘process and results’ of critical practice in this case seem less convincing, and this, in turn, tends to reinforce the view that postmodernism does not have much of a ‘rational kernel’. Of course, we must address and refute the claims of postmodernism. Many already have, and McNally in the first part of Bodies undoubtedly adds to the existing work that has done so. But this does not mean that we should fundamentally re-orientate our critical practice through our engagement with it, and if McNally wants to continue to insist on this, not just as a possibility or as a personal preference, but as a necessity for all of us seeking to contribute towards the development of a Marxist treatment of language, then he has some very significant work of persuasion yet to do.

Evaluating Voloshinov

McNally, in his reply, then proceeds towards our disagreements about the role of Voloshinov in developing a Marxist treatment of language. But, in order to do this, he has first to summarise what he actually generates through his critique of postmodernism. His summary is a useful one in that it neatly encapsulates the limitations and problems of where that engagement leads. It leads him to argue that the heirs of Saussure offer up ‘an abstracted and fetishised language system divorced from the social-material activities of language-making and language-using beings’, and ‘to set up an alternative account of language as a sociomaterial phenomenon’. It also leads him to make the ‘fairly novel move’ of ‘entering the terrain of evolutionary biology and anthropology’ so as to ‘trace the emergence of human language as an integral aspect of . . . praxis’.

There is much to admire in the way McNally pursues this engagement. But, precisely because it is meant to provide the necessary basis for the project of developing critical materialism, we have to ask what it really adds to our approach. The answer is not as much as McNally wants to imply. Voloshinov already establishes an ‘account of language as a socio-material phenomenon’, and the works of Vygotsky, Luria and Leont’ev do the same thing – though in a different way. The latter group also, in the first half of the last century, entered the terrain of evolutionary biology and anthropology in developing their approach to language and consciousness. What is more novel is the way ‘the body’ comes to figure in all of this. For the main way that McNally seems to be ‘renewing and extending’ Marxism is by attaching the postmodernists’ preoccupation with ‘the body’ to what is in good measure already there. We now proceed on the basis that postmodernists detach language not just from labour and praxis, but from ‘the body, labor and praxis’ (my emphasis), and the body itself is now to be particularly foregrounded to ‘subvert this idealist move’. Yet this is to have some quite dramatic consequences, and not just for the idealists.

This brings us to Voloshinov. Hitherto, as we have seen, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language has been seen as perhaps the key contribution to develop

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and build upon. McNally is now proposing something very different. Now, a reviewer should look for some good reasons for this. This does not necessarily mean that they do not want to be surprised, or to see ‘higher or further or differently’, or that they seek only ‘flat’ or ‘immobile’ stories, or that they are reluctant to seriously interrogate the prevailing wisdom. It means only that significant departures require some solid justification.

The first thing to observe here is just how significant that departure is. McNally seeks to portray his critique as ‘sympathetic’. He claims to offer ‘a dialectical overcoming [Aufhebung]’ of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* ‘that preserves its highest achievements’. Notably, however, he fails to respond to the observation that it is difficult to see what gets carried forward from that work in the wake of his critique. Its only further mention is on the penultimate page of *Bodies*. It is not mentioned at all in the long final chapter. It is indeed difficult to see how, on this basis, McNally can be claiming to produce some ‘higher synthesis’ that preserves Voloshinov’s key insights in any obvious – never mind usable – form.

If the departure is so significant, then, how is it justified? It is argued on the grounds that Voloshinov, in trying to distance himself from crude, pre-dialectical materialisms, ends up tending mechanically to contrast signs with things, and language and consciousness with nature and the body. Now, McNally does, though only in a footnote, acknowledge that the case here is not at all straightforward. While he highlights what he regards as Voloshinov’s dualistic tendencies, there are also ‘more dynamic and dialectical’ countertendencies, which would be ‘well worth building upon’. But nonetheless the ‘end product is an undialectical dualism’ which cannot deal with the ‘corporeal aspects of language’.18

One might assume that this phrase ‘the end product’ indicated that some clear assessment had been made of the relative importance of the two opposing tendencies. This might fit the model of ‘sympathetic critique’. But, as McNally tells us, the assessment that ‘consciousness and language are significantly dematerialized, separated from nature and the body’ is based only on those ‘tendencies that predominate in the most dualistic parts’ of Voloshinov’s book.19 Some might think that such one-sided assessment should not

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17 See the quote from Martell’s *Life of Pi* that prefaces McNally’s reply.
19 McNally 2001, p. 122 and p. 257, note 15. If this is indeed the ‘sympathetic critique’ that McNally champions, then he is correct to suggest that its methods elude me.
automatically command a really serious engagement, but, still, it would hardly
be fair to suggest that I ‘breezily’, not to say ‘disingenuously’, ‘short-circuit’
such an engagement. However, since McNally insists, let us pursue the
engagement a little further. For, even if we look at some of ‘the most dualistic
parts’ of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, then the case is not nearly
as clear-cut as he suggests. Since space is limited, I will focus on just one
particularly problematic example.

‘Sympathetic critique’ or short shrift?

In his reply, McNally quotes Voloshinov as follows: ‘Consciousness cannot
be derived directly from nature’. He claims that this shows how Voloshinov
proceeds dualistically rather than dialectically. Voloshinov cannot quite grasp
that consciousness is ‘both natural and extra-natural’. Yet, a ‘sympathetic
critique’ might have placed such a short quotation in its context a little more.

The only possible definition of consciousness is a sociological one.
Consciousness cannot be derived directly from nature, as has been and still
is being attempted by naïve mechanistic materialism and contemporary objective
psychology (of the biological, behavioristic and reflexological varieties) . . . .
Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an
organized group in the process of its social intercourse. . . . The logic of
consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic
interaction of a social group. . . . Consciousness can harbor only in the image,
the word, the meaningful gesture and so forth. Outside such material, there
remains the sheer physiological act unilluminated by consciousness, i.e. without
having light shed on it, without having meaning given to it, by signs. 20

On the same page, Voloshinov goes on to argue for the special importance
of language among signs. In doing so, he identifies a number of properties
that belong to language. Among these, one is ‘of the highest order of
importance’ – indeed it is the property that ‘makes the word the primary
medium of the individual consciousness’. 21

Although the reality of the word, as is true of any sign, resides between
individuals, a word, at the same time, is produced by the individual
organism’s own means without recourse to any equipment or any other

20 Voloshinov 1986, p. 13, my emphases.
21 Ibid.
kind of extracorporeal material. This has determined the role of the word as the semiotic material of inner life – of consciousness (inner speech). Indeed, consciousness could have developed only by having at its disposal material that was pliable and expressible by bodily means. And the word was exactly that kind of material. The word is available as the sign for, so to speak, inner employment: it can function as a sign in a state short of outward expression. For this reason, the problem of individual consciousness as the inner word (as an inner sign) becomes one of the most vital problems in the philosophy of language.\textsuperscript{22}

None of the above seems to fit at all well with McNally’s case. In the first passage, it is clear that Voloshinov is saying something that McNally himself grants:

To be sure, the emergence of human consciousness introduces a whole range of phenomena [in this case ‘signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse’ – CC] . . . which cannot be accounted for according to the laws of nature (the fundamental error of all forms of mechanical materialism).

But it is clear that he is not saying what McNally then attributes to him: ‘that consciousness inhabits a sphere of radical alterity \textit{vis à vis} the natural world’ – at least if what McNally means by this is that the two are dualistically separated. Voloshinov is saying that consciousness, though it cannot be derived directly from nature, is still inextricably linked to it. The natural basis of the processes of human consciousness is explicitly recognised, though there is clearly much more to human consciousness (and little or nothing of what is distinctive about it) in the natural-physiological process (‘the sheer physiological act’) itself. This sounds very much like the lesson McNally wants to teach Voloshinov, but it is not at all clear that the latter needs it.

Things become more problematic still when we look at the second passage. For, here, Voloshinov spells out very clearly that the role of language as the ‘semiotic material of inner life’ derives precisely from the way it connects to the body – to corporeality. Indeed, human consciousness as we know it could not have developed had it not been for the fact that language is ‘pliable and expressible by bodily means’, and requires no additional ‘extracorporeal

\textsuperscript{22} Voloshinov 1986, p. 14.
material’. This does not sound like a theorist in whose hands ‘consciousness and language are significantly dematerialised’ in that they are ‘separated from nature and the body’. Quite the reverse – consciousness and language are being connected in the most fundamental way to the body. That McNally should have ignored such a passage is perhaps an indication of just how far his ‘sympathetic critique’ goes in ignoring those ‘counter-tendencies’ which might challenge his argument.

It would be possible to continue with further examples along the lines of the above. But I trust that readers will find this alone sufficient to raise rather serious doubts about McNally’s treatment of Voloshinov, and to underpin the suggestion I offered that, on inspection, the analysis:

begins to look rather unsympathetic and perhaps quite impatient. This is . . . a little perplexing, given the apparent appreciation for Voloshinov’s analysis of language, and also the careful and patient treatment later given to Benjamin. What emerges is that even if one were to accept with McNally that we must develop a critical materialist account of language from the site of the body, it would still seem possible to do so without dealing with Voloshinov in the above manner.23

But the implication of this analysis is quite far-reaching for the wider logic of McNally’s case, and this perhaps explains some of the surface combativity of his reply. For it seems seriously to undermine the pathway along which he choreographs the movement from Voloshinov through Bakhtin and onto Benjamin. After all, it is supposed to be Voloshinov’s ‘undialectical dualism’ that provides the underpinnings for that pathway. And, though they may by now be somewhat unsteady, it is worth following some more of McNally’s movements as he tries to pick his way along it.

**From Bakhtin to Benjamin: final movements**

In my review, I argued that McNally’s movement through Voloshinov and Bakhtin to Benjamin neglects some very important differences in the way the former two treat language. After all, even if one were to concede that we needed Bakhtin to enrich Voloshinov’s concept of human embodiment, why not then use Voloshinov to rectify at least some of what McNally sees as

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Bakhtin’s neglect of the dynamics of modern capitalism? Does McNally not himself tell us that Voloshinov’s critique of Saussure is inspired by Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism? Yet McNally offers nothing at all by way of response. Indeed, he avoids acknowledging the point, and even edits a sentence he quotes from my review to ensure this (omitting the part italicised in what follows):

dissatisfied with Voloshinov’s treatment of the body, McNally simply moves onto Bakhtin in a way that neglects what are, for his purposes, some highly pertinent differences in their treatments of language.24

Thus, my alleged dismissal of his analysis of Bakhtin (which is, in fact, no ‘dismissal’ at all), which he himself dismisses as a ‘convenient fiction’, turns out to be a very conveniently distorted – if not actually fictionalised – version of my actual argument. To add to the growing weight of irony, McNally then concludes that ‘having failed to answer [his] arguments’ I proceed to ‘misrepresent them with great panache’!

And things do not improve when we proceed to McNally’s use of Benjamin. Readers will have observed that, in my review, I was careful to make it clear that I was discussing ‘McNally’s Benjamin’.25 I observed that his account was both scholarly and passionate, but that, as a basis for informing emancipatory politics, it had some serious problems. McNally does not, unfortunately, acknowledge that this is at the root of my criticism. Instead, he chooses, in a way that is becoming perhaps too familiar, to tear bits of quotations from their context in a way that misrepresents what they actually say, and which makes my case seem ‘obviously’ incongruous. He maintains that:

Once Benjamin enters the conversation, [Collins] informs the reader, ‘the contradictions of capitalism’ drop ‘out of the equation’, and ‘we are left with a pretty sure sense’ that emancipatory possibilities ‘will never be realised’.

It would be incongruous to say that the contradictions of capitalism are not part of Benjamin’s equation. But that is not what I wrote. Rather, I was pointing out what seemed to me to be a strange paradox about McNally’s project. His is a book that seeks to point us toward ‘emancipatory possibilities’ and to remind us ‘of our practical obligations . . . to the actual flesh and blood battles

25 My thanks to Alex Law for his helpful comments and observations on this point.
against capital that people wage everyday’. Yet, as McNally himself tells us, the whole argument is developed in abstraction from everyday struggles. This means that (and here is what I actually wrote):

The contradictions and conflicts of capitalism, involving specific groups in specific times and places, are left, decisively, out of the equation. In this way, the process of theoretically locating the possibility of emancipation eschews any real grounding in the emancipatory potential of these contradictions and conflicts. Instead the possibility of emancipation is located in something apparently much more nebulous. It is located in the residues of a primordial rationality of the body, which are said to be lurking somewhere in the labyrinthine basements of the storehouse of meaning which is language – residues which are to be set free by a kind of radical therapeutic art in an attempt to destabilise our unconscious identification with the commodity.

Insofar as McNally mentions the first part of this argument, he distorts it beyond recognition. As a result, he refuses to acknowledge even the most ‘obvious difficulties’ that he himself diagnoses in his use of Benjamin – the difficulties of connecting it to those concrete struggles to which we owe ‘practical obligations’. I did not invent or manufacture this problem. McNally himself identifies it for us in just about as many words. Now, clearly, this also means that struggles involving specific groups in specific times and places are left out of the equation. Yet, rather than acknowledge this, McNally distorts my words to suggest that I am saying something very different.

Worse still, McNally fails entirely to mention the second part of the argument – which raises the problem of those ‘emancipatory possibilities’ he does point us towards. This is a rather significant silence. For here we are criticising what McNally describes as ‘the central thesis’ of Bodies – the thesis that ‘the question of language is a question of the body’, which in turn leads to the conclusion that ‘the road to liberation runs through the language of the body’, and that speaking this language must lie ‘at the heart of the revolutionary project’. What are we to make of this silence? Surely it is inconceivable that McNally can have failed to notice that his ‘central thesis’

27 Collins 2003, p. 234 (emphasis added to indicate the rather vital part McNally edits out of the first sentence).
is under challenge. Perhaps, then, he baulks at the problem of actually defending it. This is certainly conceivable. For, to some, it might seem a rather speculative thesis on which to base some quite grand claims. Let us do McNally the justice of quoting him at length.

Prehistoric languages [Freud] argues, expressed erotic-mimetic relations among entities in the world. . . . And it is this forgotten dimension of language, I want to suggest, that Benjamin locates in a sort of linguistic unconscious thanks to his reading of Freud. . . . Discussing the fact that in ‘great insect communities’ communication occurs without language or speech, Freud suggests that the non-linguistic way in which insects communicate is probably ‘the original archaic method of communication between individuals’ which ‘in the course of phylogenetic evolution’ has been replaced by language. Nonetheless, he speculates, ‘the older method might have persisted in the background and still be able to put itself into effect under certain conditions’. It is easy to see why Benjamin should have been so excited by this passage, for it speaks directly to the preservation of ‘an archaic method of communication’, prior to human language, which persists today, albeit ‘in the background’, and which might re-emerge ‘under certain conditions’. For Benjamin this is another way of saying that an older language of the body and of things, a language of mimesis, lives on in modern language as a repository of a different sensibility, a different mode of experience of self, world, and others, and that this original language might yet become the basis for a radical refashioning of social life. . . . A pre-condition of emancipation is that repressed desires must enter into the language of everyday life and that the latter must recover the language of the body and of things. . . . A linguistic task – speaking the language of the body – thus lies at the heart of the revolutionary project. . . . Despite its contemporary abstraction and instrumentalization, language carries residues of the mimetic practices from which it emerged. If we can find a way to retrieve these residues, to piece together broken fragments of corporeal meaning and, thereby, awaken forgotten desires, then we will find vast and explosive resources of emancipation. This is what it means to say that the road to liberation runs through the language of the body.30

The key phrase in this is ‘he [Freud] speculates’. In fact, this speculation is based on prior speculation (about the relationship between communication
between insects and communication between humans), and is itself the basis for further speculation (that a prehistoric language ‘lives on in modern language . . .’). Yet McNally issues rather bold claims based on this speculation—not least about the project of emancipatory materialist critique and where it must begin, and about the very nature of the revolutionary project. Overall, McNally wants to insist and require that we make a very significant departure on the basis of little more than compound speculation.

Rather than try to defend any of this, McNally chooses to respond only to my alleged suggestion that:

the whole Benjaminian operation seems based upon the idea of developing emancipatory practices ‘among marginal groups and coteries – politicised artists in all probability’.

Now, clearly, this was not what Benjamin desired or intended. But, as on previous occasions, this is not what I argued. I argued that, in justifying the move from Bakhtin to Benjamin – on the grounds that the former neglects the specific cultural dynamics of modern capitalism –, McNally ascribes such awesome powers to the commodity-form that he seems to crush even the nebulous emancipatory potential he does identify. And, when it is not clear how we are meant to connect even that to actual struggles, then one might indeed conclude that, on the basis of the scenario McNally is offering us, such potential would never be realised, and that one would struggle to envision meaningful emancipatory practices beyond marginal groups and coteries. What I did not say was that Benjamin himself actually looked to marginal groups and coteries as the locus for emancipatory practices. And the suggestion seems little more than a distraction from the much more important challenge to McNally’s central thesis – a thesis which, for all his invective, he has chosen not even to mention, never mind to defend.

Conclusion

Bodies of Meaning is, in many respects, a work of admirable and committed socialist scholarship. Over the years, we have come to expect no less from David McNally. With an open and adventurous spirit, he seeks in that work to contribute to the renewal and extension of the most genuinely critical traditions of Marxist theory and practice. I never, at any stage in my response to the book, doubted, or challenged, the sincerity of that. What I did suggest was that McNally had made a series of moves that were, ultimately, of
questionable value, and that, cumulatively, these led to him to propose a very
significant departure in terms of how we approach language and conscious-
ness – one which was not, in the final analysis, justified by sufficiently strong
or convincing arguments. What now seems perhaps a little unfortunate is the
manner in which McNally has chosen to respond to this argument. His reply
seems, at times almost ironically, to embody and exemplify the very failings
he seeks to project onto my critique – and probably a few others to boot. For
my own part, I have felt it necessary to try to demonstrate at least some of
this – because the kind of unwarranted invective McNally deploys cannot
reasonably be left unchallenged. Yet, the irony of all the ironies that we have
had to encounter in following McNally’s engagement with postmodernism
is that, behind the combative front of his response, lurks an apparently meek
indifference to the ‘central thesis’ that one might imagine he would, above
all else, have wanted to defend.

It is to be hoped, though, that others who might contribute in this area of
work will not be discouraged by the unfortunate nature of some of the
exchange. And I would include in this those who might see some greater role
for the thinking of Walter Benjamin than McNally might have been able to
convince us of. However, what this exchange seems to make clear is that the
most promising basis for such contributions will bear a much closer resemblance
to that laid out by McNally in some of his earlier, rather than his most recent,
work. The key research agenda should be one of seeking to use the framework
of linguistic analysis initially developed by Voloshinov, and others in the
Bakhtin Circle, in attempting to chart and to grasp concrete processes of
sociohistorical change and development – and the class struggles which are
always integral to them. It is already clear that this framework for linguistic
analysis can offer not only powerful insights into these processes, but also
key insights into the quite special role that language-use can play in shaping
them – both in ways that can exploit and harness the emancipatory potentials
of concrete contexts, and in ways that can suppress them. All of this is vital
to any theory that seeks meaningfully to inform the practice of emancipatory
politics, but much of it would inevitably be sidelined were we to follow
McNally in the departure he has advocated. Because this departure would
see us having ‘transcended’ not just Voloshinov’s contribution, but also any
clear idea of how to connect our new theoretical resources to the actual
struggles of the present. Instead, we would find ourselves searching for ways
to connect with some primordial ‘language of the body and of things which
might yet become the basis for a radical refashioning of social life’.
Yet, as things stand, and despite the fulsome praise that has often been heaped on Voloshinov’s work, there are still, with some notable exceptions, too few serious attempts to make use of his framework along the lines laid out above. Remediating this deficiency has to be a key priority. As we seek to do this, we will also, undoubtedly, be led to develop and renew Voloshinov’s framework, and perhaps even to replace it with something qualitatively better in terms of what it can offer by way of informing the practice of emancipatory politics. McNally is correct to remind us that we need to be alert to the possibility that we may develop something which can do that, and also willing to embrace it should we do so. But what this discussion seems to have made clear is that the alternative he lays out in Bodies of Meaning is perhaps not the most likely candidate.

References


Review Articles

Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference
DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India
RANAJIT GUHA

Reviewed by VASANT KAIWAR

Towards Orientalism and Nativism: The Impasse of Subaltern Studies

When one is immersed in the immediate . . . the abrupt distance afforded by an abstract concept, a more global characterization of the secret affinities between those apparently autonomous and unrelated domains, and of the rhythms and hidden sequences of things we normally remember only in isolation and one by one, is a unique resource, particularly since the history of the preceding few years is always what is least accessible to us. Historical reconstruction, then, the postulating of global characterizations and hypotheses, the abstraction from the ‘blooming, buzzing confusion’ of immediacy, was always a radical intervention in the here-and-now and the promise of resistance to its blind fatalities.1

I. Introduction

The twin objectives of subaltern studies at its inception were (i) to challenge the elitism of Indian historiography, in its imperialist and nationalist variants, that saw the world of the peasantry and working class as secondary or subordinate to the political and economic projects of the colonial period and marginal to the directions of Indian history; and, (ii) to challenge the patronizing views of elite historiography via a

1 Jameson 1998, p. 35. Emphasis added. Parts of this paper were presented at a workshop organised by the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, in conjunction with the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, on 12 December 2003. I am most grateful to Jean-Luc Racine and Jacques Pouchelepasse for their comments and to Gilles Tarabout for making the workshop possible. I wish to thank Sucheta Mazumdar for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this article. Earlier versions of this paper were presented to the Triangle South Asia Colloquium: Part I on 12 December 2001, Parts II-IV on 6 March 2003. I am indebted to the following participants at the colloquium – Srinivas Aravamudan, Miriam Cooke, Katherine Ewing, David Gilmartin, Ranjana Khanna, Bruce Lawrence, John Richards and Joanne Waghorne – for their comments and suggestions for reworking the paper. Needless to say, I alone am responsible for the views expressed here and for all errors of reading, interpretation, etc.
historiography of the political (not pre-political) nature of popular struggles. Those two objectives were related through a critique of the terms of nationalist and imperialist historiographies and an attempt to use the documentation provided by the same historiography to understand better the precise modes of mobilisation and the goals of popular struggles.

The principal theoretical literature that influenced attempts at linking (i) and (ii) above initially drew on Marx and Gramsci. Marx not merely because of the Communist influences in West Bengal, where much of the original historiography of the subaltern originated, but also because his writings provided an indispensable vantage point outside bourgeois ideology for the critique of colonial modernity. Despite the many twists and turns of subaltern studies since the early 1980s, Marx remains in the works of Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty – the best of the subalternist historians – a crucial point of departure. Gramsci’s influence is more subtle. After all, Gramsci himself has been read in completely antithetical ways in Europe and India: on the one hand, as extending and enriching the works of Marx and Lenin on the possibilities of revolution in countries that had attained a measure of representative democracy; on the other as fundamentally repudiating that possibility as the subaltern classes became more subject, or captive, to the arts of persuasion and co-optation into parliamentary régimes. Gramsci’s influence has worked in both directions in the corpus of subaltern studies: in Ranajit Guha’s work, it still takes the form of a materialist critique of the limits of colonial modernity, reflecting, in that regard, the richly suggestive studies of Italian society, culture and politics that are encapsulated in Gramsci’s discussion of the Southern question, not to mention the notebooks compiled in prison.2 The change from Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency to Dominance without Hegemony lies in the emphasis now on an Indian historiography of India, even if the ensuing historiography has markedly conservative characteristics, drifting, in fact, towards a barely concealed nativism.3 Guha’s latest work simply gives us two visions: one of an historical compromise between the modern and what he calls the ‘semi-feudal’ in Indian society, in which the latter progressively swamped the former with economic, political and cultural results that he finds clearly regrettable; on the other, a reactionary nativist historiography (on his own terms) as the basis of an ‘Indian historiography of India’. These two elements of his work are plainly at odds with each other. A willingness to consider models of a more liberating historiography of India that foregrounded the original concerns of subaltern studies seems be something of a casualty of his current enterprise.

Chakrabarty, on the other hand, neatly avoids the issues raised by the antinomies and contradictions of Gramsci.4 Instead, he engages with Marx mainly as a negative

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4 Anderson 1977.
example of post-Enlightenment thinking that forces the ‘many ways of being in the
world’ into abstractions, not the least of which is abstract labour. To claim difference
and resist the translation of difference into common terms via abstractions are, in
this view, emancipatory gestures in a world grown tired of empty universalism. *Provincializing Europe*, however, is not devoid of politics. By emphasising the non-
goal-oriented nature of much middle-class Bengali social life and by articulating a
kind of nostalgic desire of a diasporic intellectual for that social life, Chakrabarty
seems to be suggesting that the older *Subaltern Studies*’ emphasis on struggles for
social justice, however inchoate, was a bad dream from which a mature version has
awakened. To defuse the charge that he has replaced struggle with a kind of existentialist
conservatism, Chakrabarty strives mightily to argue that the real roots of oppression
in modern Bengal (or India, or the Third World by extension) lie in a rampant
Eurocentrism and historicism, not in income inequalities, mass poverty, patriarchy,
the exploitation of labour, or the manifold oppressions of the state. The struggle is
displaced onto the level of discourse. The postcolonial radical now has no desire to
seize the means of production and socialise it on behalf of the immediate producers.
Mainly, in a diasporic reincarnation, she wishes to seize the academic curriculum and
rid it of Eurocentric diffusionist elements.

Difference is what is left when the Winter Palace of capital’s ‘metanarratives’ is
taken by the postcolonialist insurrection. Difference, we are asked to believe, is inherently
liberating. This seems disturbingly like orientalism, now refigured as a shabby second-
hand orientalism of the Orientals. This combination of nativism and orientalism marks
a definitive impasse for subaltern studies. This essay will seek to examine the nature
of that impasse by a close examination of the two works mentioned above, Guha’s
*Dominance without Hegemony* and Chakrabarty’s *Provincializing Europe*.

II. Historicism

II.i. Marx and difference

The starting point for Chakrabarty’s attack on historicism is, of course, to define the
term itself. Drawing on Ian Hacking’s view that ‘historicism is the theory that social
and cultural phenomena are historically determined and that each period has its own
values not directly applicable to other epochs’, and Maurice Mandelbaum’s notion
that ‘an adequate understanding of any phenomenon and an adequate assessment of
its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place it occupied and
the role . . . it played in the process of development’, Chakrabarty notes two prime
characteristics of historicism: (i) the notion of development and the elapse of

5 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 33.
7 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 22.
homogeneous, empty time as the medium of development; (ii) a pre-posited internal unity of the object that undergoes development.

Historicism, in this sense, Chakrabarty suggests, is common to Marxist, liberal, and similar histories of capitalism, industrialisation, and nationalism and is premised on a variety of strategies. In dealing with capital as a mode of production, for instance, historicist accounts either suggest that it is a world-historical process that will eventually sublate differences, producing a more-or-less smooth terrain of development, or one that is not only not committed to overcoming differences but positively produces and proliferates them. Both accounts are historicist in sharing a view of capital as arising in one part of the world and diffusing out to others, or, if ‘global’, nonetheless operating as a ‘totalizing unity’. The only history that counts in this regard is the history that can be retrospectively constructed as the history of the ‘becoming of capital, when it is not yet fully hegemonic or dominant’, that is the past as ‘posited by capital itself’ (Chakrabarty calls this History 1), the staple of transition narratives and historicism.

Arguably, however, this is not the sum total of histories even of capitalism and to do justice to the complexity of the reality, not to mention the practice of historians, another history has to be brought into the picture. This is History 2, that is history not ‘as antecedents established by itself [i.e. capital], not as forms of its own life-process’; capital may seek to subjugate those antecedent forms but, citing Marx, Chakrabarty notes that all sorts of ‘vanished social formations . . . still partially unconquered’ survive those efforts. No simple metanarrative of capital will suffice to unravel the complexity of modernity. Chakrabarty wants us to resist thinking of the future simply in terms of the unfolding of some potentiality inherent in capital, History 1 marching on to the end of history, and to consider the ‘pasts that live in the present’, which resist yielding some simple agenda to make that happen.

To do so with any amount of success involves confronting a number of issues. First is the acknowledgement that European colonial rule in India marks a definite caesura. Intellectual traditions, Chakrabarty asserts, ‘once unbroken and alive in Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic are now only matters of historical research for most’; categories once subject to ‘detailed theoretical contemplation and inquiry now exist as practical

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8 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 23 and p. 47.
11 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 70.
concepts, bereft of any theoretical lineage, embedded [merely] in quotidian practices in South Asia'.12 When South Asians wish to theorise, they have recourse to European ‘traditions’, some of indisputably greater antiquity than the ‘dead traditions’ of South Asia. Second, and allied to the first, is the near-universal attraction to Enlightenment universals among the colonised and ex-colonised globally. He cites Hichem Djait, a Tunisian philosopher, who accused imperialist Europe of ‘denying its own vision of man’, and Frantz Fanon, who struggled to hold on to the Enlightenment idea of the human, even when he knew that European imperialism had reduced that figure to the male white settler. The attraction of the Enlightenment stems from the fact that there is no easy way of dispensing with the abstract figure of the rights-bearing individual or Reason in its revolutionary guise in the conditions of political modernity, or of developing a social science that ‘addresses the issues of modern social justice’.13

Chakrabarty’s response to historicism (in his view, the global unfolding of capital and its possible ultimate transcendence) and the idea of the political (the abstract figure of the human and Reason as the agency of history) develops a complex notion of time and place within which to disrupt their implicit triumphalism. To do so requires acknowledging that European thought is both indispensable and inadequate. Indispensable not only in articulating a programme of social justice precisely in terms of Enlightenment abstractions, but also because, in its radical register as Marxism, in demystifying the ever-present tendency in the West to see capitalist expansion as a case of altruism; inadequate because it occludes questions of belonging and diversity. This is something of a central problem for Chakrabarty since, in fact, the indispensable elements of European thought contain a powerful dose of anachronism, which he explains as the desire of modern humans to ‘reduce the past to a null point’ outside oneself and one’s time, so as to be free of it and so as to liberate oneself for the project of social justice.14 Historicism of one variety or another, it seems, is central to the project of social justice.

However, this kind of reductionism is also problematic, since he wants to interrupt this narrative with those unvanquished elements of History 2. To do this, he must assert not only that ‘difference’, a key term that will recur throughout Provincializing Europe, is not external to capital but that it lives on in ‘intimate and plural relationships to capital, ranging from opposition to neutrality’.15 Why opposition to capital must come from History 2 and not History 1, that is from antecedents (such as labour) reduced to moments of capital’s self-expanding circuit, is a mystery that Chakrabarty does not elucidate.16 He insists that subaltern studies is not about the resistance of

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12 Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 5–6.
13 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 5.
14 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 244.
15 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 66.
16 After all, one of Marx’s most celebrated axioms is that the barrier to capital is capital itself, not the remnants of vanquished social forms that live on in the present. See Kaiwar 1999.
this or that group to the spread of capitalism; it is not outside in place, but in a time
that includes the category of capital, that is it violates that category’s internal coherence
disrupting History 1 with History 2, counterposing other forms of temporality to the
homogeneous, empty time of post-Enlightenment modernity. Subaltern studies, in
other words, can neither give up Marx nor difference.

Marx and difference are supposedly embodied in two intellectual traditions (both
European), seemingly at radical odds with each other: the analytic and the hermeneutic.
The analytic tradition, Chakrabarty tells us, seems to evacuate the local by assimilating
it to some abstract universal; it seeks to ‘demystify’ ideology by looking forward to
a ‘more just social order’. Marx is held up as one of the progenitors of this tradition.
The hermeneutic tradition, on the other, with Heidegger as its chief icon, finds ‘thought
intimately tied to places and to particular forms of life’ and is ‘innately critical of the
nihilism of that which is purely analytic’. We will ignore, for the moment, why a
‘critique that looks forward to a more just social order’ should be considered nihilistic
_per se_ or why ‘thought intimately tied to places’ should not be implicated in injustices
and tyrannies of all kinds. Nonetheless, the polemic against Enlightenment universalism
that Chakrabarty launches here maintains that the universal is but a placeholder into
which steps a proxy which usurps its position in a ‘gesture of pretension and
domination’. Let us say that Eurocentric diffusionism, or the coloniser’s model of the
world, is one such gesture of pretension and domination. Histories from the margins
attempt to challenge that pretension and domination by giving us other life histories.
The larger question of why a programme for a just social order must evacuate the
local; or why life histories from the margins must eschew a programme for social
justice is never seriously broached in _Provincializing Europe_ and constitutes a serious
political failing. Nor does Chakrabarty come to grips with the dialectical unfolding
of the local and the global, the universal and the particular. This is a significant
methodological limitation.

II.ii. _The not-yet of historicism_

Historicism is what allowed European domination of the world, Chakrabarty asserts,
thereby correcting one’s naïve assumption that it was the heavy artillery of imperialism.
It does so by making modernity or capitalism look not simply global but global over
time, by originating in one place and spreading to others. Historicism posits historical
time as the measure of the cultural distance assumed to exist between the West and
the non-West; in the colonies, it legitimated the idea of civilisation. Historicism assumes
we are all heading in the same direction, but that some have got there first and must
direct the traffic for later arrivals. This is what he calls the ‘not-yet’ of colonial rule
whereby the colonised, whether Indians, Africans or Irish for that matter, must wait
and learn the codes of modernity and citizenship from the coloniser. Up to a point,
nationalist thought goes along with this historicist approach to questions of modernity,
but, at others, baulks at the limits it places on the mass mobilisation of peasants and
others not yet drawn into the vortex of modernity for the eminently modern project
of nationalism. The ‘not-yet’ of colonial rule is then replaced with the ‘now’ of anti-
colonial thought, as those ‘not yet’ schooled in the ‘doctrinal and conceptual’
responsibilities of a secular civil society explode on to the historical stage.21

Chakrabarty’s criticism is not limited to colonial pretensions on this issue of the
civilising mission, but also takes to task the English Marxist historian, Eric Hobsbawm,
for describing peasant rebels as ‘primitive’ and ‘pre-political’ admitting non-secular,
non-rational elements into their thought.22 This kind of historiography, Chakrabarty
states, is echoed in India where the peasantry, under ‘world-historical notice of
extinction’, has survived and remains a sign of India’s incomplete transition to
modernity. In contrast, Chakrabarty describes the peasant as no less a part of Indian
modernity than the secular-rational bourgeoisie and that the primitive (peasant) rebel’s
reading of the relations of power was ‘by no means unrealistic or backward-looking’.23
Indeed, Chakrabarty states, there is no need to translate – as part of some secular-
rational civilising mission – the practices of the rebels who called upon gods and
spirits, and attributed much agency to them, into some acceptable and ‘more real’
secular reality.

However, nationalist narratives are trapped within the ‘not-yet’ of historicism, and
with the signs of inadequacy and primitiveness of the subaltern classes. According
to those narratives, the subaltern classes needed to be educated out of ‘their ignorance,
parochialism, or depending on your preference, false consciousness’. In trying to
subsume a variety of narratives not written from a ‘modern subject position’ into
narratives that ‘bear approximation to that of a private citizen’, nationalist narratives
essentially tried to make Indian history look like a chapter in European history, only
that it happened later and was perhaps an inferior copy of that original. This leaves
modern Indian history bereft of its ‘multiple and contradictory themes’, reproducing
Indian modernity as a project of ‘positive unoriginality’.24 In a spirit of even-handedness,

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21 Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 8–9.
22 Hobsbawm 1959 is widely credited with having launched the ‘new social history’ that
brought the methods of critical-comparative historiography to the subaltern classes.
24 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 33, pp. 38–9. The term ‘positive unoriginality’ is taken from Morris
1993.
Chakrabarty is intent on implicating even subaltern studies, at its inception, in this project of studying ‘the historic failure of the nation to come into its own, a failure due to the inadequacy of the bourgeoisie as well as the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of the classic nineteenth-century type’.  

Arguably, Chakrabarty is right to distance himself from this form of historicism – which, as we shall see, has not entirely died out among the founding principals of subaltern studies – but his arguments do raise some thorny theoretical, methodological and political issues that cannot be easily disposed of. For instance, when he notes that the presence of gods and spirits in the manifestos of peasant rebels is not symbolic of some ‘deeper, “more real” secular reality’, he is, in fact, avoiding dealing with the problem of the symbolic in human thought. To attribute some crude literalism to peasant thought is not only to succumb to vulgar idealism or materialism as the case may be, but to avoid the question of what the gods and spirits may symbolise even if they do not stand in for something ‘more real’. Equally, Chakrabarty seems to imply that, in the thought of ‘disenchanted’ workers in their struggles for social justice, there is, in effect, a straight equivalence between thought, action, and description. This kind of literalism is of no help in sorting through the multiple and instantaneous translations that take place not only in the sphere of everyday politics but also in more exceptional times, and is probably why his questions of how ‘we’ (presumably narrators, interpreters of subaltern consciousness) handle the issue of the presence of the divine or the supernatural in the history of labour, and whether the project of social justice requires the use of some sort of ‘disenchanted’ universalist language, remain largely rhetorical.

As for the red herring of the untranslatability of experiences into a common currency, we might only note that, while Indian and British workers labour in different ‘life worlds’, they have been no more or less attentive to the radical calls of democracy and socialism, though they might very well interpret those terms quite differently. Any suggestion that disenchanted workers will hear the call to secular social justice and workers for whom gods and spirits are an everyday reality not, is belied by working-class history itself.

As for the ‘not-yet’, and the lack/inadequacy that it appears to imply and that informs the drive to develop programmes for social justice, why should this be interpreted merely as an example of the imperialism of post-Enlightenment thought? Every programme of reform or revolution, even in the disenchanted West, implicitly acknowledges some inadequacies in the present state of things, and, to the extent that it succeeds in mobilising people to the cause, perhaps even convinces them of the importance of addressing those inadequacies. If all we could come up with as an

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alternative is the ‘many ways of being in the world’, there would be no need for a programme of social justice, since, at least some, if not most, could happily adjust to the manifest injustices of their time. Altogether, Chakrabarty’s rambling presentation and his Platonic questions about gods, spirits, not to mention Reason – ‘Can we give Reason the same mission the world over?’; ‘In what do we ground the “reason” that unavoidably marks the social sciences, if not in a historicist understanding of history?’ – may only convince the reader of the need for a more sophisticated sociology and hermeneutics than Provincializing Europe seems able to muster. One would also need to go beyond repeating *ad nauseam* the same mantras about translation, agency, historicism and universals and get down to some serious comparative history and ethnography.

It is in light of the above that we must assess Chakrabarty’s claims about ‘provincialising Europe’, which he explains as a way of exploring how European thought – both indispensable and inadequate to think about the thorny problems of colonial and postcolonial modernity – may be renewed ‘from and for the margins’. For Chakrabarty, this involves dispensing with the (by-now archaic) concern with the transition to modernity/capitalism, resisting the translation of different life-worlds into a common currency, and finding ‘conjoint and disjunctive genealogies for European categories of modernity’. It involves, too, the possibility of an alliance between the dominant metropolitan histories and subaltern peripheral pasts whose task must be to expose the collaboration of European imperialism and the Third-World nationalism in making Europe universal and to formulate a ‘radical critique and transcendence of liberalism’, most notably bureaucratic constructions of citizenship, the modern state, and bourgeois privacy. If successful, provincialising Europe should result in a recognition of the many roads to and a many-sided modernity in which Enlightenment-inspired liberalism is only one – and a provincial discourse at that. And what would be the end result, apart from (ironically) a liberal tolerance, if not celebration, of diversity? While the latter might suffice in an elite private-university setting in the West, one wonders how it would address the real, material deprivations of the world’s poor and oppressed. Respecting the beggar’s right to sleep under a bridge or on the sidewalk and her invocation of gods and spirits in a cruel world, while avoiding such historicist issues as income redistribution is, in fact, to give the game away. Is Provincializing Europe also a sophisticated apology for global and class polarisation, an aestheticisation of poverty and human misery? What would it take to abolish modernity itself?

Be that as it may, I would argue there is a more promising way of provincialising Europe that takes its cue from what Jameson calls the ‘growing contradiction between

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26 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 236.
27 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 16 and p. 255.
lived experience and structure', or between ‘a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience’. While, in older societies, or even in the early stages of capitalism, the immediate and limited experience of individuals was still able to encompass and coincide with the economic and social form that governs that experience, at a later moment, these two levels drift ever further apart and ‘really begin to constitute themselves into an opposition’, ‘Wesen and Erscheinung, essence and appearance, structure and lived experience’. 29 In advanced capitalism, the phenomenological experience of an individual becomes limited to a tiny corner of the socio-economic world, while the ‘truth of that experience’ no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of the ‘limited, daily experience’ of someone in London may lie, Jameson points out, in India, Jamaica or Hong Kong, bound up with the whole colonial system of the British empire. The latter determines the very quality of the individual’s ‘subjective life’, and, yet, the ‘structural co-ordinates are no longer accessible to the individual’s lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people’.30 The experience of the metropolis is no longer a universal referent. Global capitalism scrambles the previously relatively stable geographies of core and periphery. A stageist theory of politics loses all meaning. It is this materiality of advanced capitalism that affords the objective basis of provincialising Europe, while keeping in full view the need for a universal discourse of rights and justice. It may, of course, be historicist, in one of the ways in which Chakrabarty defines historicism, but it is a much more promising line of inquiry, not only to explain the contours of modernity but also to create a politics adequate to countering capital’s relentless drive to planetary dominance.

II.iii. Dominance without hegemony: historicism by another name?

Ranajit Guha’s Dominance without Hegemony suggests other ways in which Chakrabarty’s critique of historicism can be addressed. Guha does not hesitate to use elements of a transition narrative, locating historiography in the historical mode of production that gives birth to it and the ideology that it extrudes. He underlines the limited capacity of that ideology and the accompanying historiography for a critique of the dominant mode of production, and the necessity to locate a radical critique outside that mode of production. As we shall see, Guha does not hesitate to suggest a lack or inadequacy not merely in the historiography but in the social formation that it seeks to describe. Insofar as he draws on philosophy, it is the classical philosophy of Locke, Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Hegel, not to mention Marx, none of whom can be said to be reticent

about locating their historiography in relation to a doctrine of progress. Not for Guha, it seems, the temptations of poststructuralism or postcolonialism, a function one might suggest of location (Europe versus the United States) and political commitments.

Guha starts with a tripartite division of historical development: slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, with historiographies that capture the peculiar aporias of each historical moment. Thus, both classical Greece and imperial Rome not merely tolerated but positively supported slavery by naturalising it to the condition of certain people and advocating it as a positive social good, as Aristotle and Xenophon, for example, were to do. Xenophon wanted to set up a state fund of public slaves to provide every Athenian citizen with at least three slaves. However, Enlightenment philosophers such as Montesquieu and Hegel had no difficulty seeing through the apologetic nature of those arguments by counterposing the radical notion that ‘all men are born equal’, that helotry was ‘contrary to the nature of things’ (Montesquieu) or that Greek freedom was ‘only a fortuitous, undeveloped, transient, and limited efflorescence, and on the other, a harsh servitude of all that is humane and proper to man’ (Hegel). Guha argues from this example that intellectuals (by and large?) had no critical distance from the ruling order in their understanding of the basic power relations of a slave society, historiography itself being ‘an instance of the ideological correlate of the material prosperity of the master class, unable to break away from its moorings in slavery and deal critically with it’.

Similarly, with Kalhana’s account of the civil wars in twelfth-century Kashmir (that Guha takes as an example of the limitations of the feudal intellectual), which exhorts the nobles and kings to get their house in order, but falls short, as his modern critics – R.C. Majumdar and A.L. Basham – point out, by attributing causal efficacy to gods, spirits, not to mention karma and transmigration. Majumdar, for instance, though admiring Kalhana for his critical attitudes to kings and nobles faults him for his tendency to explain events by fate and divine will rather ‘any rational cause’; and Basham provides a secular-humanist (and disenchanted?) critique of Kalhana for not acknowledging that humans are ‘makers of their own history and masters of their own destiny’, and for attributing to ‘superhuman forces or beings...the biggest part in the destiny of man’.

Whence then does criticism come? The unambiguous answer: from outside the ‘universe of dominance which provides the critique with its object’, indeed ‘from another and antagonistic universe’. From this vantage point, Montesquieu and Hegel, for instance, were able to see through Aristotle’s hollow pretences about natural

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31 Guha 1997, p. xiii.
32 Guha 1997, pp. 7–8, 11.
33 Quoted in Guha 1997, p. 12.
slavery. People captive to the gravitational field of ruling-class ideology of any particular historical epoch, on the other hand, have a ‘necessary [and] congenital blindness’ to the paradoxes of their times. The lesson for our times is that liberal historiography, operating within the cramped imaginative space of ‘bourgeois consciousness’, can never shine a light powerful enough to ‘penetrate and scan some of the strategic areas of [that consciousness] where dominance [a structural component of any system of class rule] stores the spiritual gear it needs to justify and sustain itself’.34 Liberal historiography, in its colonial and postcolonial guises, Guha notes, is congenitally blind to the paradoxes of colonial and postcolonial rule in South Asia. The critique must again come from outside, from an ideology ‘antagonistic towards the dominant culture [which] declares war on it even before the class for which it speaks comes to rule’.35 All of this would, of course, be hopelessly historicist from Chakrabarty’s point of view.

Undeterred by that possibility, Guha plunges on to develop an outline of British historiography of India that not only relates history to ruling-class ideology but traces its evolution to the internal transformations of power relations. The point of departure is the recognition that colonial capitalism and colonial modernity were not merely a replica of their European counterparts but something sui generis, an ‘original alloy’ composed of the historic failure of capital to realise its universalising tendency under colonial conditions and a corresponding failure of the metropolitan bourgeois culture to dissolve or assimilate fully the indigenous culture of South Asia in the power relations of the colonial period.

The colonial state in South Asia was fundamentally unlike the metropolitan bourgeois state in England, the chief difference being that, while the metropolitan state was hegemonic in character ‘with its claim to dominance . . . based on a power relation in which the moment of persuasion outweighed the moment of coercion’,36 the colonial state was, by comparison, non-hegemonic with persuasion outweighed by coercion in its structure of dominance.37 At home, champions of the right of nations to self-determination, the metropolitan ruling élite denied the same right to their Indian subjects, and their antagonism to feudal values in their own society made little difference – despite what Guha considers their much-publicised though rather ineffective campaigns against sati, child marriage, and so on – to their vast tolerance of pre-modern values and institutions in Indian society.38 The ‘contemporary element [that is, the British/European political culture] so vigorous in its metropolitan soil’ failed

34 Guha 1997, pp. 7–8.
36 Guha 1997, p. xii, emphasis added.
37 This is, of course, reminiscent of the way in which Gramsci elaborated the notion of bourgeois hegemony. For a superb exposition, and far greater complexity than Guha’s account presupposes, of the notion of bourgeois hegemony in Gramsci, see Anderson 1977.
to strike root as a graft and remained ‘shallow and restricted in its new site’. As an upshot, bourgeois notions of rights remained weak, by and large, coercion won out over persuasion and Guha concludes that any universalising design one might attribute to post-Enlightenment capitalism is false. Colonialism stands not for the ‘historical progeny of industrial and finance capital but . . . for its historic Other’.

Even such a staple of bourgeois hegemony as individual rights was unavailable, it seems, to colonial subjects. As Gandhi is said to have stated, while in South Africa: ‘I discovered that as a man and as an Indian, I had no rights. More correctly, I discovered I had no rights as a man because I was an Indian’.

To be fair, Guha does acknowledge that what he calls ‘dominance without hegemony’ had a nationalist aspect as well, a result of the capital’s failed universalising mission and the corresponding failure of the indigenous bourgeoisie to dissolve the indigenous culture of India. Vast areas of the life and consciousness of the people were never integrated into bourgeois hegemony, and, over such areas, the bourgeoisie could only exercise a largely coercive dominance.

The limitation of much liberal historiography lies, in Guha’s opinion, precisely in not recognising that the discrepancy between metropolitan and colonial social formations was not a mere ‘exceptional and aberrant instance of malfunctioning’ or ‘local difficulties’ destined to be overcome, presumably by modernisation, but a ‘structural fault’ in the project of colonialism.

Guha’s quarrel with colonial historiography lies in its failure even to recognise this problem. In its origins and development, he argues, colonial historiography was concerned with statist priorities and projects, citing Hegel – whose historicist credentials are beyond reproach – to make the point: ‘It is the state which first supplies a content which not only lends itself to the prose of history but actually helps to produce it’.

The philosophy underlying the first school of colonial historiography, developed during the mercantilist period, is memorably captured in Alexander Dow’s statement: ‘The success of your Majesty’s arms has laid open the East to the researches of the curious’. This school, intended for the education of the East India Company’s officers, aimed to elucidate the relations of state power and landed property in India so as to extract an efficient surplus. *Itihasa*, as Guha puts it, had become a component of *Arthashastra*. A second school, corresponding to a more mature phase of colonial rule in which the coloniser spoke not merely as a merchant or tax-collector but as a legislator as well, produced the knowledge of the past that would serve as a guide to the future. Here, the idiom of Improvement took its place alongside that of Order, and Indian history found itself reduced to being merely a ‘highly interesting portion of British

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40 Guha 1997, p. xii.
41 Guha 1997, p. 73.
42 Guha 1997, p. 74.
history’, with James Mill’s History of British India as prototype. The civilising mission was the operative concept for this school.

Why was a historiography of India necessary in the first place? Guha argues that the idiom of Order and Improvement both required a knowledge not merely of contemporary custom but of the past as well, to ascertain with authority issues of ownership, rights of owners and the government, not to mention a whole host of social issues. But, more importantly, it was the result of an ethnographic encounter, in which colonial officials suspected that specialised local knowledge, and even general knowledge of statecraft and political economy, was being withheld from them by local officials. History was ‘ethnology’s surrogate’ and, in the end, a more ‘scientific’ one as well, in which the higgledy-piggledy of local arrangements was more scientifically reclassified in line with modern statecraft. This, to Guha, is not the basis of an Indian historiography of India so much as a history of the British in India, their concerns, priorities, and so on.

Nor, apparently, does this type of historiography end with colonial rule; a good example of the carry over of colonial-period paradigms, if not specific issues, into the present is the Cambridge-school historiography, particularly of the 1960s and 1970s. Continuing with the notion of the civilising mission of British rule, government is seen in this historiography as the stimulus, either directly to a class of people (collaborators) to perform according to proper (modern) rules of conduct, or, indirectly, via the formation of various associations that replicate the rules and modalities of governmental organisations. Either way, colonial rule works as a school of liberal modernisation, using market mechanisms to create collaborators out of subjects. Guha is somewhat scathing about this liberal-modern characterisation of collaboration, and points to the limited, monopoly-like character of the benefits the British did distribute, more like ‘feudal jousting’ than ‘free bargaining in an open market’. The focus on collaboration hides the rather large social arena in which resistance to colonial rule developed. By definition, resistance is consigned to the realm of the prepolitical, a mere reaching for sticks and stones. Of more recent instalments of Cambridge historiography, Guha is no less caustic, seeing it as no more than replacing some worn-out fittings, while keeping the basic foundations and structures intact. Thus, Guha responds to Washbrook’s description of the non-Brahman movement as a result of the ‘novel processes [including the creation of a public sphere] of early twentieth-century Madras’, a movement supposedly without a political existence prior to that period, by noting that the emergence of the colonial state and the substantial effects

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43 Guha 1997, p. 79.
it had on caste conflicts did not amount to transforming an apolitical movement into a political one but rather a shift from one kind of politics to another.46

Nonetheless, the central point explored in this section is the degree to which subaltern studies, both at its inception under Ranajit Guha’s inspiration and now many years later in his *Dominance without Hegemony*, still occupies what Chakrabarty would consider historicist ground, in which, clearly, the notion of a failed transition to capitalism/modernity, and the limitations and handicaps introduced into Indian society as a result, is a central element of analysis. Additionally, as we shall see below, so is the question of relating religion to politics, ideology or praxis. Subaltern studies cannot do without a sociology and politics of religion. This will become apparent in the next section as we delve into the Guha’s more detailed account of the historic compromises of colonial modernity.

II.iv. The constituent elements of colonial modernity

To explain more fully the combined nature of Indian modernity, Guha has recourse to a schematic of power around the concepts of Domination [D] and Subordination [S], which are structural components of any relation of power in a class-divided society. Each of those terms in turn is overdetermined by a pair of interacting elements, D by Coercion [C] and Persuasion [P], and S by Collaboration [C*] and Resistance [R]. While D and S imply each other ‘logically’, and are intrinsic to all ‘structural, modal and discursive aspects’ where an authority structure can be discerned, this is not true of other pairs of concepts, which imply each other ‘contingently’.47 Drawing on the Marxian notion of the ‘organic composition of capital’, Guha develops a framework of the ‘organic composition of power’, in which C, P, C*, and R, in various combinations and permutations, constitute ‘the warp and the weft in the fabric of world history’.48

Guha further breaks down each constituent part of D/S into European and Indic elements, the former associated with the modernising drive of English bourgeois rule, and the latter the recasting and reconfiguring of India’s ‘feudal’ culture in the context of colonial modernity. Thus, C is broken down into Order and *Danda*, P into Improvement and *Dharma*, C* into Obedience and *Bhakti*, and R into Rightful Dissent and *Dharmic Protest*. The failure of a ‘bourgeois revolution’ in the Indian context is signalled for Guha by the extent to which the latter term in each dyad survives and indeed constitutes the ‘warp and weft’ of the fabric of Indian life up to the present, a fact that an Indian historiography of India has to deal with. Politics, no less than culture, is constituted by such coexistence, which, in another context, has been described

as uneven and combined development of an ‘existential and psychic kind’, alongside the combined and uneven development of the economy.\textsuperscript{49}

For example, Order represents an impersonal rule-governed system designed to curb the use of extra-economic coercive powers by institutions and ideologies to win the consent of the governed. The realm of Order in India extended well beyond the normal sphere of governance in Europe to embrace public health, sanitation, municipalisation, labour mobilisation for plantations, and recruitment to the army. In all of these areas, the idiom of Order interacted with that of \textit{Danda}, ‘central to all indigenous notions of dominance’ and defined as the manifestation of the ‘divine will in the affairs of the state’. \textit{Danda} extended to the creation and use of private armies, levies, caste and territorial \textit{panchayats}, caste sanctions, bonded labour and \textit{begar} – the jurisdictional powers of landlords over tenants – punitive measures against women for disobeying patriarchal codes, and so on. \textit{Danda} operated in ‘every walk of life outside the jealously guarded realm of official Order’ and was employed to uphold, in every little kingdom, ‘every putative king’s authority’ constituted by D and S in all relationships of gender, age, caste, and class.\textsuperscript{50} Notwithstanding the inconsistencies of the exposition – such as the fact that \textit{Danda} infiltrates the idiom of Order; exists alongside, and outside the realm of Order – Guha’s argument stresses the reactionary quality of colonial rule.

Similarly, Improvement coexisted with \textit{Dharma}. Improvement refers to the long list of reforms including Western education, orientalist projects of exploring, interpreting and preserving India’s ancient and medieval culture, not to mention more mundane enactments of labour law, the abolition of \textit{sati}, Hindu polygamy, infanticide, laws to improve working conditions, and so on, all signs, Guha avers, of ‘an optimistic and ascendant bourgeois[\ldots] to prove itself adequate to its own historic project’. But, true to form, Improvement had to share and, one suspects, concede considerable ground to \textit{Dharma}, the ‘indigenous . . . organic societal doctrine of Hinduism’. What \textit{Dharma} brought to the mix of P was, in fact, a pre-rights paternalistic notion of the government as ‘protector, trustee, and friend of the people’, not to mention caste-based exclusivism. The hierarchical, Hindu components built into the notion of \textit{Dharma}, when deployed during the Swadeshi movement, for example, succeeded in dividing Muslims from Hindus, upper castes from Namasudras, landlords from tenants. Its subsequent adoption by the Gandhian Congress had much to do with ‘saving’ the country from socialism and saving landlords. As Gandhi himself put it: ‘I enunciated this theory [of trusteeship associated with \textit{Dharma}] when the socialist theory was placed before the country in respect to the possessions held by \textit{zamindars} and ruling chiefs’.\textsuperscript{51} Guha thinks that \textit{Dharma}, like \textit{Danda}, was an accommodation to the old and moribund order

\textsuperscript{49} Jameson 1991, p. 366.
\textsuperscript{50} Guha 1997, pp. 25–30.
\textsuperscript{51} Quoted in Guha 1997, p. 37.
rather than a vigorous challenge to it, embraced alike by Gandhi and Ghanshyamdas Birla.

Similarly, with C* and R, Guha unfolds his theory by juxtaposing Obedience with Bhakti and Rightful Dissent with Dharmic Protest. Obedience, developed to a fine-tuned doctrine by Samuel Smiles, urged sympathy between employers and employees rather than class struggle, but what distinguishes it from trusteeship is that Obedience has a countervailing notion of rights and just rebellion if authority should fail to live up to its commitments. Bhakti, for Guha, has no such redeeming features. With the Bhagvad Gita as its ur-text, Bhakti linked all the collaborationist movements of subordination in Indian thinking and practice during the colonial movement to an ‘inert mass of feudal culture which had been generating loyalism and depositing it in every kind of power relations for centuries before the British conquest’. Bhakti, unlike Obedience, operates basically in a servile mode, and, even in its recasting in nationalist terms by Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the overtly authoritarian and servile registers of it survived. Guha cites the case of the relationship of husband and wife, in which, theoretically, Bhakti was supposed to be mutual but, in practice, as its expositor Bankimchandra concluded, ‘the husband provides the first step in the access to God. . . . [T]o a Hindu woman, her husband is god’; ‘Bhakti [towards] the husband is the first step towards Bhakti for God’.53

Finally, Guha makes the point that the notion of Rightful Dissent, which drew on an important current of English liberalism going back to John Locke and which later informed the Indian civil disobedience movement, coexisted with the notion of Dharmic Protest, which was manifested in subaltern uprisings of all kinds. These uprisings – such as the ones studied by Guha in Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency – were not premised on the notion of citizens’ rights but on the defence of Dharma and were founded in values such as vichara, a providential justice having nothing to do with the English law courts, and nyaya, legitimacy conferred by the ethics of Dharma far removed from secular political morality in any modern sense. Gandhi attempted to link the two by grafting the Western notions of liberty and citizens’ rights to Dharmic Protest, the result being a hybrid category called satya.54 Mass protest in colonial India, whether the Swadeshi movement or the later civil disobedience movements, used mechanisms associated with the dharmic order, including social boycott. Indian liberals such as Surendranath Bannerji and Aurobindo Ghosh involved in the Swadeshi movement not only condoned but also actively promoted this kind of boycott. While Gandhi set his face firmly against it, he nonetheless indirectly winked at its practice. The overall point that Guha makes is that ‘Indian liberalism, thanks to the rather

52 D.D. Kosambi, quoted in Guha 1997, p. 47.
53 Quoted in Guha 1997, p. 53.
peculiar conditions of its development within colonial power relations... belonged to an ideological and cultural category altogether distinct from its Western prototype.'

Why, Guha asks, did this peculiar socio-political formation take shape and prove so durable? ‘Why two paradigms not just one? Why did the establishment of British paramountcy in South Asia fail to overcome the resistance of its indigenous culture to the point of being forced into a symbiosis? Why did the universalising drive of the world’s ‘most advanced capitalist culture’ fail to match the strength and fullness of its political dominion by assimilating, if not abolishing, the precapitalist culture of its subject people? After all, it is that drive to abolish, rather than settling in amongst other, or older, forms of culture that gave the bourgeoisie its hegemonic power?’

Guha’s explanation rests on the idea that colonialism could only continue in power in the subcontinent on condition of failing to live up to the bourgeoisie’s universalising mission. Emerging as it did not by ‘internal process’ but as an ‘external force’, it was doubly alienated from the local culture, both in its becoming and in its being. As an ‘absolute externality’, colonial rule was structured like a despotism, with no ‘mediating depths’, no space for transactions between the will of the rulers and the ruled. This produced what Guha calls a décalage, the insertion of the world’s most dynamic power of the contemporary world into the power relations of a world ‘still living in the past’.

The colonial state was an anachronism embodying the paradox of an advanced bourgeois culture ‘regressing’ from its universalist impulse to compromise with the ‘precapitalist particularism under colonial conditions of its own making’. The end result of the working out of the two paradigms described above is an immensely complex social formation that acquires its specificity from ‘the braiding, collapsing, echoing, and blending of these idioms’ in such a way as to baffle all descriptions of this process as either a dynamic modernity overwhelming an inert tradition, or ‘the mechanical stapling of a progressive Western liberalism to an unchanging Eastern feudal culture’.

The Indian bourgeoisie, for its part, had no wish (or, one would assume, capability) to destroy this social formation whatever the private unease of some. In this ‘mediocre liberalism’, the watchwords were ‘compromise and accommodation’.

The issue for us here is not whether Guha’s characterisation of colonial rule and the colonial social formation is an accurate one. It is, at any rate, not incompatible with some earlier Marxist positions of Indian society as ‘semi-feudal’, though some scholars might quibble with the use of the term feudal to describe the ancien régime in India. We might simply note that his counterposition of colonial rule as a dominance without hegemony with contemporary Europe as the hegemonic rule of the bourgeoisie

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56 Guha 1997, p. 63.
57 Guha 1997, pp. 63–5, emphasis added.
58 Guha 1997, p. 61.
59 Guha 1997, p. 5.
is much too stark. The rhetoric of The Communist Manifesto, a sombrely triumphalist account of European capital and its agents sweeping all obstacles before them, masks a much less heroic reality. Historians such as Arno Mayer have pointed to the survivals of all kinds of ‘feudal habits’, not to mention historic compromises with feudalism in all parts of Europe even after the devastation of World War I. The difference could have been more one of degree than of kind. Further, Guha’s method seems to imply that the secular freedoms associated with the West were a free gift from the bourgeoisie to the people, rather than hard-won, if only partial, rights. Between the intent of the European bourgeoisie to sweep away feudal powers, institutions, and habits, on the one hand, and the institution of a modern secular polity embodying real rights for citizens, on the other, lay a trail of broken bodies caused by war, revolution, and counterrevolution.

It is, therefore, quite unclear under what conditions the universalising impulses of the bourgeoisie seem to have the amount of play they do in Western Europe. How deep does the ‘internal process’ have to be, and how far does it extend? Eurocentric historians have tended to posit the rational rights-bearing individual, ostensibly a uniquely European phenomenon, as the heroic subject of their history. Guha’s statement that ‘an uncoercive state is a liberal absurdity’ is perhaps a caution against getting carried away by a stark Europe-Other contrast, but that insight is not developed in his comparative historiography. That is a rather important lacuna for a historian who draws his inspiration from a historical-materialist methodology.

II.v. Why historicise?

Historicism, for Chakrabarty, is the attempt by proponents of post-Enlightenment thought to universalise the tyranny of homogeneous, empty, disenchanted time. There are other ways of experiencing time than as a relentless sequence of secular cause and effect, other ways of worlding the earth as it were. To think of European modernity, he says, is to think of modern industry, technology, medicine, legal systems – into which are coded not only a transition narrative but also the above-mentioned homogeneous, empty, disenchanted time. Subaltern studies cannot accept the ‘imperious code’ embedded in this kind of narrative of progress in time. In Chapter 3 of Provincializing Europe, Chakrabarty more or less tears up the idea that ‘subaltern’ refers to any particular social group or groups. We must assume that anyone who world the earth, experiences time, and so on, in ways that challenge the imperious

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60 Mayer 1981.
61 MacFarlane 1987.
63 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 34.
64 Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 93–4.
code of historicism is a subaltern. Social location itself is virtual; it is the tyranny of homogeneous, empty time that is the target of theoretical underlabouring. The practice of subaltern history is to take history, the code, to its limits in order to make its ‘unworking’ visible. And, so, we must stoutly resist the call to ‘Always historicize...the one absolute and we may even say “transhistorical” imperative of all dialectical thought’.65

But, is the matter so simply resolved? Chakrabarty himself comes close to arguing that modern history and historical consciousness are material necessities, since bureaucracies and other instruments of governmentality can only hear particular types of argument coded with the ubiquity of the commodity economy and its categories, in which abstract time and labour are key categories. Subaltern classes will need this knowledge in their struggle for social justice. But, one might argue, in response, that there is surely more than a crudely ‘decisionist’ approach to history. To think of modern industry, technology, medicine, and other innovations is, in fact, to come face-to-face with the question: ‘[W]hat earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive powers slumbered in the lap of social labour’?66 It is the real, visible and experienced material difference that opened up in the course of the nineteenth century between industrial and non-industrial societies that continues to sustain the ‘transition narrative’, not just some imperious code of post-Enlightenment modernity.

The history of lack/deficiency, and other cognate terms, the ulterior leitmotif of much of the historiography of the former European colonies, locates itself in an obscure realisation that what unleashes the powers of social labour lies not in the economic sphere – powers that can be released by mere policy measures – but in the course and aftermath of sweeping social transformations, that is in the disturbing (for some) sphere of radically undecidable class struggles. The modernity that Chakrabarty attacks is the modernity of liberal theorists like John Stuart Mill and of their latter-day modernisation counterparts, in which ‘traditional’ societies are transformed into ‘modern’ ones by the diffusion of Western institutions and practices. There is another concept of modernity, in plotting whose co-ordinates Perry Anderson notes the coexistence of significant elements of ancien régime culture and economy at a time when Europe was recognisably modern in the common sense of that term. There is no law that dictates an inevitable and inexorable movement away from those ancien-régime mores. If that does come to pass, it is by an act (or many acts) of political will, some of which, at any rate, originate not among the so-called revolutionary bourgeoisie but among workers and peasants, whose vision of an alternative to ancien-régime bondage is not the unfettered reign of capital but something far more radical. Freed

65 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 96.
from that constraint, bourgeois rule neither in its colonial nor postmodernist guises has any need for much more than a façade of rights, self-determination, and democracy. That radical popular political will is the subject of liberal and postcolonialist amnesia.

Chakrabarty makes much of the fact that Indian historians are expected to know the works of their European counterparts, that is that European history is part of the archive of Indian history but the reverse is not true. In fact, the ‘Third World’, when it is of interest at all to European historians, is as a living fossil of social forms long ago consigned to the museum of history in Europe itself. The point is well taken but the issue is how effectively he (or for that matter, Guha) uses the European archive to write history. The Europe that Chakrabarty invokes is, by his own admission, hyperreal; Europe’s modernity appears as some mythical Protestant ideal filtered through Locke and Hume. Huge chunks of counterhegemonic thought in Europe, not to mention political economy, much less the critique of political economy, are simply ignored. What emerges is a caricature, one that is likely to be greeted with derision by European historians. At best, Chakrabarty seems able to give us vignettes of Bengali life, which I shall address in the section on orientalism and nativism below, constituted around terms such as ‘difference’, ‘excess’, and ‘plenitude’.68 Behind these, lies an ‘Indian’ tradition, alive and unbroken in both theoretical and practical registers before the colonial encounter, but which now sustains itself in quotidian practice and, to some extent, literature and art, without the benefit of theoretical and hermeneutic reasoning. It is the survival of this tradition in however attenuated, if not debased, forms that Chakrabarty is at pains to recuperate. All those other things that social historians have been, and remain interested in – political, economic, and social struggles, which utilise Enlightenment and Enlightenment-derived, not to mention a variety of ‘indigenous’, forms of thought and action – become, in this account, background noise. The ways in which modernity is constructed in each dynamic context, reshaped by a variety of political tendencies, responding to, articulating or obfuscating the understanding of a world buffeted by capital and colonial rule are, at best, faintly visible.

There is, of course, a more interesting way to come to grips with modernity, though this essay can only indicate it in the broadest outline. It would involve, as the epigraph to this paper states, ‘a more global characterization of the secret affinities between those apparently autonomous and unrelated domains, and of the rhythms and hidden sequences of things we normally remember only in isolation and one by one’.69 This capacity to think in large, conceptual, systemic terms – arguably made possible by the ‘in-between, or both together’ character of the modern, as noted above – is seemingly lost to our age, the postmodern moment of capitalism, a ‘purer and more homogeneous

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69 Jameson 1991, p. 400, emphasis added.
expression of classical capitalism’, in which, as Perry Anderson argues, ‘the possibility of other social orders’ has all but vanished.70

The resistance in postmodern and postcolonial theory to ‘globalising or totalising concepts’, such as the mode of production (or the dreaded transition narrative), are a function of precisely the ‘universalisation of capitalism’ of the post-World War II epoch. As Jameson puts it, ‘where everything is henceforth systemic the very notion of system seems to lose its reason for being, returning only by way of a “return of the repressed” in the more nightmarish form of the “total system” fantasized by Weber or Foucault or the 1984 people’.71 The rejection of the ‘pernicious categories of a totalizing Western Marxism’ – not limited to, but finding its most active use in the arsenal of the postcolonial theoretist – and the preference for the ‘discrete genealogies of, say, Michel Foucault’72 emerge as much from this historical context, as from any desire to achieve a sense of identity ‘uncontaminated by universalist Eurocentric concepts and images’.73

They emerge, too, at a moment when the ideologies of progress and modernisation, whose human and ecological costs have often been fearful, and whose results have been dubious to say the least, have gone into a terminal crisis. Furthermore, terms such as conservatism and revolution seemingly no longer mean what they did and indeed have no clear referents. The spatial economy of global capitalism is now so ‘jumbled up’ that those in the pathways of global capitalism undergo development, growth, commodification; others find it virtually impossible to do so. Some, in the erstwhile Third World, participate in a new global culture, while others turn to finding solace in ‘cultural havens as far apart from one another as they were at the origins of modernity, even though they may be watching the same TV shows’.74

Postcolonial theory, the result of the arrival of the Third-World intellectual in the First-World academy, as one of its more trenchant critics Arif Dirlik notes, has ‘rearranged the global situation, objectively quite pessimistic, into a celebration of the end of colonialism’, and the necessary tasks for the near future as ‘the abolition of its ideological and cultural legacy’.75 However, it is difficult to understand how this ideological and cultural legacy (or Eurocentrism, as some prefer to call it) comes to have this special significance in abstraction from capitalism’s foundational status. Without the heavy

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71 Jameson 1991, pp. 405–6. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the Enlightenment represents Western culture’s attempt to utilise a ‘controlling rationality’ to dominate sensuous existence, a process which found its fullest expression in the eighteenth century. However, they also maintained that, far from ensuing the progress of reason and emancipation, Enlightenment reason has resulted in the ‘return of the repressed’ in the form of fascism and the other barbarisms of the twentieth century, see Schott 1996. Ironically, perhaps, Jameson uses the phrase, return of the repressed, to refer to the capitalist system itself, amnesia about which seems to characterise so much poststructuralist thinking.
73 During 1987, p. 33.
74 Dirlik 1994, p. 353.
75 Dirlik 1994, p. 343.
artillery of capitalism in its imperialist guise, Eurocentrism, Dirlik cogently points out, would have been simply another ethnocentrism comparable to the Chinese, the Indian, or for that matter, ‘the most trivial tribal solipsism’. An exclusive focus on Eurocentrism as a cultural, ideological or discursive factor ‘blurs the power relationship that dynamized it’ and ‘endowed it with hegemonic persuasiveness’.76 Postcolonial theory fails to explain why Eurocentrism, in contrast to local and regional ethnocentrisms, was able to define modern global history and ‘define itself as the universal aspiration and end of history’. It merely ‘throws the cover of culture over material relationships, as if one had little to do with the other . . . and diverts attention from the criticism of capitalism to the criticism of Eurocentric ideology’.77

How does postcolonial theory put its agenda of provincialising Europe into motion? Like other postcolonial critics who claim to be influenced by Marxism while resisting its imperious code, Chakrabarty has an odd way of doing so. Insofar as anything of Marxism survives the ‘anti-colonial spirit of gratitude’ with which he embraces Heidegger – fascist warts and all – it is translated into a poststructuralist language, in which the universalist ambitions of Marxism are deconstructed, decentred, and so on.78 Unlike earlier Marxists, who had perforce to render Marxism into a local vernacular – Dirlik gives the example of Mao Zedong thought; one can think of a host of other equally important translations – the postcolonialist theorists’ repudiation of practical transformative challenges leads ‘not to its dispersion into local vernaculars but a return to another First World language with universalist epistemological pretensions’.79 Anti-universalist universalism is no less foundational than its predecessor, and probably more so, we might imagine, from the sheer lack of any need to render it intelligible to those who have been on the wrong side of imperialism and its Enlightenment-derived ideologies.

Why historicise? Because ‘difference’, ‘excess’, ‘plenitude’ turn out to be dubious slogans after all; because ‘a system that constitutively produces differences [still] remains a system’; and because knowledge of the system might be an indispensable ally to overcome the ‘seemingly blind and natural laws of socio-economic fatality’. If the Third-World theorist in the First World objects that ‘something precious and existential, something fragile and unique about our singularity, will be lost irretrievably when we find out that we are just like everybody else . . . so be it; we might as well know the worst’. That objection is ‘the primal form of existentialism (and phenomenology), and it is rather the emergence of such anxieties that needs first to be explained’.80

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77 Ibid.
78 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 255.
In light of the preceding considerations, it is perhaps not so unexpected that Chakrabarty should write about other social orders, while adopting a theoretical stance appropriate to a moment of world history when the possibility of other social orders besides or beyond the planetary hegemony of capital seems, to many if not most, simply unimaginable. The social order that Chakrabarty offers as the Other of Western modernity is, at best, a reactionary one, even on the terms of the founding ideas of subaltern studies. His theory and polemics implicitly rule out a progressive, indeed revolutionary, alternative to really existing capitalism.

III. Orientation and nativism

III.i. The bumpy road to nativism

Recall that, in analysing the condition of colonial modernity in India, Guha employs four pairs of concepts, each with a European and an Indic element, that together constitute the elements of D/S: Order and Danda, Improvement and Dharma, Obedience and Bhakti, Rightful Dissent and Dharmic Protest. In doing so, Guha tries to show the hybrid qualities of Indian modernity, a function of the arrival and social implantation of a foreign and secular idiom in a land that, by his argument, had not known any autochthonous movement in the direction of a secular modernity. It is unclear, from Guha’s account, what precise weight to assign the possible ways in which this hybrid and combined modernity came about: was the incorporation of Indic elements, for example, a strategic move on the part of the colonial rulers to utilise Indian idioms familiar to their subjects so as better to control them, or was it an attempt by the Indian upper classes to assert an autonomous domain by refurbishing parts of their own tradition? How should this issue figure in an Indian historiography of India?

Insofar as Guha discusses the Indic elements in colonial modernity, he seems to be flirting with some stock orientalist themes. Apparently, the Indian elements trace an unbroken lineage back to the laws of Manu; they can be referred exclusively to a ‘Hindu’ (Brahmanic?) tradition, and contribute via ‘the braiding, collapsing, echoing, and blending of these [Indic and European] idioms’ to the immense complexity of colonial modernity in India. Even more problematically, this Indian tradition seems to have rooted itself in popular culture so seamlessly and thoroughly that we can understand many aspects of peasant insurgency by recourse to the ‘theoretical’ insights revealed by a mastery of what is, arguably, an elite tradition of thought, and whose reach and symbolic power in the precolonial past is questionable. Of course, this sits awkwardly with Guha’s more straightforward use of a transition narrative and with

81 Guha 1997, p. 61. Is colonial modernity more complex than European modernity, which undergoes a transition from feudalism to capitalism, shedding the ancien-régime values along the way? This seems more rhetoric than analysis, since such statements can only be made in a proper comparative framework.
his unabashed insinuation of a lack/inadequacy in the Indian social formation, ignores the implications of the consciously developed anachronisms of colonial modernity, and comes uncomfortably close to the organicist fantasies of the Right about ‘tradition’.

Guha traces the evolution of both modern Bengali fiction and historiography – replacing the structure of epic and myth with a secular, rational account of events in ‘homogeneous, empty time’ – to ‘a decisive victory in that struggle to free the Indian past from the coils of epic time which had begun with the pandits of Fort William College’.82 It was from the English that Bengali intellectuals learnt to rethink their own past according to a post-Enlightenment rationalist view of history; and it was from the influence of the same source that a modern Bengali prose began. Once that happened, however, Guha is convinced that a Bengali historiography of Bengal – which he insists on referring to as an Indian historiography of India – is likely to be ‘more sensitive, and interesting, than anything a foreigner’ could turn out, not only due to the ‘superior linguistic capabilities’ of native speakers but also because the latter have a variety of other factors going in their favour, such as extra-linguistic beliefs, cognitive structures, and a myriad of other factors that ‘interact with underlying competence to determine actual performance’.83 Presumably, Bengalis writing about non-Bengali, but still Indian, history would have no such advantage, and, presumably again, some of this advantage would be lost when Bengali historians of Bengal write in English, and all this without even asking where the boundaries of Bengal, let alone India, begin and end.

Be that as it may, Guha proposes to drive this theme home, citing the introduction to Nilmani Basak’s *Bharatbarsher Ithias* (1857–8) to the effect that Indian history written in English is not only prejudiced and ill-informed about the Hindu past, that students who read them at school were led to believe that ‘the religions and customs of this country were all based on falsehood and that the ancient Hindus were a stupid lot’, but also that such writings utterly lacked aesthetic quality.84 In the second half of the nineteenth century, Guha’s hero Bankimchandra Chatterjee carried Basak’s concerns forward: ‘There is no history of Bengal... There has to be a history of Bengal.... Who is to write it?... Anyone who is a Bengali has to write it’, suggesting that the need to establish an autonomous historiography was also a sign of ‘an urgent, insistent, though incipient nationalism’.85

Colonial education as ‘a code of culture’ and ‘a code of power’, coming together in the English-educated Indian, opens up a chasm between the latter and those educated in Bengali, even translation from one to the other unable to render their ideas mutually compatible. English education, we are told, cut the English-educated Indians off from

85 Guha 1997, p. 201.
their ‘own tradition’ and, by the same token, made the ‘their own past inaccessible to them as history’.86 Far from promoting the development of a distinctively Indian historiography of India, Anglophone education ended up as a vehicle of ideologies that hindered it. Writing novels and histories in Bengali was tantamount to the making of a nation, a potentially transformative, if as yet inchoate, use of fiction and history to challenge colonialist attempts at dominance. Guha continues: ‘A movement, with its springs rooted deeply in that relation in which man as species being has with his [sic.] natural language, it was no more than a reflex action of the will. The passions it inspired and the metaphors of motherhood used to describe it, were all evidence of its rootedness in such a primordial connection’.87 Stripped of any mention of its class content and somewhat dubious political ambitions, Guha’s attempt to theorise the nineteenth-century creation of a standardised literary Bengali out of numerous dialect forms88 – the vehicle, one might say, of the bhadralok’s own feeble and incomplete attempt at hegemony, a failure Guha himself admits in so many words earlier in the book89 – in idealist and organicist language brings Guha’s narrative within shouting distance of the nativism of blood and soil, so popular among the petty-bourgeois Right in Europe and India from the late nineteenth century onwards. In fact, his exegesis of the role of the matribasha (mother language) in the project of nation-building is uncannily similar to Sadik Al-Azm’s notion of ‘Orientalism-in-Reverse’, in which it is the language that speaks the ‘Oriental’ not vice versa.90

So determined is Guha in these pages to portray the foreigner as the expropriator in need of expropriation as a precondition for the efflorescence of a nationalist historiography, that he does not pause to examine the implications of the dominant (upper-caste) Hindu motifs in Basak’s and Bankimchandra’s writings, a curious lapse of memory for one who had earlier chastised nationalism for employing the idiom of Dharna, which effectively drove a wedge between Hindus and Muslims, upper castes and Namastudas, and so on.91 The foreigner, supposedly as alien to the historiography of India as she was to the process of nation formation, could quite easily be the Muslim (in a Hindu-nationalist rendering of Indian history); Bankimchandra’s equation of former glory to the glory of our forefathers could simply be the prototype of one of the stock images of right-wing Hindutva-inspired nationalism. At least in this form, an incipient Indian historiography of India turns out to be the short road to communalism. Orientalism-in-reverse, xenophobic nativism (unable to separate the foreigner from the coloniser), Bengal standing in for India (as empty a

85 Guha 1997, p. 190.
88 Bhattacharyya 1987.
89 Guha 1997, p. 151.
90 Al-Azm 1981.
‘gesture of pretension and domination’ as any white-supremacist universalism) become the components of an Indian historiography of India, and those are, to say the least, somewhat Pyrrhic victories to be celebrating. Guha’s concept of an Indian historiography of India seems to be off to a rather sorry start.

It is perhaps some ulterior discomfort with this romantic and idealist foray into nationalist historiography that causes Guha to draw attention to *bahubol* (literally, ‘muscle power’, used in this case to signify the power of armed struggle) as an important ingredient of Bankimchandra’s historiography and thence to an ‘Indian historiography of India’. The concept of *bahubol* stood, in Bankimchandra’s thought, for ‘that rat-hole which allowed history to flood into what would have been a banked-up and interiorized nationalism’. *Bahubol* was predicated on an object and the power of arms was power only ‘in the sense and to the extent that it had an object for its exercise’. The object was none other than colonial rule and the power of arms an essential condition for a critique of the necessity of colonialism. Guha’s point seems to be that a historiography of colonial India would ‘qualify as genuinely Indian and autonomous only if it allowed bahubol to operate as a decisive element of that critique’.\(^92\)

He continues that, in doing so, Bankimchandra problematised Indian historiography at a higher level of politics than had been the case so far in the liberal tendencies of Indian historiography. Above all, it ‘armed Indian historiography with a principle that would allow it to expropriate the expropriators by making the Indian people, constituted as a nation, the subject of their own history’. A genuinely national history – *prakrita itihas* – would address the ‘slander against Indians’ by setting the record straight on *bahubol*.\(^93\)

Ignoring, for the moment, the curious logic of this argument, Guha nonetheless notes, though he does not seriously come to grips with the implications of, a ‘slippage’ in the object of *bahubol*. He obsessively debates why Bankimchandra hardly deals with armed conflict against the British, while mentioning many instances of it against Muslims. The simple and sufficient answer might be that he thought British rule was providential and good for India. But Guha’s apologetic response on behalf of Bankimchandra (and, by extensions, more recent Hindu extremists?) is to say that ‘the force of ideology [had] brought about a series of displacements to make the Musulman rather than the British the object of *bahubol* and the remote pre-colonial past rather than the recent colonial past its temporal site’. Putting *bahubol* in the wrong place denied it a role in the process of *jatipratishtha* [nationality formation] ‘which it must have without which the formation of nationhood, hence the writing of history, would not be possible in the era of imperialism’. Nationhood, and indeed nationalist historiography, cannot assert their autonomy without a recourse to arms. Guha

\(^{92}\) Guha 1997, pp. 205.

concludes by noting that what was absent in Bankimchandra’s writing was overcome by the later development of a kind of *samizdat* literature in the early twentieth century.94 He does not discuss precisely how such a *samizdat* literature actually contributed to an autonomous historiography of India, whether a Marxist historiography of India owes much to the theme of recourse to arms, or even the content – fascist, anarchist, socialist, communist – of the various attempts to cut history’s Gordian knots through *bahubol*. It is only worth pointing out that mere recourse to arms is insufficient to do the radically remedial work assigned by Guha to *bahubol*. It has minimally to be a principled recourse for socially transformative ends, not some cult of violence à la Tilak, Savarkar, Golwalkar and the RSS goon squads that regularly terrorised minorities in colonial India and continue to do so in the name of correcting imagined historical wrongs.

An Indian consciousness expressed in political and creative writings speaks in two registers simultaneously: the romantic-rejectionist register whereby the symbols of Western modernity themselves become the target of distancing the Orient from the Occident, and a civic-universalist register in which the absence or negation of the principles underlying those symbols in everyday life become the subject of a positive critique of colonialism.95 In the writings of Tagore, this latter position is expressed as disillusionment: ‘The idea is fast gaining ground in India as well as in England that European principles are meant for Europe alone. Indians are so very different that the principles of civilization are not suited for their needs’.96 Difference was, of course, a stock theme of what has since come to be called orientalism. A bourgeois nationalism that aspired to, and to some extent succeeded in, leading a mass movement against colonialism addressed this question of rights (‘European principles’) in a very partial and incomplete way. As Guha himself notes, it often tended to substitute discipline, both external and self-discipline, for the seemingly intractable problem of developing a radical enough agenda to mobilise the masses, tolerating in the meantime all sorts of carryovers of inequalities and inequities from ‘feudal culture’.97 As such, ‘it was a bumpy road which the elite had to negotiate in its ride to hegemony. It never arrived’. *Bahubol*, we must imagine, might have helped it do so, but, again, what kind of force of arms, organised by whom, behind what ideology and programme? Guha’s failure to engage this issue in full makes *Dominance without Hegemony* incomplete and the discussion of *bahubol* merely rhetorical, when it is not quite problematic.

The implicit contrast – a progressive European bourgeoisie that did arrive – is questionable. Guha himself concedes that, even in Europe, the capitalist mode of production – and hence bourgeois hegemony – did not triumph without ‘encountering,
combating, overcoming, and yet in a certain sense yielding to the feudal mode'. It is the last characteristic that requires serious analysis, not at the level of Europe-wide generalisation, but in the kind of detailed historiography that Guha demands for India. Surely a parallel historiography would illustrate the numerous failures of bourgeois hegemony, not only in the period 1789–99, but, more spectacularly, in 1848, 1871, not to mention 1914–18 and through the entire inter-war period in Central and Eastern Europe. Workers, peasants and women in many parts of Europe may have felt, rather like Tagore and Gandhi, that ‘universal’ rights were not intended for them. If they, in the end after many detours, culs-de-sac, and some partially successful and many failed revolutions, achieved some measure of formal rights, it was not due to the kindness of the bourgeoisie but to their own resolute autonomous mobilisation. It is in the realm of social movements and class struggles that the proper sphere of comparative historiography lies. The place of bahubol in this sphere needs systematic investigation, its potentialities and limitations a more rigorous methodology than Guha supplies.

III.ii. Tattooed by the exotic

Chakrabarty, as noted, rejects the notion that modernity requires us to think exclusively in terms of a secular, disenchanted time in which history unfolds. He rejects the notion that gods and spirits are social facts and that the social somehow exists prior to them. Although the god of monotheism may have taken a few knocks, perhaps been declared dead in the nineteenth century, the gods and spirits of ‘superstition’ (in India and presumably many parts of the ‘Third World’) are, he assures us, alive and well. Chakrabarty claims to take gods and spirits as ‘existentially coeval’ with the human and to think from the assumption that the question of being human involves the question of being with gods and spirits. Being human means – quoting Ramachandra Gandhi – discovering the possibility of ‘calling upon God without first being under an obligation to establish his reality’. The Santal rebel, facing death, could offer in his defence the plea ‘I did as my god told me to’, which Chakrabarty concludes is about the consciousness of the Santal and about the Santal as our ‘immediate contemporary’, a figure illuminating a life possibility for the present. This existential coevalness of gods and spirits allows Indians to mobilise anti-historical notions of the past that are fully integrated into their modernity. There is, in other words, no way to consign the Santal’s consciousness to the museum of history, while privileging the secular consciousness of disenchanted rebels for the present and future. They both coexist as facets of modernity.

98 Guha 1997, p. 178.
99 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 16.
100 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 108.
By themselves, these claims are quite banal. People who invoke god in everyday life do so without having to prove his/her prior reality. This is a fairly ordinary definition of faith. As for modernity, one of its ‘essential horizons’ is precisely the coexistence of different social and imaginative orders. It is the further claims that Chakrabarty makes on behalf of the supposed existential coevalness of the secular and the spiritual world that begin to unravel his claims on behalf of the difference underlying Indian modernity. For example, he distinguishes between ‘good’ history and ‘subversive’ history. A good history, trying to assimilate the Santal’s explanation of what made him rebel, would recast his explanation into a causal mode in which his thakur (god) would be given a materialist reading to the ends of privileging a purely secular, perhaps socio-economic, account of the rebellion itself. If we see the causality attributed to thakur as massive self-estrangement, then we have merely done ‘good history’. A subversive history, on the other hand, would take the Santal’s account literally, leave open the possibility of loose ends which will not need to be tied into a neat secular knot, thus giving us a peek into a very different form of thinking about causality other than the relentless secular cause-and-effect sequence of much modern historiography. Subversive history, it turns out, is nothing more than a proxy for what Chakrabarty elsewhere calls the time of the gods. It is unclear what has been subverted, and in favour of what? If the end of this kind of history is causal and political agnosticism, what happens to the project of social justice? If it is epistemic charity, then why is it not patronising and orientalist? One is left with the suspicion that the time of the gods becomes, in this type of account, a mere placeholder which can be replaced by whatever scraps of orientalism are ready to hand.

Let us suppose, for the moment, that we were confronted, not with a subaltern rebel, but with a fundamentalist Zionist who rationalised his role in the occupation of the West Bank by saying that God had given that land to Israel. Would we extend to him the same epistemic charity, the same causal and political agnosticism as Chakrabarty wants us to in the case of the Santal? Both statements seem to abdicate responsibility, both partake of the logic of extreme authoritarianism, utter absolutism. On what grounds would we differentiate the statement of the land-grabbing Zionist supported by his government and the world’s superpower from that of the Santal rebel, since this particular brand of ‘subversive’ history gives no basis for such comparative judgement, since all is difference, excess, and plenitude? In point of fact, neither the existential coevalness of the time of the gods and the spirits nor calling upon god without having to establish his/her reality form any part of Chakrabarty’s methodology in Provincializing Europe; they are merely empty gestures. Despite his disclaimers, he does offer a fairly straightforward anthropology of faith, if not of

religion, of the forms in which gods and the ineffable are invoked, the occasions when they are, and what those invocations signify, written by a metropolitan historian with a relentlessly outsider’s point of view.

Not surprisingly, in the last four chapters of Provincializing Europe, supposedly written under the sign of Heidegger, we neither get the kind of insight into Bengali urban life that a ‘good’ historical approach might provide, nor even an inkling of what projects of social justice might have been developed out of nineteenth-century Bengali urbanism. There is no discussion of how Indian political, economic, and cultural ideas were, or could have been, mobilised for such projects. Those concerns are replaced by the more familiar trope of ‘Indian exceptionalism’. The endless spinning around on the notions of ‘difference’ and ‘excess’ seem mainly designed to spirit economic and social inequalities, injustice and oppression out of sight, or if occasionally brought into view quickly aestheticised and rendered unusable for any project of social justice. Indeed, Chakrabarty’s positive reading of hierarchy, images of worship, the thoroughgoing relativisation of patriarchy – all contribute to making modern city life in Bengal part of an exotic moral economy and the site of an apolitical difference and excess.

Two examples should suffice. Chapter 5, ‘Domestic Cruelty and the Birth of the Subject’, traces the emergence of the caste Hindu widow both as the object of much solicitude in Bengali writings of the colonial period and as a person with a complex emotional life, whose sufferings she herself could write about and about whom articles and books be written. How was the condition of the suffering Hindu widow presented in this newly emerging literature? Much of it seems to have been fairly straightforward calls for social reforms to ameliorate the condition of the widow, often accompanied by analyses of the problems posed by Hindu customs and joint-family life. For Chakrabarty, however, the need to avoid ‘good’ history is so insistent that he proceeds to set aside these concerns, or the voices of the widows themselves, except for the odd paragraph here and there.103

He is much more concerned to show that the plight of the Hindu widow came to be articulated within the field constituted by two spheres of thought: one, the Enlightenment sphere of natural sentiments, in which reason plays an important part in regulating ‘blind custom’, thus releasing a human capacity to experience sorrow for the plight of those who have been subject to especially poor treatment; the other, the field of ‘Indian aesthetics’, which asserts that only the particularly large-hearted could feel the pain of others. The point is by now familiar, that the Enlightenment field of interpretation did not swamp the Indian but coexisted with it and that the suffering of widows – undeniable in both traditions – generated alternative and

103 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 139.
incompatible readings of human capabilities, endowments, and so on.\footnote{Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 127–9.} If we assume Chakrabarty’s reading of the situation to be correct, are we then to conclude that somehow the life of the Hindu widow was enriched, and her suffering lessened, by the coexistence of these traditions? If not, are we permitted to entertain a sneaking suspicion that Chakrabarty is more interested in aestheticising the widows’ sufferings and less in understanding the actual dynamics of social-reform movements that grew up in engagement with, and the interstices of, the two traditions?

Are we also to assume from this that the Enlightenment view was the generally accepted one in, say, eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Europe, that similar antinomies were not present in European modernity? If not, what is the point? The best that one can say is that in the unprecedented conditions created under colonial rule in Bengal, social spaces may have opened up that Indian aesthetics could not theorise and explain, so that some form of Enlightenment philosophy would become an important theoretical, political and social resource. Enlightenment philosophy was ready to hand to urban Bengalis and could be pressed into service; otherwise, undoubtedly, Indian aesthetics would have been wrestled to the ground in order to generate a new conceptual order adequate to the new situation. The appropriation and invention of traditions is very much a part of every modernity, with the Enlightenment itself, reinterpreted to suit, being one pole of it.

My second example, from Chapter 6 (‘Nation and Imagination’), takes up the question of the nation as imagined community and the specific connotations of imagination. Chakrabarty is keen to show that India was not imagined according to some European conception alone, but owed a lot to the animation, in new circumstances, of an ‘ancient’ Indian tradition. One component of modern Indian thought about the nation is informed by incorporating European thought in which the imagination is seen as a ‘mentalist’ construct in which an active, thinking historicising subject participates in the construction of the imagined community; the other is the Indian component, darshan, a ‘subjectless practice’ which implies the cessation of the world – the ordinary historical world, samsara – and its sudden replacement by a new dimension of reality. The enjoyment of the rasa [essence] of nationalism requires, in modern India, the coming together of both traditions. Chakrabarty insists that ‘plural and heterogeneous ways of seeing . . . raise questions about the analytical reach of the European category “imagination”’.\footnote{Chakrabarty 2000, p. 174.} This is an arguable assertion; one might suggest that Indian bourgeois thought of the nineteenth century is actively inventing a tradition, or creating multiple and ever-more complicated examples of sophistry, rather than simply recapitulating some ancient tradition.
Chakrabarty is further interested in linking the peasant mode of imagining and seeing with the ancient (elite) tradition of Sanskrit aesthetics. Thus, he asserts, the ‘Bharat Mata’ of the peasants – as opposed to the ‘India’ of the intelligentsia – is imbued with this age-old practice of *darshan*, and refers to ‘practices, aesthetic and spiritual, sedimented into language itself and not referring to concepts that the mind elaborates or that contain experiential truths’, and that such practices were the ‘legitimate ground of peasant nationalism’.¹⁰⁶ We are being asked to believe that an ancient Indian tradition shared by elite and peasants alike distinguished not only Indians from Europeans but surely, by implication, Hindus from Muslims, and that this was true for all the subcontinent’s authentic Hindu denizens through time. This is, despite Chakrabarty’s earlier polemic against historicism, a sheerly dogmatic statement of conservative historicism and orientalism, wrapped up in the kind of organicist fantasy that subaltern studies seems to be increasingly drawn to. What is the price to pay for setting aside a secular causal account of the national imagination?

For a start, the ‘Bharat Mata’ of the peasants could be the earth beneath one’s feet or the whole world. Why should we call this nationalism, since nationalism carries the charge of belonging in a community constituted precisely by shared notions of the past, and some vicariously experienced commonality with people one will never meet, some notion of boundaries, and so on. Educated nationalists such as Tagore, Nehru and others might use *darshan* self-consciously to indicate an equivalence or difference – both should be possible – with other, Enlightenment-influenced theories of nationalism. But, short of systematic investigation, one cannot summarily suggest that there is some organic, class-indifferent tradition that binds all Hindus together. Further, what notion of ‘imagination’ corresponds to the realist mode, even if we know what corresponds to the poetic? In fact, the nationalist imagination à la Benedict Anderson, contains both the notion of origins and time, therefore history, in some sense, and the suspension of time itself.¹⁰⁷ In the latter mode, the nationalist imagination dwells in an unhistorical present that connects individuals into a community regardless of subjective will; or a timeless collective Being that suspends the very notion of origins. Via its poets, and secular priests, the nation becomes an almost sacred entity experienced in moments of devotion, when the rational, critical faculties are suspended and one submits to fancy. These facets of the nationalist imagination might suggest that the imagination is itself a multi-faceted thing to be investigated in each historical context for what it can reveal about the poetry and pathos of nationalism. But Chakrabarty wants so much to wring the maximum mileage out of difference and excess that he must ransack every bit of Sanskrit aesthetics that he can instantly muster to press his case, even if that involves, ironically, arguing within precisely the enclosures

of the orientalism and nativism bequeathed by the colonial legacy he otherwise wishes to challenge.

Chakrabarty’s desire to invert the terms of the ‘transition’ narrative and for lack/inadequacy substitute plenitude/creativity may have a soothing sound for a Western audience steeped in the clichés of multiculturalism. For sidewalk-dwellers in Calcutta, this would simply be a cruel joke at their expense. Despite his disclaimers, Chakrabarty’s book is about translating the Bengali middle-class world for their Western counterparts. Conveniently, Provincializing Europe glosses over the patriarchal, anti-minority, anti-Untouchable sentiments of that world, and emphasises the dreamy, non-end-oriented activities such as adda. This is an Orient an occidental could learn to like, patronise, and perhaps even exploit in the age of globalisation without fear of backlash. The occasional mention of poverty, filth, and cruelty is curiously disembodied; this is a world in which poetry can ‘reconstitute’ harsh realities, in which poverty is mere deprivation – one supposes that the rich have an excess of wealth and there is some difference between them and the poor.  

We must remind ourselves that modernism emerges at, and draws it energies from, the conjunction of two sets of circumstances: the legacy of a still-living pre-industrial past and a situation in which a global (capitalist/colonial) system inscribes its imperatives at the very heart of human experience, those two circumstances, in turn, affecting artistic and political endeavours. This context in which both European and Indian modernism emerged enabled the creation of ‘remarkable new languages and forms’, ‘haunted by the exotic’ and ‘tattooed with foreign place names’. Perhaps what the historian of colonial modernism needs to understand is that the foreign and the exotic lie, not on the other side of the globe, as it were, but in the intimate proximity of the colony itself. Chakrabarty betrays a misunderstanding of colonial – in his case, Bengali – modernism when he suggests that ‘subaltern pasts act as a supplement to the historian’s pasts’, that they remind us of a ‘shared, unhistoricizable and ontological now’. This is to turn the subaltern into an exemplary character who illustrates the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous, an inhabitant of the psychic basement of bourgeois consciousness.

A conversation between Marx and Heidegger, in which the former is effectively hobbled with the help of the latter, cannot contribute to provincialising Europe. It only succeeds in spiriting the former’s radical critique of capitalism out of sight, rendering one’s understanding of economics, culture and politics vague, if not downright vapid. So does a method in which an idealised European modernity serves as the fixed point for variable others, whose variance from this idealised norm is precisely the measure of their subalternity. Overall, the result is a more complete totalisation

of Europe than any variant of modernisation theory has managed to achieve. The more complete the political paralysis into which *Provincializing Europe* sinks, the more comprehensive is the triumph of bourgeois-capitalist Europe. The Bengali stories add an exotic colouration to European proceedings, just as the world’s fairs of an earlier time used to bring in artefacts and people from the colonies to illustrate Europe’s pre- eminent stature.

One can grasp the nettle by at least outlining the ways in which a radical critique of political economy has sometimes been used to launch a devastating attack on European dominance and finding ways to deploy it at the margins of world capitalism. But, since Chakrabarty is so much more interested in using the hermeneutic thought of Heidegger against a critical body of thought whose object might be resolute resistance to the ‘seemingly blind and natural laws of socio-economic fatality’, the vignettes of Bengali life add up to an amnesia about, if not apology for, the exploitation, cruelty, indifference if not downright resistance to projects of social and economic justice in the various ranks of Bengali society itself. The cultural turn has become a winding sheet for many a social injustice.

III.iii. The unrenouncable project

For Marx, as for other radical thinkers, the dull compulsion of labour, the time discipline of capital, uniformity, homogeneous, empty time, etc., were so many tyrannies visited on us by the world-historical rule of capital. Even as they acknowledge the extent to which we now inhabit a much larger world than our predecessors, in which a world literature and world history have emerged, they note that these occur only in forms admissible under capital’s dominance. The universalism we experience is seriously truncated, incomplete and, for many, crippling, ‘incapable of resolving the problems engendered by its [capital’s] own expansion’. Progressive thinkers do not necessarily deny the potential in this situation for human emancipation, but we get from here to there by grinding it out, finding as much in common as humanly possible to gather up our militant-particularist oppositions for a mighty struggle. If successful, and humans manage to transform social life by transcending the rule of capital and its homogeneous empty time, the real potential for the full and free expressions of human energies will emerge.

The problem now is that, even as capital homogenises the exploitation of human energies in the pursuit of profit, it creates massive disorders on the world scale, and psychic, emotional crises to match. Identity politics steps in to assuage the damage, but it remains trapped within the very system of reproduction of capital, merely responding to, and inventing illusory escape hatches. The ‘unrenouncable Marxist

project’ remains a totalising comprehension of an apparently unlimited capitalism. The collective agency necessary to confront the disorder of world capitalism is missing; but, as Perry Anderson remarks, ‘a condition for its emergence is the ability to grasp it from within, as a system’.112

This ambition to grasp the lineaments of the global system from within – requiring at least a historiography of adequate scale – has been jettisoned by subaltern studies. All we are now offered is the potentiality of a futile resort to the serial local; everything being so particular and so mired in ‘ancient’ tradition that the connections between the seeming particularities is of secondary importance.113 Local agents produce local cultures and, presumably, therefore, local problems and miseries through their local agency. Capital is off the hook. Between subaltern studies’ preference for the fragment and the conjoined, multiple genealogies of modernity, on the one hand, and the Marxist concept of mode of production, on the other, there is an absolute political divide. The former not only posit a spurious parity to the different components of colonial modernity, but posit also their continued reproduction, and do nothing to address the colonial status of colonial modernity and its continued reproduction as a subordinated pole of a global relationship. Guha’s ‘Indian historiography of India’ tries to confront this problem early in *Dominance without Hegemony* but succumbs to the limitations of the very subalternity of the historiography that he advocates. The force of arms, after all, is directed, not against imperialism, but against the Muslim minority and is seemingly informed by the most parochial of concerns, a Bengali history of Bengalis.

For Marxists, the freedom to express one’s creative energies, to engage in limitless spirit-talk and science of the most weird and wonderful kind are things one must fight for, and will only follow when we have finally emancipated ourselves from the tyranny of capital.114 There is no imaginative escape that will yield us those benefits under the world-historical dominance of capital. Chakrabarty, however, has made good his escape, genealogies, fragments and all, by being able here-and-now to dwell simultaneously in the secular, empty time of post-Enlightenment modernity and in the time of the gods. What is a tough issue for Marxists, and one with no guarantee of success, has already been achieved by spiriting us to another place, India, where the potentialities of emancipation from capital are always-already available in living subaltern pasts linked to ancient traditions and Sanskrit aesthetics. One way to look at this escape is to think of postcolonial critics like Chakrabarty as already having been worked over by a postmodern global capitalism and now, as a result, in deep denial about the nature of the struggle ahead.

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113 Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 84–5.
114 Harvey 2000, particularly the appendix; Meszaros 1995.
IV. The uses of Marx

IV.i. The politics of methodology: abstract labour and the question of difference

Both Chakrabarty and Guha cite Marx, or use Marxist theory to buttress their historical and historiographical concerns. In Chakrabarty, this takes the form of seeing both the potentialities and limitations of Marx’s discussion of abstract labour for a history that avoids triumphalism and inevitability in favour of a history of perduring difference between cultures. In Guha, Marxist theory supplies, via notions of expropriation and hegemony, theoretical instruments for a critique of historiography that is quite amnesiac about imperialism and colonialism in the constitution of South-Asian modernity. However, the specific ways in which such concepts are mobilised and the ends to which they are employed raise serious questions about their uses of Marxist theory. Chakrabarty argues against the reductionism of the concept of abstract labour in Marx’s thought effectively that would limit history to History 1, the ‘self-expanding process of capital itself’, whereas, in fact, much of the history of people, he contends, is outside capital’s ‘life process’. Chakrabarty wishes to use the latter history (History 2) to show how Marx’s thought may be made to resist the idea that the logic of capital ‘sublates difference to itself’. How is ‘abstract labour’ to be conceptualised? It is the key, Chakrabarty asserts, to understanding how capital can encounter difference – presumably, different labour processes carried on under a variety of social arrangements – and still extract surplus-value from labour while abstracting labour from ‘all the social tissues in which it is embedded and which make any particular labor, even the labor of abstracting, concrete’. In a hypothetical ‘barbarian’ society, labourers might evince a practical ‘indifference to specific labor’ but this would not be visible to an analyst; in capitalist society, by contrast, the particular work of abstracting (from the specific qualitative aspects of each labour process and its output) would itself ‘become an element of most or all other kinds of concrete labor and would thus become visible to an observer’. Abstract labour, Chakrabarty maintains, is to be understood, in this sense, as a practical, performative category, rather than the result of a ‘large-scale mental operation’. He quotes Marx to the effect that

men do not bring the products of their labour into relation with each other as values because they see these objects merely as material integuments of homogeneous human labour. The reverse is true: by equating their different products to each other in exchange as values, they equate their different kinds of labour as human labour. They do this without being aware of it.

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Given this practical, performative character of the abstraction – that is, equalisation of different kinds of labour by abstracting from their particular useful qualities and qualitative differences in the conditions of their production – Chakrabarty concludes that Marx decodes abstract labour as a key to the ‘hermeneutic grid through which capital requires us to read the world’.¹¹⁸

However, even this somewhat dubious postmodernisation of Marx leaves Chakrabarty uneasy. For him, abstract labour is a problematic idea not only because of its homogenising effects, obliterating difference and subjecting many different entities and processes to a common substance, but also because the abstracting tendency gives us analytical histories which render supreme (and perhaps unquestionable) the universalising language of the social sciences. For Chakrabarty, this is to ignore ‘affective narratives of human belonging’, where life-forms ‘though porous to one another, do not seem exchangeable through a third term of equivalence such as abstract labor’.¹¹⁹ The universalising language of the social sciences follows too closely the logic of a capitalist economy. He would prefer to give us the other histories, of difference, of affective belonging, life-worlds, and so on, which resist homogenisation to a common substance, and therefore do not require a third term. Although capital may discipline workers in their capacity as workers, and may subject them to the full force of abstraction, Chakrabarty suggests that, for Marx, no less than for himself, the real limits to capital’s dominance lie in some vital human quality that capital needs but cannot fully subjugate. In this sense, life itself in its biological/conscious capacity for wilful activity (the ‘many-sided play of muscles . . .’) is the ‘excess that capital, for all its disciplinary procedures, always needs but can never quite control or domesticate’.¹²⁰

Life is a ‘standing fight’ against the process of abstraction that is constitutive of the category of ‘labour’ (abstract labour). The process of abstraction is likened to death, which threatens the unity of the living body with dismemberment.¹²¹

Ultimately, however, this is precisely where, according to Chakrabarty, Marx founders. Acute as Marx’s insights into the violence implicit in the abstracting process are, his commitment to the ‘idea of productive labor’ is such that he overlooks the rich possibilities of the standing fight, difference, History 2, and so on. Chakrabarty finds objectionable the distinction between productive and unproductive labour that Marx develops in his parable of the piano-maker whose labour is productive and the pianist whose labour is not. Marx, in a passage in the Grundrisse, indeed goes so far as to say that the pianist’s labour, important though it may be to the formation of the aesthetic sensibilities of an audience, is no more productive than the ‘madman’s

¹¹⁸ Chakrabarty 2000, p. 55.
¹¹⁹ Chakrabarty 2000, p. 71.
¹²¹ Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 60–1.
delusions’.122 This ‘baleful’ equation is a sure sign of how weak really was Marx’s capacity to deal with the Histories 2 that punctuate and interrupt capital’s dominance. The pianist is, for Chakrabarty, the quintessential figure of difference, of worlding the earth, whereas the ‘mad man’ is ‘world poor’.123 It is clear that Chakrabarty has limited patience for Marx’s failures in this regard. He concludes his discussion of Marx’s notion of abstract labour by noting that, while Marx uses his vision of the abstract human embedded in the capitalist practice of abstract labour to generate a radical critique of capital itself, historical difference remains ‘sublated and suspended’ in this particular form of critique.124 Marx may have recognised that the limits to capital are ‘constantly overcome but just as constantly posited’,125 may have registered, too, the survival of unvanquished remnants of older social formations in the social order of capital, but for him, or so we gather from Chakrabarty, the ‘not-yet’ triumphed over the ‘never’. Difference, on the other hand, Chakrabarty states, is ‘not external to capital, nor is it subsumed into capital, [but] lives in intimate and plural relations to capital, ranging from opposition to neutrality’.126 This is where Heidegger, presumably, can help address the limits of Marx; thus, as Chakrabarty states, subaltern studies can give up neither Marx nor difference.

Thus, History 1 and History 2, taken together, destroy the usual topological distinction between the outside and the inside that mark debates about whether the whole world has come under the sway of capital. History 2 is not about a programme of writing histories that are alternatives to the narratives of capital, not ‘the dialectical Other of the necessary logic of History 1’; nor is it subsumed to History 1. History 2 is charged with the ‘function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1’.127 History 2 is not necessarily precapitalist or feudal, or even inherently incompatible with capital. If that were the case, Chakrabarty declares, capital would truly be an exemplar of unrelied and absolute unfreedom. History 2 gives us insights into how humans ‘can be at home – dwell – in the rule of capital, create room for enjoyment, the play of desires, or the seduction of the commodity’, and makes room, in ‘Marx’s analytic of capital for the politics of human belonging and diversity’. It ‘gives us grounds on which to situate our thoughts about multiple ways of being human and our relationship to the global logic of capital’.128

It is from this vantage point that Chakrabarty takes on the hollow universalist pretensions of History 1’s totalising thrusts. The universal is a place holder, visible only when some particular takes it over in a gesture of pretension and domination.

122 Marx 1993, p. 305.
123 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 68.
127 Chakrabarty 2000, p. 66.
The globalisation of capital is not the same as capital’s universalisation; globalisation does not mean that the ‘universal and necessary logic of capital’ has been realised. Various Histories 2 always modify and interrupt History 1 and thus ‘act as our grounds for claiming historical difference’.129

It would be difficult to deny the grain of truth in Chakrabarty’s attack on the hollow universalism of capital’s apologists, but why implicate Marx, and Marxists in this attack? The notion that globalisation is not the same as universalisation will perhaps be news to Milton Friedman, Thomas Friedmann, and a host of erstwhile Cold Warriors lost in the mists of their own triumphalist rhetoric, and perhaps to some present and former members of the Planning Commission in India, but it will most certainly not be news to Marxists who have, for the longest time now, been pointing out the partial, limited and often destructive nature of the globalising mission of capital. Marx’s stinging criticism of colonial rule, not to mention his growing interest in the ‘unvanquished’ remnants of past epochs of social-economic reproduction, has served as a prototype of many such accounts.130 His accounts of European society, whether The Class Struggles in France, 1848–50, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, The Civil War in France, or the prospects for revolution further east reveal a keen interest and insights into the limits to capital, whether internal, that is, those generated by its own ‘laws of motion’ or more often by resistance from communities facing subsumption to capital’s onward march.131 Much Marxist historiography has followed in this vein. Antonio Gramsci’s work, for all its antinomies, has explored the enormously complex social formation of Italy, which goes much further than Chakrabarty’s mutual interruptions of History 1 and History 2, as does E.P. Thompson’s magisterial work on the making of the English working class.132 Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe is an act of bad faith in not laying out the achievements and limitations of such historiography in the requisite detail but rather engaging in a slap-dash polemic deformed by postmodernist, poststructuralist stylistic flourishes.

What does Chakrabarty manage to do with Marx’s immanent critique of capital, which he claims to find useful? What sort of engagement with the universal does he give us? What are the supposed mutual interruptions of History 1 and History 2 about? If difference is unthinkable outside History 1 no less than History 2, then, clearly, difference is as much part of the universalising drive of capital as a matter of residual life-worlds. Chakrabarty may recognise this in the abstract, but his historiography cannot cope with the problems this poses for the issue of capital’s commodity-determined and truncated universalism. Difference, as he develops it, and as discussed above, emerging out of a variety of life-worlds, is a rather poor alternative.

129 Chakrabarty 2000, pp. 70–1.
130 See, for example, Marx 1972; Marx and Engels 1972; Hudis 1983.
to the histories of revolts, revolutions, class struggles that Marxists have dealt with, especially as the supposed mutual interruptions of History 1 and History 2 must have a dynamic character to them. A world in which capital threatens to dissolve all fixed signposts before they have had a chance to be firmly erected does not admit of the treatment of difference as if it had fairly firm geographical co-ordinates that, moreover, resist the passage of time.\footnote{Later in this essay, I develop numerous examples of Chakrabarty’s tendency to objectify difference.} This is not just a methodological issue but also a political one. For Marxists, a challenge to capital’s universalism requires a suitable riposte – in theoretical, political and scalar terms.

When Chakrabarty confronts the issue of the potential terrain of struggle over capital’s dominance, if not hegemony – that History 2 is not necessarily precapitalist or feudal – he reveals tellingly, if quite unknowingly, the political underpinnings of Provincializing Europe. Thus, for Chakrabarty, if History 2 were reckoned to be antecedent to or outside of History 1, there would be no way for humans to ‘be at home-dwell-in the rule of capital, no play of desires, no seduction of the commodity’. Capital would ‘truly be a case of unrelieved and absolute unfreedom’, obliterating ‘human belonging and diversity’.\footnote{Chakrabarty 2000, p. 67. Emphasis added to the earlier quote from this passage.} In fact, however, being at home in the rule of capital and experiencing the seduction of the commodity – that is, accommodating oneself in a subaltern position to capital – are rather poor examples to choose to establish the importance of human belonging and diversity. For much of the world, massive and continuous deprivation is the norm under the rule of capital; celebrating one’s being-at-home in this situation is macabre. As to the issue of the seduction of the commodity and the play of desires, the proper analysis, following Fredric Jameson and Perry Anderson, is to note the co-extensiveness, in our times if not earlier, of economy and culture and locate the play of desires and the seduction of the commodity as very much part of the totalising thrust of History 1.\footnote{Anderson 1998, p. 73.}

IV.ii. The piano maker and the piano player: getting to the crux of social-productive labour

We have seen that, for Chakrabarty, the issue of abstract labour connects through History 1 and History 2 to issues of human belonging and diversity. In some senses, this would a fairly standard argument: that labour under capital’s rule is so unremitting, empty and abstracted of all meaningful social ties that humans seek diversity, community, and so on outside the labouring nexus with capital, except that Chakrabarty nowhere indicts the capital system. What is, however, problematic is his contention...
that Marx is somehow committed to the ‘idea of productive labor’, such that his ideas about History 2 remain underdeveloped. These contentions are fantastic and patently false, as I have argued above. But, does a closer look at the issue of abstract labour, and the closely related notions of productive and social labour, tell us something interesting about Marx’s politics, and help us clarify the political implications of Chakrabarty’s methodology?

Why does Marx insist that the labour of the piano-maker is productive while that of the pianist is not? As Marx explains it, ‘What is productive labour and what is not... has to emerge from the dissection of the various aspects of capital itself. Productive labour is only that which produces capital’. ‘The piano-maker’, Marx insists, ‘reproduces capital; the piano-player only exchanges his labour for revenue’.\(^\text{136}\) Labour, for Marx, becomes productive only in so far as it produces its opposite, and the productive labourer is ‘he that directly augments capital’.\(^\text{137}\)

Marx is clearly developing the notion of productive labour here as a relation of production, that is a relational category linking living labour to the augmentation of capital via its exploitation in the process of production. ‘The transformation of labour (as living, purposive activity) into capital is, in itself, the result of the exchange between capital and labour, in so far as it gives the capitalist the title of ownership to the product of labour (and command over the same)’. Labour is productive, Marx insists, ‘only if absorbed into capital, where capital forms the basis of production, and where the capitalist himself is in command of production’, the productivity of labour thus becoming the ‘productive force of capital’. Labour ‘in its immediate being, separated from capital, is not productive’.\(^\text{138}\) It should be clear, by now, that productive labour is not a ‘natural’ relationship between the worker and her activity, but a specific economic relationship.\(^\text{139}\) This becomes abundantly clear in Marx’s discussion of Richard Jones, in the *Theories of Surplus Value*, where he states:

Jones quite correctly reduces Smith’s productive and unproductive labour to its essence – capitalist and non-capitalist labour – by correctly applying the distinction made by Smith between labourers paid by capital and those paid out of revenue.... The distinction made between the labourers who live on capital and those who live on revenue is concerned with the form of labour... This difference must be kept in mind and the fact that all other sorts of activity influence material production and vice versa in no way affects the necessity for making this distinction.\(^\text{140}\)

\(^{136}\) Marx 1993, p. 305.
\(^{137}\) Marx 1993, p. 305.
\(^{138}\) Marx 1993, p. 308.
\(^{139}\) Marx 1993, p. 310.
\(^{140}\) Marx 1971, III, pp. 431–2, emphasis added.
Of course, the very nature of this formulation suggests that it is not the kind of labour that makes it productive or not but merely the relationship it has to its ‘opposite’. Now, the pianist can also become a productive labourer if she is hired by a company to play concerts, make recordings, and so on, while on a salary. In that case, the product of her labour is alienated, objectified and commodified and she becomes quite clearly a productive worker in the Marxian sense. It should be understood that productive labour is, for Marx, a historical category, thereby transforming what had been a ‘transhistorical and affirmative category of political economy [with the exception of Richard Jones?] into one that is historically specific and critical, grasping what is essential to capitalism’,\(^141\)

It is from this distinction that Marx develops what he sees as characteristics of the capital system of production that account for the role of living labour in its on-going valorisation, its economic dynamism and the need ultimately to overcome the condition of productive labour by transforming the basis of production itself.

Productive labour is the direct means of capital’s valorisation, that is, to its ‘self-expansion’. Production in capitalism is necessarily quantitatively oriented, towards ever-increasing amounts of surplus-value. This, as Postone notes in his study of Marx’s thought, is the basis of Marx’s analysis of production in capitalism as production for the sake of production. This means that production is no longer a means to a substantive end but ‘a means to an end that is in itself a means, a moment in a never-ending chain of expansion’. Production in capitalism becomes a means to a means\(^142\) in which productive labour becomes the indispensable mediation.\(^143\) The goal of production in capitalism – ever-increasing amounts of surplus-value, a function of the competition of capitals – exerts a ‘form of necessity on the producers’; it is neither given by social tradition nor decided upon consciously but, rather, confronts people as ‘an external necessity’. Producers can only decide which products would likely maximise surplus-value.\(^144\) It is out of this situation that, historically, the richest possible concrete development (the lavish explosion of commodity production) emerges, so much so that Marx begins the first volume of *Capital* by saying: ‘The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities’.\(^145\) And it is precisely as a reflex of this, and labour’s mediating role (objects as ‘material integuments of homogeneous human labour’), that the very ‘abstraction of labour’ arises.\(^146\) As Marx explains:

\(^{141}\) Postone 1996, p. 356.
\(^{142}\) Postone 1996, p. 181.
\(^{143}\) This is why Marx insists that the question of whether capital is productive or not is an absurd one, Marx 1993, p. 308.
\(^{144}\) Postone 1996, p. 182.
\(^{145}\) Marx 1977, p. 125.
\(^{146}\) Marx 1977, pp. 166–7.
Indifference towards any specific kind of labour presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant. As a rule, the most general abstractions arise only in the midst of the richest possible concrete development, where one thing appears as common to many, to all. Then it ceases to be thinkable in a particular form alone. On the other side, this abstraction of labour as such is not merely the mental product of a concrete totality of labours. . . . Not only the category, labour, but labour in reality has here become the means of creating wealth in general, and has ceased to be organically linked with particular individuals in any specific form. . . . The simplest abstraction, which expresses an immeasurably ancient relation . . . nevertheless achieves practical truth as an abstraction only as a category of the most modern society.\footnote{Marx 1993, pp. 104–5.}

The abstraction of labour corresponds to the abstraction of time. With the establishment of capitalism, homogeneous, empty (that is, abstract) time, ‘free to pass by independently of man and events’, establishes its tyranny to which ‘men are constrained to submit’.\footnote{Gurevich 1976, p. 242.} The concept of ‘socially necessary labour time’, so central to Marx’s analysis of generalised commodity production, is not simply a measure of the time expended in the production of a commodity, but a socially constrained amount of time within which the production of a commodity must take place if producers are to receive the full value of their labour time, that is, if the commodity is not to become devalorised in exchange. As a result of the socially mediating role of labour under capitalism, ‘labor time is transformed into a temporal norm’, not only abstracted from but standing above and determining individual action.\footnote{Postone 1996, p. 214.} In the capitalist mode of production, the ‘definite, particular labours’ of individuals must manifest themselves as their opposite, as ‘equal, necessary, general labour, and in this form, social labour’.\footnote{Marx 1971 III, p. 130.} Individual labours thus become ‘cellular components of a large, complex and dynamic alienated system that encompasses men and machines’.\footnote{Postone 1996, p. 270.}

The historical development of capitalism involves two quite diametrically different processes: (i) the on-going transformation of social and economic life, including the ways in which the production and circulation of commodities take place through the continual appropriation of science and technology into production; (ii) the reconstitution of the fundamental opposition of capital and labour in the production process as an ‘unchanging feature of social life’, that is, the reproduction of the socially mediating role of labour.\footnote{Postone 1996, p. 300.} Thus, even as humans replace personalised forms of social domination
of the kind that obtained under tributary structures, for instance) and partially liberate themselves from the domination of nature, they substitute it with a ‘non-conscious and unintentional . . . structure of domination constituted by labor’, a sort of ‘second nature’, as Postone calls it. It overcomes the first – domination by nature and other humans – by another sort of domination, by this second nature. In this sense, a system based on productive, abstract, socially necessary labour underpins social relations that are ‘blind, processual, and quasi-organic’.154

The core of the capital relation is, thus, constituted by the two-fold character of labour: (i) as an active, if progressively minor, force in creating material wealth, much of which is now contributed by the awesome powers of science, technology, and in general by the harnessing of the powers of nature;155 (ii) as the source of value (socially necessary labour time) and surplus-value. In Marx’s analysis, the working class remains important, indeed indispensable, as the source of value but no longer of material wealth. Value does not, from Marx’s point of view, express human relations with nature but is constituted by abstract labour alone, a function solely of socially necessary labour time. Although increased productivity does result in more material wealth, it does not result in more value.156 However, it is not material wealth but value that is expressive of the general form of wealth under the productive system of capital. As Marx puts it sardonically, ‘[n]o scientist to date has yet discovered what natural qualities make definite proportions of snuff tobacco and paintings “equivalents” for one another’.157 To explain the general nature of profits, ‘you must start from the theorem that, on an average, commodities are sold at their real values, and that profits are derived from selling them at their real values, that is, in proportion to the quantity of labour realized in them’.158

Labour in capitalism, far from being the standpoint of Marx’s critique, is its object.159 Fundamental to Marx’s critique, in Postone’s judgement, is the ‘constituting centrality of labour in capitalism as the ultimate ground’ of the abstract structures of domination (of the blind, processual, quasi-organic kind alluded to above); the increasing fragmentation of individual labour and individual existence involving, paradoxically, the subsumption of individuals as ‘mere organs of the whole’;160 the progressive hollowing out of social relations; the blind runaway logic of capitalist society necessitating the ever-increasing exploitation of nature;161 and the ever-larger scale of organisations that subsume humans. This critique analyses the working class as an

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155 Marx 1975a, p. 33; Marx 1971, I, p. 39.
157 Marx 1971, III, p. 130.
‘integral element of capitalism rather than as the embodiment of its negation’. The proletariat remains structurally important to capitalism as the indispensable source of value but, over the course of its history, becomes a minor component of material wealth. Postone contends that, far from constituting ‘the socialized productive forces that come into contradiction with the capitalist social relations and thereby point to the possibility of a post-capitalist future’, Marx argued that the working class was the ‘essential constituting element of those relations themselves’. Both the capitalists and workers are bound to capital, but the latter is more so. The working class, rather than embodying the socialist future is the necessary basis of the present under which it suffers.

In so far, therefore, as the working class represents ‘capital-constituting rather than capital-transcending forms of action and consciousness’, overcoming capital must be understood in terms of abolishing proletarian labour rather than realising it more adequately. For Marx, it was far more important to abolish the proletariat and free human life from the abstract, quasi-natural form of domination by production than merely to seize the means of production and continue ‘capital-determined production’, even if under workers’ control. Only then would humans be able to appropriate the ‘socially general knowledge and capacities’ (produced by harnessing nature and natural laws via science and technology) that had hitherto been constituted as the alienated power of capital and thereby open up the possibility that ‘people might begin to control what they create rather than being controlled by it’. For Marx, the realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends. . . . Freedom, in this sphere, can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.

It is not too much of a stretch at this point to see that Marx, committed as he was to a historical analysis of the idea of productive labour and to a future in which humans would live in intentional communities in which the ‘realm of freedom’ would be vastly expanded, could have had no commitment to some transhistorical idea of

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165 See Postone 1996, pp. 364–5 for a rich discussion of this. Of course, militant workers might choose to abolish a system of which their labour is the constituting factor, rather than merely act as a corporative force that perpetuates their captivity to the value-positing, value-producing forms of labour.
productive labour and certainly not to productive labour in its capitalist guise. Indeed, Marx argued that the immediately social character of labour – productive, abstract, socially necessary labour under capitalism – produced a massive waste of ‘the worker’s life and health’,\(^{168}\) and that being a productive labourer was ‘not a piece of luck but a misfortune’.\(^ {169}\)

In light of the above, Chakrabarty’s idea that ‘historical difference would remain sublated and suspended in this particular [Marxist] form of critique’ is not only beside the point but trivial and obfuscatory.\(^ {170}\) It is really up to Chakrabarty to say why human difference under the dominance of capital is so important per se as to override Marx’s point that it is only in overthrowing capital – in the sense of the specific social relations of production of our epoch – that humans can experience the full flowering of their creative powers, implicitly establishing the conditions for the expression of human difference in creative, non-antagonistic ways. What are the mutual interruptions of History 1 and History 2 supposed to achieve? If they merely create some space for the seduction of the commodity, the play of desires, and so on, while leaving the dominance of value-positing, value-producing labour well alone, then one must conclude that History 2 remains captive to the logic of History 1. In the end, this particular hermeneutic strategy has the main function of spiriting the necessity of revolutionary transformation of the current mode of production out of sight. After all, while Marx may not have produced a transition narrative – in the sense of a transition from feudalism to capitalism –, much of his work was concerned to point to the absolute historical necessity of the other transition to come, namely one that would take us beyond the rule of capital. Chakrabarty seems unable to theorise a rather important distinction: that a respect for different life-worlds in a hierarchic world order should not imply any respect for the processes that created those hierarchies, including the uneven geography of world capitalism, and that any understanding of the significance of resistance to absorption into capital’s processes should also ask when \textit{a resistance to} becomes \textit{a struggle against}. That particular distinction, and the question of resistance and struggle, requires one to work under the sign of Marx not Heidegger. Otherwise, we end up with a sentimental, postmodernist Third Worldism, no better than its discredited positivist, historicist predecessor.

IV.iii. The limits of capital’s universalising pretensions
While abstract labour represents, for Marx, a window into the exploitation of workers and the drive towards limitlessness under capitalism, he always maintained that the

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\(^{169}\) Marx 1977, p. 644.

\(^{170}\) Chakrabarty 2000, p. 62.
capital system’s universalistic pretensions were rife with contradictions and internal limits. At first sight, capital’s universalism appears to find its objective resonance in the development of a world market and by massive transformations in the social and cultural fabric of the ancien régimes of Europe, but, ironically, this very development proceeds in a contradictory fashion – creating, overcoming, and recreating obstacles to itself, thus leaving in its wake not only a highly uneven, and polarised, world geography but also highly localised social formations which appear to share very little in common with each other. Guha, in his *Dominance without Hegemony*, makes this point in the proper Marxian spirit, noting the many advances in the transformative direction registered in the epoch of capital’s dominance but just as surely recognising the great barriers to that process thrown up by capital itself.\(^{171}\)

Guha begins his attack on the problems of the specificity of the Indian social formation under colonialism and the limits of bourgeois hegemony therein by locating it in a global framework embracing capital’s revolutionising of society from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. He notes that, both in the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Grundrisse*, Marx opens up a ‘vista of receding horizons over an endless cultural space’. Compared to the epoch of capital, all earlier social formations were, quoting Marx, ‘mere local developments of humanity’ and ‘nature idolatry’. Capital, as a revolutionary force, tears down barriers that hem in the development of the material (and scientific) forces of society. But, Guha notes, this is where the ideal and the reality differ. Capital may posit every limit signified by ‘national barriers and prejudices’, ‘nature worship’, ‘traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs’, as a barrier and ‘gets ideally beyond it, but that does not mean that it has really overcome it’.\(^{172}\)

In reality, each ‘bourgeois revolution’ that had transformed the societies of Western Europe and North America exhibited specific national characteristics based on its ability to transcend the limits imposed by its ancien régime. Marx himself ranged Germany, France, England and the United States in an ascending order in terms of the extent of their inadequacy ‘with regard to the universalist ideal’; by this reckoning, both 1648 in England and 1789 in France were victories not only for the bourgeoisie but ‘the victory of a new social order, the victory of bourgeois ownership over feudal ownership, of nationality over provincialism, of competition over the guild, . . . of Enlightenment over superstition, . . . of industry over heroic idleness, of bourgeois law over medieval privileges’.\(^{173}\) By contrast, 1848 in Germany was not ‘a question of establishing a new society’ but a way of betraying the people and compromising with ‘the crowned representatives of the old society . . . renewed interests within an obsolete society’, a mere parody, in other words, of 1789.\(^{174}\) Guha wishes to locate Indian history

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171 Guha 1997, pp. 15–16.
under British colonial rule in this regression; colonial rule in India represented, according to him, an even more egregious compromise with the old order, as described above. British rule in India, liberal dogma, to the contrary, did not represent the expansion of the universalising mission of the Enlightenment or the revolutionary bourgeoisie. Almost as a reflex of this, the nationalist movement too, Guha argues, did not represent the energies of a revolutionary bourgeoisie able to assimilate the class interests of the peasants and workers into ‘a bourgeois hegemony’. Rather, the Indian National Congress, as the voice of the leading sectors of the Indian bourgeoisie, found itself flanked both by communalism and autonomous peasant and working-class politics, never being able in that regard to become the ‘representative of the whole society’. ‘Nothing testifies,’ Guha adds, ‘more clearly to the predicament of a bourgeoisie nurtured under colonial conditions and its difference from its opposite numbers in Western Europe’. Not only, therefore, did colonial rule fail to bring to India the universalistic, revolutionary élan of the English and French bourgeoisie in their heyday, but the historiography of India produced by the colonial rulers represented merely the particular interests of the colonisers in their portrayal of Indian history as an interesting chapter in British history, that is, denying any autonomous creative role to social, cultural forces in the subcontinent itself. Guha likens this to a form of appropriation, or expropriation. British dominance (without hegemony) in India was registered and objectified in the appropriation of the Indian past, ousting Indians from the ‘site of an autochthonous occupancy, violating the traditions of a pre-existing right of use’.175

In this way, Guha links up the contradictory, historically compromised, universalising mission of capital with the nature of colonial rule in India and the subsequent failures of the Indian bourgeoisie to go beyond their particular interests to represent their hegemony over the entire society. The political point, of course, is to show that only an autochthonous Indian historiography of India could begin to point the way out of this impasse, presumably to recover some sort of autonomous space in which such a role might be articulated. The problem, of course, as discussed earlier, is that such an enterprise came perilously close to nativism and, probably, even communalism, incapable apparently of developing a hegemonic programme even among different fractions of the subcontinent’s bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. But the uncertainties revealed by Guha’s argument lie deeper, in his somewhat schematic discussion of the concept of bourgeois hegemony, the mechanical counterposing of dominance and hegemony, and in a historiography that fails to reckon with the burning out of the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary élan in parts of industrial Europe itself, which spurred

175 Guha 1997, pp. 130–3.
some of the comparative enquiries of Marx and Engels, not to mention Gramsci’s inquiries into Italian politics. As the following pages will argue, the concept of hegemony itself turns out to be inchoate and any effort to use it to comparative effect will require a comparative historiography on a much larger scale and a much greater engagement with the complexities of the notion itself than Guha is able to supply.

IV.iv. Class or social order? Hegemony revisited

The issue of bourgeois rule over the working class by consent rather than coercion is the crux of Gramsci’s theorising about hegemony and revolution in Western parliamentary democracies. Gramsci noted that ‘[Benedetto] Croce emphasises ... that moment in historico-political activity which in politics is called “hegemony”, the moment of consent, of cultural direction, to distinguish it from the moment of force, of constraint, of state-legislative or political intervention’.\textsuperscript{177} The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways: as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’; even a group that is in a position to dominate must continue to lead as well, by securing the ‘collaboration, or voluntary and active consent from the subordinate classes’.\textsuperscript{178} Lenin, more cynically, offered the following gloss on hegemony via a comparison of Russia with Britain and France. Whereas the Russian Tsars ruled by force, the British and French bourgeoisie had developed another method, ‘the method of deception, flattery, fine phrases, promises by the million, petty sops, and concessions of the inessential while retaining the essential’.\textsuperscript{179} The success of the bourgeoisie, in this view, lay in confining the working class to a ‘corporative framework’, that is, separating politics and economics and more or less confining the working class to primarily economic concerns pursued through the ‘proper’ parliamentary channels.\textsuperscript{180} Proletarian hegemony would result, Lenin argued, to the extent that the working class refused to be limited to such an economic-corporative role and took on instead a hegemonic role of leading other exploited classes in a programme directed against bourgeois domination; in doing so, it went beyond being a ‘guild or the sum total of various guilds’, becoming instead a ‘class’.\textsuperscript{181}

But this confinement of the workers to an economic-corporative framework cannot be understood purely as a result of either the ideological work of intellectuals in the Crocean sense, or bourgeois ideology in some diffuse sense, or even a failure of nerve and imagination on the part of the working class, though, presumably, all three

\textsuperscript{177} Quoted in Anderson 1977, pp. 20–1.
\textsuperscript{178} Gramsci 1971, pp. 57–8, 271.
\textsuperscript{179} Quoted in Anderson 1977, pp. 26–7.
\textsuperscript{180} This formulation was developed at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern. See Anderson 1977, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{181} Quoted in Anderson 1977, p. 17.
play a part. Other, more objective, mechanisms operate. As Anderson points out, parliamentary democracy – understood as the objective structure of a ‘once great – still potent – achievement, the triumph of the ideals of the bourgeois revolution’ – is where bourgeois hegemony is really secured. As he puts it,

The fundamental form of the Western parliamentary state – the juridical sum of its citizenry – is itself the hub of the ideological apparatus of capitalism. The ramified complexes of cultural control within civil society [radio, television, and so on] undoubtedly play a critical complementary role in assuring the stability of the class order of capital. So, too, do the distorting prism of market relations and the numbing structure of the labour process within the economy.182

The subjective side of this development – what Anderson calls ‘the novelty of consent under advanced capitalism is the masses’ belief that they exercise an ultimate self-determination within the existing social order’. The ‘masses’ tolerate their impotence, he states, because there is a belief that there is really no ruling class, and that bourgeois democracy offers real freedom. And there are extrinsic factors as well, most notably the absence of democracy in what was once dubbed ‘actually existing communism’ of the Soviet and Chinese variety. The effects of ‘fifty years of Stalinism’ are undoubtedly important in understanding the complex meaning of bourgeois democracy in the West today.183 Of course, none of this would really have applied in a colonial context, and one might perhaps note that what Guha diagnoses as the failure of the colonisers to establish their hegemony in India, would have stemmed precisely from the dual limitations of colonialism itself: the absence of anything approaching a parliamentary democracy even in the final days of the Raj, and the absence of the belief among any class of people in India that they exercised ultimate self-determination in the colonial system. Compromises with the old order – danda, dharma, bhakti, and so on – were probably merely secondary factors in this situation.

However, the situation of any particular class of people (say, the emergent Indian bourgeoisie) vis-à-vis the hegemony of a ruling order (if not reductively bourgeois hegemony per se), is a much more complex affair. Of great importance is Anderson’s insight that the normal structure of capitalist political power in bourgeois-democratic states is ‘simultaneously and indivisibly dominated by culture and determined by coercion’. A ‘non-additive and non-transitive’ relationship exists between ideology and repression, consent and coercion. The normal conditions of ideological subordination of the masses – the day-to-day routines of parliamentary democracy – are themselves

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182 Anderson 1977, p. 29.
constituted by a silent, absent force which gives them their currency: ‘the monopoly of legitimate violence by the state’. Deprived of this ‘legitimate violence’, Anderson observes, the ‘system of cultural control would be instantly fragile’; on the other hand, with it, cultural control is immensely powerful, so powerful that it can paradoxically do without the exercise of ‘legitimate violence’.\(^{184}\) The Western parliamentary-democratic state was stronger than the Tsarist state because it rested not only on ‘the consent of the masses but also on a superior repressive apparatus’.\(^{185}\) Ironically, perhaps, the mixture of sops and concessions on inessential matters while maintaining control, even coercive control, over the essential matter of power did give the British ruling order in India an undeniable degree of hegemony, if, by that, one means challenges to its continued presence in India were not fundamentally of a revolutionary character. Dominance, in this sense, is not iminical to hegemony, even if it does not coincide with the idealised versions of hegemony contained in Croce, and, to some extent, in Gramsci too.

Additionally, one can question Gramsci’s dichotomy of force and consent by looking at a number of systemic constraints that operate in any capitalist system, among them the fear of unemployment, the incapacity to see through the opacity of the workings of capital on the global scale. The confinement of the workers’ and a colonised bourgeoisie’s politics to the national scale while capital itself progressively operated on the global scale might have had the effect of obscuring the possibility of working outside an economic-corporative framework. Arguably, the hegemony of a ruling order could signal a situation in which the universe of all classes that might theoretically take a radically oppositional stance is more-or-less fully contained in the complex of constraints represented by the ‘business cycles’ of capital, not to mention the growth of labourism, and similar kinds of ‘reformism’. In this sense, hegemony cannot be reduced to the successful exercise of the revolutionary élan of a victorious bourgeoisie, the role of intellectuals in fostering working-class (or colonised-bourgeois) co-operation with the (metropolitan) ruling classes, or sheer unwillingness to compromise with the ancien régime. More accurately, as noted above, the hegemony of a ruling order rests on numerous pillars, only some of which have anything to do with the bourgeoisie at all.

This idea is reinforced by the observation, made by Anderson and others, that the development of parliamentary democracy and the economic order of capital had very little to do with outright revolutionary victories of the bourgeoisie over the representatives of the ancien régime, except perhaps in the case of France and, here too, class compromise seemed to be the order of the nineteenth century. Across much of Europe, World War I may have destroyed the ancien régimes of Russia, Austro-Hungary, and Germany, but this only modified rather than overturning the cultural

\(^{184}\) Anderson 1977, pp. 42–3.

\(^{185}\) Anderson 1977, p. 52.
dominance of the European upper classes and their ‘train de vie’. Advanced industrial organisations and mass consumption were largely confined to the United States, while ‘revolution and counter-revolution battled from the Vistula to the Ebro’.\(^{186}\)

Conversely, one might argue that the last twenty years or so have seen the disappearance of the bourgeoisie in the sense in which ‘Baudelaire and Marx, Ibsen and Rimbaud, Grosz or Brecht’ or, for that matter, ‘Sartre and O’Hara’ knew it, their place taken in today’s global marketplace by ‘projectors and managers, auditors and janitors, administrators and speculators of contemporary capital: functions of a monetary universe that knows no social fixities or stable identities’.\(^{187}\) This underlines two paradoxes: that, when the bourgeoisie seemed to be at its most developed state, it was culturally, and politically, dominated by the aristocracy and its \textit{train de vie} and capitalism itself was still somewhat rudimentary; but, when capital and parliamentary democracy became the twin pillars of a world-triumphal system, say post-1975, the bourgeoisie itself, for all practical purposes, disappeared. Clearly, the development of capitalism as the lynch pin of the political, socio-economic and cultural order does not require bourgeois hegemony at all. Either that notion itself needs more careful modification or, as I would suggest, the notion itself needs to be discarded, Gramsci notwithstanding. In the Indian case, the failure of the colonisers thoroughly to renovate the social order needs to be balanced against their undoubted success – discernible in the longer historical framework – in establishing a socio-economic order in which capital and its accessory institutions would establish themselves, however crudely, as the horizon of possibility of most classes in India. In that sense, it is arguable that colonial dominance was a necessary interlude to secure the hegemony of the global capitalist order in India, which in turn reduced the possibilities of a purely autochthonous mode of politics or culture (assuming historiography to be a part of both).

\textbf{IV.v. Beyond the ‘bourgeois revolution’}

The issue of consent, as the immediately foregoing pages suggest, is rather a complex affair, requiring at least greater temporal, spatial and social qualifications than Guha is prepared to give us. Even the simple issue of the securing of the indigenous bourgeoisie’s consent to British rule in India needs to be rescued from summary or arbitrary formulae. Clearly, for a period after 1857, the consent of the Indian bourgeoisie to British rule was secured by the spectre of the massive uprising that began in that year and for which the Indian bourgeoisie had, by and large, no taste, however much nostalgia would later transform it into the first nationalist war for independence. And again, despite the rhetoric of nationalism, some degree of bourgeois consent to British

\(^{186}\) Anderson 1998, p. 81.

presence in India persisted, varying with wars, economic crises, the politics of the Viceroy, the Secretaries of State and other major functionaries, not to mention significant fractures within the Congress itself and, of course, the politics of communalism that came to dominate the nationalist movement as time went on. When push came to shove and India was finally offered independence on an accelerated time-table, leaders of the Congress panicked and demanded instead a period of Dominion status!

One cannot, of course, remain in this merely punctual vein, history itself being much more than a mere record of happenings and the day-to-day fluctuations and temptations of the eventful world. On the face of it, the problem in India might be presented as the seeming inability of any section of the Indian bourgeoisie to take advantage of those elements of British rule in India that represented the settled results of a much older socio-economic revolution in England to push forward a comprehensive Indian agenda for social transformation. If the British failed to establish their hegemony in India as completely as Guha suggests, that might be construed as having provided an opportunity for at least the most progressive sections of the Indian bourgeoisie, not to mention its class allies, acting as a determined Jacobin force, to push through an alternative social-transformative agenda. Instead, more often than not, the Indian bourgeoisie took extraordinarily retrograde positions, as witnessed by the debates over the Age of Consent Bill. In this, as in the much wider communalisation of politics, the Indian bourgeoisie appeared to act as a religio-corporative and reactionary force.

But this would be to give in to a rather facile reading of the forces shaping Indian politics. In some respects, the interests of the colonial rulers and those of an emerging Indian ruling elite were comfortably aligned. The law-and-order régime of colonial rulers, for example, set the stage for ‘legitimate’ state claims to a monopoly exercise of coercion that served Congress ministries very well from 1937 onwards. In other respects, the racism and cultural arrogance of the colonial rulers and the discrimination it produced in professional and everyday life rankled middle-class Indians considerably. The driving force of Indian politics, it would appear, was not so much a case of addressing, or redressing, colonial dominance without hegemony, but rather an effort to bring the dominant and determinant into line.

Could this be why the nationalist movement, and the positioning of substantial sections of the Indian bourgeoisie behind it, evolved so completely in the direction of a passive revolution, more so as time went by? What was the status of the war of manoeuvre against colonial rule against that particular evolution? And how did these issues come to be expressed in Indian historiography? As previously suggested, though colonial rulers might not have evolved a highly successful system for securing the consent of the ruled, they did manage to develop the institutional and ideological structures that provided the emergent nationalist movement with its grammar and syntax. In this context, a Bengali historiography of Bengal that advocated a recourse to arms might have been operating, pace Guha, within an archaic and limited horizon.
A more mature historiography might have sought more precise ways to address what a war of position would entail, en route to a full, rather than passive, revolution. In what ways and under whose direction could the subaltern classes themselves have been mobilised to work towards a transformation of the considerable remnants of an ‘antiquated’ and ‘oppressive’ social order? Clearly, while coercion might have dominated over hegemony – disregarding, for the moment, the reservations already expressed over the adequacy of the binary opposition – the colonial state did manage not only to manipulate indigenist discourses of authority and submission but also to incorporate them thoroughly into Indian modernity, so much so that the nationalist leadership itself thought, more often than not, inside this frame, as it were. There is also, of course, the construction, under colonial auspices, of racialised models of Indian history, the racialisation of caste, the powerful inducements of Brahmanisation (or Sanskritisation) that had such perduring effects on the thought and action, and therefore the politics, of substantial sections of the Indian population. An interesting analysis of the Bengali historiography of Bengal would have focused on the ways in which these tensions revealed themselves even without the conscious realisation by the authors of that historiography, than on some mind-numbingly formulaic binary oppositions and their supposed combinations in the Indian social formation.

A provisional consideration of those issues take us well beyond the terrain of Dominance without Hegemony. We need, among other things, a properly Gramscian engagement with the mechanical bloc that finally came to lead the Indian nationalist movement, representing as it did – particularly in regard to the suicidal violence that accompanied Partition in 1947 – no particularly progressive social force at all. For a start, this would have required a much more careful and subtle anatomisation of British rule in India, and an analysis of the overall social formation than a mere schematic of domination/subordination.

The complexity of this issue has to be grasped with the aid of a requisite scale. No history of India can avoid being at least an implicitly comparative history, comparative that is with European history. That is a world-historical issue unresolvable purely by recourse to insipid ramblings about difference, summary schemata, or the ignorant notion that anything can be compared to anything else in some sort of barter-style arrangement. With all the provisos that Marx himself provided, European history has a priority and a universality that historians of the colonies reject at their peril. After all, if one were to separate the phenomenon of what one calls bourgeois hegemony from the people one identifies as the bourgeoisie, the question of who was/were the agents of bourgeois hegemony in Western Europe becomes entirely germane to thinking about colonial modernity. The bourgeoisie per se? Unlikely, even as a crude synopsis. Or were there deeper forces, including the Renaissance, the Reformation, struggles over land and labour rights, not to mention the working day, that inspired dissident forces, no matter what their class background, to develop a whole new approach to
issues of production, power, representation and community that we summarily term the bourgeois revolution? The bourgeoisie per se may have played a greater or lesser role in this process. Indeed, the whole Brenner debate over the transition to capitalism suggests that merchants, the quintessential representatives of the bourgeoisie of early-modern Europe, may not have been agents of revolutionary transformation at all, and that it was largely carried forward by members of the aristocracy and gentry.¹⁸⁸ If, eventually, the bourgeoisie did establish a far-from-secure hegemony, it was the result of deeper changes and transformations in society. While a determined Jacobin force may have set in motion some sort of eventual bourgeois hegemony in France in the late eighteenth century, this was – even in the context of European history – a rather exceptional set of circumstances.

Thus, the bourgeois revolution has to be understood not in class terms, except retrospectively, but as a complex historical effect. It was, most emphatically, not transportable from one historical milieu to another via the institutions that its beneficiaries set up. When the carriers/agents of the English revolution encountered in India a different historical trajectory, they set up a colonial administration that reflected precisely their understanding of the balance of social forces that would enable them to govern with the utmost economy of both rule-making and alliance-building. *Dominance without Hegemony* turns out to be a huge red herring, offering little in the way of critical thinking about the Gramscian notion of hegemony, much less does it seem capable of addressing modernity’s antinomies, contradictions and inadequacies in the way that Anderson does so well.

IV.vi. Capitulating to the superficial

It is clear that their peculiar uses of Marx and Gramsci have led Chakrabarty and Guha into a dead-end or, in the former’s case, a capitulation to what he seeks to avoid. Gramsci’s exposition of hegemony – acutely contradictory, as Anderson points out – signals not a political paralysis nor even the verbal double-bind of the antinomy but a sharp registry of the contradictions of his epoch and an attempt to locate the particularities of the age that would provide the political key to transformative action. One finds little of this in Guha’s identification of the origins of an autochthonous Bengali historiography of Bengal with *bahubol*, which he claims lets history’s light flood into what would otherwise have been a ‘banked-up and interiorized nationalism’. One would expect, as suggested above, Bengali historiography to register, if only in muted accents, the contradictions of colonialism, not least of all the ways in which the hegemony of the social order established itself and survived the departure of the

¹⁸⁸ Aston and Philpin (eds.) 1985.
colonisers even as Indian nationalism moved ever more vocally and militantly against its more superficial aspects. The historian’s task is to perceive the contradictions where only antinomies seem to be thematisable.

Chakrabarty’s capitulation to difference is an even more obvious and facile example of the cul-de-sac that subaltern studies has ended up in. The heterogeneous voices that Chakrabarty introduces us to with such relish would be significant at a historical moment when they could plausibly be portrayed as an alternative way of (dis)ordering a world in which the nightmare of post-Enlightenment social engineering projects seems poised to ride roughshod over all alternative ways of life. But such a moment would be purely a fiction of the dystopian imaginary. The social order of capital, not only now but even back in the colonial period – although admittedly in a more embryonic fashion – simultaneously operates at two levels: the uniformisation implicit in large-scale political and economic projects, on the one hand, and the play of difference, the seduction of the commodity, the merchandising of the exotic and so on, on the other. The evil genius of postmodern capitalism is to present the latter as emancipation; the postcolonial historians’ most signal shortcoming is their failure to perceive this, and their desperate attempt to make a virtue out of the deeply capsized political perspective that comes in its wake.

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Volume III of Marx’s Capital has long been a source of controversy for Marxist and non-Marxist commentators. Some of the best-known debates in Marxist political economy, concerning the so-called transformation problem and the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, derive from its pages. There are also rather less well-furrowed issues of contention concerning Marx’s theorisation of credit and money capital, monopoly and agricultural rent, and the incompleteness of Capital itself. Yet, too many of the contributions to these debates suffer from a lack of close attention to Marx’s text, rely on a few selected quotations prised out of context, or even remain oblivious to the location of Volume III within the structure of Marx’s work as an unfinished but methodologically rigorous whole. The problematic character of the original text, discussed in some detail in Reuten’s introduction to the volume under review, has not helped. Marx left behind only an extensive but uncorrected manuscript with significant parts, in the words of that heroically dedicated but not always meticulous editor, Engels, ‘in a disordered jumble of notes, comments and extract material’.1

The publication of a new collection of essays devoted to the rigorous examination of Volume III as a whole, written by some of the most dialectically minded and serious scholars in the field, therefore deserves a warm welcome. The Culmination of Capital is the fourth in a series of collected essays, largely contributed by the same group of authors who have met regularly since the early 1990s and thoroughly debated their work amongst themselves.2 Debate has not eliminated difference, not least over the question of the relationship of Marx’s dialectic to Hegel’s, as Reuten suggests in a tantalising footnote to his introduction (p. 5).3 But it has meant a degree of thematic coherence and shared perspective often lacking in collections of this kind.4 The consistent

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3 It would be very useful for someone to attempt a critical survey of the different appropriations of Hegel by the various authors mentioned, but this review is hardly the place for that. A chapter in the unpublished recent thesis by Jim Kincaid has however been very helpful on some of these matters (Kincaid 2002), and I am indebted to conversations with Jim on these subjects over many years.
4 See, by way of contrast, Bellofiore (ed.) 1998, a two-volume extremely eclectic and uneven,
quality of the contributions across all four collections is certainly impressive, but many of the important questions which concern the third volume of *Capital* were also discussed, sometimes in more depth, in the predecessors of *The Culmination of Capital*. One, perhaps inescapable, problem with this volume is that a full understanding of the theoretical position of several of the authors writing here, especially Chris Arthur, Tony Smith and Geert Reuten, on whom I will focus, can only be obtained with reference back to their earlier work.

That is not true, however, of Fred Moseley, who provides an overview of *Capital*, Volume III which, as usual in the case of this author, is a model of lucidity and contains a scrupulously thorough use of quotations from Marx. His central thesis is that the main subject of the volume is the distribution of surplus-value between different components of capital. Volume I, by contrast, deals with the production of surplus-value through the exploitation of labour, which is then taken as given in Volume III. This interpretation appears to be too narrow for some of his co-authors, and there is always a danger in reducing a work as multi-dimensional as *Capital* to a simple formula. Nevertheless, Moseley’s approach has the great merit of providing an accessible summary of many of the contentious issues referred to in my opening paragraph.

Patrick Murray’s essay on ‘The Illusion of the Economic’ also stands in its own right as a model of textual exegesis and as a critique of ‘left-Ricardian’ readings of *Capital*. His focus is on the way in which the inverted character of capitalist social relations themselves generates the ideological misrepresentations which pervade bourgeois thought. He skilfully reveals the difference between Marx’s emphasis on historically determinate social forms and a left-Ricardian reading which neglects forms altogether. The latter, as a result, tends to counterpose an unequal distribution of the product to a process of production conceived of as natural or a simple function of technology. Murray’s summary of Marx’s penultimate chapter on the Trinity Formula (the idea that land, labour and capital all contribute to production and therefore receive a commensurate reward) is beautifully done, even if it does not venture much beyond Marx’s own work.5

Paul Mattick Jnr., on the other hand, provides a stimulating discussion of Marx’s fragment on class which contains some apposite asides on the weaknesses of the theories of class found in Bourdieu and analytical Marxists such as Roemer and Olin Wright. Mattick is also more inclined than most of the other contributors to distance collection also on Volume III of *Capital* to which, however, many of the authors in this volume also contributed.

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5 Lest that seem a dismissive sentence, I feel the need to express my admiration for Murray’s other work. That includes his debate with Reuten in the pages of *Historical Materialism* (Murray 2000a and 2000b, Reuten 2000 and Murray 2002), his book on *Marx’s Theory of Scientific Knowledge* (Murray 1988) and, above all, his concise yet brilliant and innovative commentary on debate around the ‘purist splits’, or the dualisms of the conceptual and the empirical, the subjective and the objective – which Marx, following Aristotle and Hegel, sought to overcome – in the second volume in this series (Murray 1997).
himself from a strictly Hegelian reading of Marx’s dialectic, but does not explore that issue in any depth here. Finally, he provides a provocative defence of Grossman’s ‘breakdown theory’, interpreted to imply not a ‘final catastrophe’ but ‘many catastrophes’, including wars and economic crises which only revolutionary action by the working class can prevent. The argument is too brief to be entirely persuasive, but it does remind us that Grossman was an important Marxist theorist whose work has been far too neglected.

Reuten, in his helpful introduction, acknowledges differences among the authors over the extent to which any interpretation of Marx’s text must also be a ‘reconstruction’ of the argument, and the relationship between Marx and Hegel. Yet he also suggests that there is agreement on ‘three interdependent aspects of Marx’s method’. First, the dialectic is not ‘unnecessary jargon’ but ‘key to the understanding of Capital’. Second, ‘the movement in Capital is from abstract and simple categories to concrete and complex ones, and is marked by conceptual levels of abstraction/concretion’. Third, ‘these levels are marked by the Parts within each of the volumes of Capital, many of which are also conceptual conversions or transformations’. ‘In addition all the authors emphasise – although with different accentuation – that the monetary value-form is key to the understanding of Capital’ (pp. 5–6).

I hesitate to challenge Reuten over his attempt to maintain a united front on such a minimal programme, but it does seem a little doubtful whether one of the authors, Riccardo Bellofiore, is quite so committed to a dialectical reading of Marx and an emphasis on the ‘value-form’. Bellofiore, who writes on ‘Transformation and the Monetary Circuit’, explicitly states that ‘Marx’s project cannot be defended as it stands, and that some of the contradictions on which the critics have insisted are really there in Capital’ (p. 104).

Instead, Bellofiore proposes a reconstruction of Marx’s argument, which draws on the work of Sraffa on price determination and Schumpeter’s theory of credit money. Marx’s labour theory of value is retained as a theory of the origin of surplus-value in the labour process. But Sraffa’s model of simultaneous price determination (commonly labelled ‘neo-Ricardian’) is invoked as a superior solution to the so-called transformation problem. Marx’s theory of money is rejected outright as reliant on gold as commodity money, directly produced by labour. Neither position corresponds to the stance taken by the other contributors to this volume, as is evident, for example, in Campbell’s

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6 The critique of Hegelian readings is summed up in his ‘Marx’s Dialectic’ in Moseley 1993, especially the quote on p. 129 from Fred Schrader: ‘There is no portentous reception of Hegel, no World Spirit unmasked as Capital, and no need to decode an identity between the movements of Being and Value . . ., rather the pragmatic utilization of Hegel’s mode of expressing the systematic interconnection of categories’. This is very different from Chris Arthur’s approach discussed below (see also footnote 26).

7 Grossman 1992 is only a severely abridged English translation of the original work from 1929.
essay on the credit system and commodity money in this volume. It would take up too much space here to review once again the various contributions to the transformation debate, which has received a quite disproportionate amount of attention in the literature as it is. Suffice it to say that Fred Moseley’s contribution in the first volume of the series deals very effectively with the methodological deficiencies of neo-Ricardian approaches to this question.8

Leaving the complexities of that issue aside, it is still necessary to address the position of Volume III of Capital within Marx’s overall plan for the work as a whole. The title of this collection in this respect is a little misleading. Certainly, Volume III is The Culmination of Capital as we have it. But Marx left us an unfinished work. There is evidence for that in the various plans, and rough sketches of a six-volume work, including in one version further volumes on landed property and wage-labour.9 More critically for the argument here, there are frequent references within the text of Volume III itself to the need for further volumes dealing with competition, the state and the world market and crises. Those references put into question a common view that, in Volume III, Marx has moved from the level of capital in general, discussed in Volumes I and II, to the level of many capitals and competition in the fullest sense of the term. Certainly, there is a further movement towards the concrete as ‘the concentration of many determinations’.10 But there were important determinations still left aside at the end of Volume III although, not surprisingly, the rough draft of the manuscript contains several passages in which Marx as it were leapt ahead of himself – anticipating results yet to be systematically established. This means, for example, that Marx’s fragments on the trade cycle and crises, however suggestive, cannot be taken as a definitive treatment. As Marx insists at a point where he is discussing the effect of price changes on the devaluation and revaluation of capital:

> The phenomena under investigation in this chapter assume for their full development the credit system and competition on the world market, the latter being the very basis and living atmosphere of the capitalist mode of production. These concrete forms of capitalist production, however, can be comprehensively depicted only after the general nature of capital is understood; it is therefore outside the scope of this work to present them – they belong to a possible continuation.11

Curiously, but not atypically for work in this field, none of the authors in this collection pays any attention to Marx’s emphasis, which could hardly be stronger, on the world

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9 Rosdolsky 1977, pp. 10–55. This work still provides the most useful analysis of the various drafts and their implications, although his identification of Volume III, as the level of ‘many capitals’, is correctly disputed by Arthur in this volume, as I argue below.
market as ‘the very basis and living atmosphere’ of capitalism. Even those who do emphasise the incompleteness of *Capital*, such as Chris Arthur and Michael Lebowitz, have tended to concentrate on the issues raised by the missing volume on wage-labour.\(^{12}\) ‘Reconstructing’ Marx’s missing volume on the world market and crises would, of course, be an impossible task but some attention to the implications of Marx’s remarks here and at many other points in Volume III and the *Grundrisse* would not be misplaced. It might also put in question some of the attempts to ‘reconstruct’ Marx’s *Capital* as a whole in the light of Hegel’s *Logic*, a work, which in its own terms at least, certainly is a completed and self-sufficient totality.

**Arthur (and Smith) on capital in general and competition**

Chris Arthur, Tony Smith and Geert Reuten are, in their different ways, among the most prominent of the new Hegelians. Of the three, it is perhaps Arthur who is the most philosophically steeped in Hegel, whereas Smith and Reuten are more alert to the problematic ‘economic’ issues concerning the ‘laws of motion’ of contemporary capitalism. Arthur, however, distances himself explicitly from the other two who, he claims, believe that Marx’s method is a direct application of Hegel’s *Logic*. Smith’s interpretation of Hegel, in particular, is ‘non-metaphysical’ in the sense of emphasising the process of category development needed to reconstruct an object, such as capitalism, in thought. Arthur instead insists with some justification that: ‘it is patent that the movement of the *Logic* is indeed that of the self-acting Idea’.\(^{13}\)

In his recent book on the ‘new dialectic’, Arthur is very explicit that it is the peculiar, ‘spectral’ and ‘inverted’ character of capitalism as a social totality which, paradoxically, gives Hegel’s idealist ontology its relevance to a materialist theory. For Arthur, there is ‘a striking homology between the structures of Hegel’s *Logic* and Marx’s *Capital* or at least a homology given some minor reconstructive work on either or both’. The critical point is that ‘the capitalist system does indeed consist at least in part of logical relations’ corresponding to the abstractive power of the exchange relation, when commodities are sold for money. From that perspective, he proceeds to interpret all the opening categories of *Capital*, Volume I, such as value and money, as becoming actual only within ‘the totality of capitalist relations’.\(^{14}\)

There is an important insight in the idea of a ‘homology’ between the two works – an idea anticipated by Adorno – and Arthur is right to claim that both Hegel and Marx were seeking ways to conceptualise the world in which they lived as a systematic

\(^{12}\) Lebowitz 1992.

\(^{13}\) Arthur 2002, p. 7.

\(^{14}\) Arthur 2002, pp. 7–8. I comment on the problematic character of this claim by Arthur in footnote 41.
totality. But, if Marx borrowed categories from Hegel, it does not follow that the ordering of those categories follows a Hegelian pattern, except in the most general sense of a movement from the abstract to the concrete, ‘as the concentration of many determinations’. Arthur and Smith both warn against the dangers of mapping a Hegelian grid onto Marx’s work. Yet both are inclined to suggest ‘reconstructions’ of Capital along their own rather different Hegelian lines, with Arthur, in particular, revealing dissatisfaction with Marx’s failure to adhere to a strict dialectical development of the categories. As with much of the earlier German work in value theory influenced by Backhaus, the attempt to reclaim Hegel as a critical influence on Marx tends to end up berating Marx for not being a strict Hegelian. The historical and materialist dimensions of Marx’s own critique of Hegel are in danger of being not so much forgotten as consigned to a level of contingency and brute fact which is counterpoised to the logical necessity of capital as a totality.

Leaving that criticism aside for a moment, it needs to be acknowledged that Arthur, in his two contributions to this volume, provides a thorough and illuminating discussion of the concepts of capital in general and competition and their place within Volume III. In his first contribution, he starts with Rosdolsky’s emphasis on the methodological importance of the concept of ‘capital in general’ in the Grundrisse, but proceeds to explore this theme much more carefully than other commentators. Rosdolsky’s path-breaking work used the concept of ‘capital in general’ to explore the structure of Capital itself. He revealed how, in Volumes I and II, Marx is abstracting from the differences between individual capitals in order to focus on capital’s reliance on the production of surplus-value by the working class as a whole. Only in Volume III, does Marx deal with the effects of competition in the market on how that mass of surplus-value is allocated between different capitals or fractions of capital.

Rosdolsky’s work was so illuminating – especially by the standards of the literature of the time when it first appeared in English – and its stress on the methodological significance of the Grundrisse so persuasive, that its interpretation of those categories has rarely received detailed critical attention. But Arthur is able to demonstrate that there are at least five different ‘definitions’ or deployments of the phrase ‘capital in general’ in the Grundrisse, although these are internally related. Despite Rosdolsky’s claim, Marx never directly counterposes capital in general to many capitals, although he does repeatedly contrast it both with competition and the individuality of capital.

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15 Adorno, an influence on Arthur mediated by Backhaus (little of whose work is translated, but see his chapter in Backhaus 1992), had a sharper sense of how Hegel’s logic failed in the face of the ‘non-identity of the antagonistic’ (Adorno 1993, p. 31).

16 Arthur 2002, p. 3 and Smith 1990, pp. 44–5. Arthur criticises ‘lifeless formalism’ which proceeds ‘by applying abstract schemas adventitiously to contents arbitrarily forced into the required shape’. He can even quote Hegel to the same effect and on how science ‘demands surrender to the life of the object’. There is no doubt that Arthur’s intention is to explore the life of the object, capitalism – whether he always succeeds is what is being questioned here.

17 Rosdolsky 1977, pp. 41–53.
Individuality here refers to a systematic totality incorporating differences between capitals, unlike capital in general which leaves such differences aside and therefore has only a provisional status in the argument. All this may appear to be academic pedantry, but Arthur is preparing the ground for an understanding of the role of competition in Volume III, which is very different from Rosdolsky’s influential reading.

Arthur proceeds in his second contribution to insist that the concept of capital in general includes ‘the form of competition and the dialectic of many capitals’ (p. 129). He does not refer to the character of Volumes I and II here, which is unfortunate for the clarity of his presentation, but it follows that those two volumes, whilst concerned with capital in general do not abstract from the existence of competition as Rosdolsky implied. Rather they abstract from the consequences of competition with respect to any tendency for an equalisation of rates of profit and formation of prices of production.

In Volume III, on the other hand, Marx is still working within the frame of capital in general in the first three parts which are concerned with the formation and determinants of the ‘general rate of profit’. After that, Marx moves to consider the division of capital itself into money capital and industrial capital, and then onto the question of capitalist agriculture and land ownership, and thus to an emphasis on what differentiates capitals rather than what they have in common. However, Marx never reaches a systematic discussion of the way competition itself, within each sector, serves to differentiate between capitals. As Arthur rightly emphasises, the book on competition was to be ‘a possible continuation’ of the work. Instead, competition is dealt with in Volume III only in the very restricted sense of the manner in which the movement of capital between spheres of production serves to ground a tendency towards equalisation of rates of profit across those spheres. The uniformity of rates of profit of capitals across sectors is assumed by Marx throughout Parts One and Two, and their differentiation within sectors (between more and less successful capitals) – which is one of the most important results of the real process of competition – is ignored, except for the occasional aside.

Arthur then seeks to explain how one can reconcile two different approaches to the formation of a general rate of profit. One emphasises a uniform rate of profit as simply a result of competition and the movement of capitals, whereas the other postulates a general rate of profit whose ‘essential determinants are equally general’. Arthur is very interesting on how the apparent opposition in Marx between asserting the priority of the one (the total social capital) and regarding the competition of the many (individual capitals) as essential, can be understood in the light of the dialectic of ‘the one and the many’ in Hegel’s Logic. The (use-) value of Arthur’s contribution is revealed in his stress on the ontological reality of total social capital, a notion quite beyond the comprehension of analytical Marxists, and neo-Ricardians. As he rightly insists:

Capital is the enemy in a different sense than that in which Disease is an enemy. The latter is a personified class name for empirically distinct diseases
which have enough in common to group and personify. But Capital has a reality as an individual whole. It is not just a class name for Ford, Shell, ICI etc. . . . Capital is an Individual, determined in its unity of many capitals by its negative relation to the working class. (p. 147)

Yet the value of such an insight is undermined by weaknesses in Arthur’s development of the argument about the different concepts of the rate of profit. Having opened his discussion with a reference to Marx’s use of the concepts of general and average rate of profit, Arthur then proceeds to slide from the term ‘average’ to the term ‘uniform’ and back again, almost indiscriminately. When he concludes that the general and average are quantitatively identical but subject to different determinations and thus qualitatively distinct, he should really be referring to the distinction between the general/average on the one hand and the uniform rate on the other.18 It is the equalisation of profit rates across sectors, or the formation of a uniform rate, which depends upon different more concrete determinations, emerging only as a result of competition and the actual movement of capital.

Arthur quite correctly highlights the passage in which Marx ‘says that equalization depends upon the mobility of capital and labour’, and how Marx locates the credit system as concentrating the available social capital and moving it between sectors.19 But he seems to assume that the average is necessarily realised in the form of a uniform rate. Marx may suggest this at points in the argument, but a uniform rate is not essential to his argument in the way that a general rate of profit obviously is. Indeed, a uniform rate is unlikely to ever actually emerge, although there is a tendency in that direction. Unlike the general rate of profit, the actual realisation of a uniform rate of profit depends critically upon the conditions for unfettered mobility of capital and labour, not simply within but across national economies. Yet, throughout capitalism’s history, understood as a global system not as an aggregate of national capitalisms, those conditions have never been completely fulfilled.

In practice, capitalism simultaneously sets in play tendencies towards the equalisation of profits and tendencies towards their differentiation, within and across sectors. Tony Smith’s chapter in this collection on ‘surplus profits from innovation’ deals with one reason for that in some depth. Smith argues that surplus profits can arise not simply for innovative capitals within a sector, as Marx argues, but for innovative sectors as a whole. The variation of profit-rates in practice may be wide, but the average rate of profit will still exist, and be calculable at least in principle. The determinants of the general/average rate of profit are not (at least directly) affected by such a dispersal.

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18 This confusion may explain why Fred Moseley is unable to see the point of the distinction between general and average made by Arthur according to a footnote to his contribution – Campbell and Reuten (eds.) 2001, p. 76.
Indeed, none of Marx’s critical arguments about the dynamics of capitalism are predicated on the assumption of a uniform rate of profit, whereas that is not the case for Sraffian models which cease to have any meaning when that assumption is dropped.\footnote{For this, see the devastating critiques of Steedman and other neo-Ricardians by Farjoun 1984, and Farjoun and Machover 1983.}

There is an interesting contrast between Smith and Arthur which emerges from this, and reflects back on their respective uses of Hegel. Smith is much more sensitive to the reality of differentiation within the realm of ‘many capitals’ than Arthur. Yet he also mistakenly follows Rosdolsky in believing that Marx had shifted already to the level of many capitals and competition in the first three parts of Volume III. Because Smith recognises that surplus profits from innovation are a driving force of competition, he criticises Marx for failing to consider such profits systematically before deriving the tendency for the general rate of profit to fall. But Marx was explicitly leaving such considerations to a later volume. The question of how the tendency was executed in and through competition is never addressed, except in a few fragments. That is our loss, but it does not justify Smith’s critique of Marx’s ordering of the categories. Marx was still only dealing with the determinants of the general rate of profit in Volume III and, therefore, the factors which serve to differentiate rates of profit are correctly left aside, although their significance is frequently alluded to.

There is just a suggestion in Arthur’s presentation, however, that, as for Hegel, the many (competing) capitals are ultimately absorbed back into the one (the total social capital). It can even appear that capitals are only truly capital when they discard their impure material incarnations in use-value form, and transform back into pure value in motion (or money), all receiving their rightful uniform share of the profits, in proportion only to their size. Size, in this context, is a mere quantitative difference of no other significance, a notion that hardly corresponds to Marx’s analysis of the concentration and centralisation of capitals. Arthur’s unquestioning adoption of the idea of a ‘uniform rate of profit’, corresponding also – at least approximately – to a given money rate of interest, implies an obliteration of differences between capitals in some pure state of ideal capital (the equivalent in a sense of the world of neoclassical general equilibrium). His emphasis on capitalism as a totality in which the law of value is necessarily ‘fully developed’ can easily lead to an underestimation of the ‘uneven development’ which has always characterised global capitalism.

That is perhaps unfair to Arthur who, elsewhere, has insisted that capitalism is not a self-sufficient totality but one which relies on both its internal and external others – the proletariat and nature respectively.\footnote{Arthur 2002, p. 77.} But the error outlined above may also be symptomatic, suggesting that Arthur can be led astray by his indisputable strength – his deep immersion in Hegel’s Logic.\footnote{Smith 1990 avoids the dangers of Arthur’s overemphasis on totality to the exclusion of...}
Marx's dialectic may derive from Hegel, but it also has other sources of inspiration. Those include Aristotle, as Patrick Murray and others have shown, and the Enlightenment materialists from Hobbes and Spinoza through to Holbach and Diderot, who was a dialectical thinker – and joker like Marx himself – if ever there was. There is also a multitude of literary influences from the Greeks through to Shakespeare, Cervantes and Goethe, whose contribution to Marx's dialectical presentation, if not his systematic analysis, should not be underestimated. Arthur may have distanced himself from any position which collapses Marx's method back into Hegel, but he finds it difficult to read Capital except through the lens of The Science of Logic. The result is a reading which, for all its many insights, has difficulty in accounting for the actual material history of capitalism. But, before addressing that question, I want to look at the essay of another Hegelian Marxist, Geert Reuten.

Reuten on the rate of profit and financial/managerial capital

Geert Reuten has already made a number of significant contributions to discussion around Marx's 'law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall'. One critical issue concerns the concepts of tendency and countertendency deployed by Marx himself. Reuten's detailed investigation, in the second volume of the series, of different uses by Marx of the concept of tendency and its associated concepts such as expression, is a model of its kind and one to which I am indebted in the critique which follows. That study also drew on the work of critical realists such as Bhaskar and Lawson to conclude that a tendency is 'a power that may be exercised and yet unrealized in manifest phenomena' and that 'powers themselves exist by virtue of certain enduring structures'. Both assertions are correct but, curiously, unlike Bhaskar, Reuten seems to have a rather agnostic view on the ontological status of tendencies.

difference. But his own syllogistic reading of Capital, which also attempts a reconstruction of 'missing categories' in Marx, falls at times into a rather different formalism. Paul Mattick Jnr – in Moseley (ed.) 1993, p. 129 – is equally sceptical about any attempt to 'decode an identity between the movements of being and value'. But Mattick's own conception of Marx's dialectic as 'the principle of the critique of ideology', and his view that what Marx takes from Hegel is essentially a 'mode of expression', is far too narrow.

23 Prawer 1976 remains the best commentary on the literary influences; Murray 1988 and Meikle 1985 on that of Aristotle. On Diderot and Marx, there seems sadly to be near-universal neglect, at least in English, although we do know that he was Marx's favourite prose-writer (McLellan 1973, p. 457). Plekhanov, however, makes some interesting connections between Diderot, Holbach, Spinoza and Feuerbach in his 'Essays on the History of Materialism', and 'Bernstein and Materialism', in Plekhanov 1976. There is also the quite astonishing 'Dialogue between Denis Diderot and Karl Marx' in Tsuru 1994. Strict Hegelians of the value-form school, which has heavily influenced Arthur and Reuten in particular, find anything which smacks too much of earthy materialism anathema. But even if we are obliged to renounce the term 'dialectical materialism' for its Stalinist connotations, we still need to insist that Marx held fast to a materialist dialectic. Arthur would not disagree with this.

24 This is also evident in Arthur's attempt in the first contribution to this collection to reconstruct Marx's original nine-point plan for Capital as a whole using Hegelian categories. I may have missed something here, but this seems to be little more than a skilful but formalistic exercise which fails to elucidate what Marx himself was trying to do.

That earlier essay helpfully revealed that, for Marx, there are at least two sorts of tendencies at work at different levels of analysis. The more fundamental of these, with the ontological status Reuten attributes to ‘power tendencies’, is the underlying tendency for capitalism to raise the ratio of dead to living labour and thus simultaneously increase both the organic composition of capital and the productivity of labour. The other is the expression of that transformation of the productive forces, namely a tendency for the general rate of profit to fall, which may or may not actually manifest itself, depending upon the effect of counteracting causes, as Reuten prefers to label them. It is the second of these that Reuten adopts as more representative of Marx’s argument, but there is no justification for making such a choice on the basis of Marx’s own texts, including the passages quoted by Reuten himself.

Reuten concludes the essay on tendency by insisting that the rate of profit does not fall continuously, an assertion that is hardly controversial in the recent literature defending Marx’s analysis. Unfortunately, he seems to have decided that the only alternative to a continuous fall is a cyclical fall, a position he expands upon in his contribution here. Both interpretations are mistaken, in my view. The notion of a continuous secular fall does not allow for the possibility of the counteracting causes overriding the tendency for a considerable period of time. It suggests an image of a clockwork mechanism slowly winding down into a state of semi-permanent stagnation. That image does not in the least accord with Marx’s account in Chapter 15 of Volume III of the ‘Development of the Law’s Internal Contradictions’. It is also revealing, as Reuten notes, that the strongest statement to the effect that the rate ‘will fall in the long run as we have already seen’ is one inserted by Engels. But, if the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is only an expression of an underlying tendency for the organic composition of capital to rise as a function of the rising ratio of dead to living labour, the former is not adequately described as a cyclical tendency, not least given Marx’s own use of the term ‘cyclical’. Reuten signally fails to clarify what sort of cycle, over what sort of time period, he is referring to. There are certainly

\[\text{\footnotesize 26 Reuten’s preferred phrase is counteracting causes rather than countertendencies, although he also wants to insist that both tendency and counteractions spring from the same source or process. In my view, we need to differentiate countertendencies which also result from the rising productivity of labour, such as the devaluation of the fixed and circulating elements of constant capital, from other influences on the rate of profit such as the course of class struggle, the impact of foreign trade or changes in turnover time which could be termed counteracting causes. Both types are included in Marx’s undifferentiated and unsystematic list of counteracting forces, which, one suspects, would also have been thoroughly reworked before publication.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 25 Marx 1981, pp. 318–19, quoted in Moseley and Campbell (eds.) 1997, pp. 159–60. Reuten challenges the Fernbach translation on this point, but the alternative Untermann translation still refers to the ‘actual tendency’ (from Marx’s ‘die wirkliche Tendenz’) with respect to capitalist production, which ‘produces’ a rise in the organic composition. More critically, it makes sense to regard the rise of the organic composition of capital as itself a tendency subject to countertendencies, as well as the expression of that tendency at the level of the general rate of profit which is however counteracted by other forces as well. I hope that the significance of this becomes clearer in the next three paragraphs of my text.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 28 Marx 1981, p. 337.}\]
fluctuations in profitability over the standard seven- to ten-year business cycle, but these are, in the first instance, a function of shifts in demand, relative to available capacity, and of price movements above and below values which are fuelled by the expansion and contraction of credit. Here, changes in the rate of profit are results which, in turn, feed back into the process, as effects become, in their turn, causes in a process of reciprocal determination. Marx explores, if only sketchily, elements of such a cyclical theory at several points in Volume III, but Reuten pays those passages little attention.29 As Marx also insists, though in the context of the formation of a general rate of profit

We shall see later on in what direction such fluctuations tend in the last analysis. But this process is slow, and the suddenness, multilateral character and differential duration of fluctuations in the different spheres of production lead to a situation in which they partly compensate for one another in their temporal succession . . .30

Note, by the way, the astonishing compression of so many determinants of a more concrete character into this sentence, only for all of them to be put aside as Marx moves back to the general tendency. The conclusion can only be that, for Marx at least, the fall in the rate of profit is a tendency which, whilst it only manifests itself in and through cyclical fluctuations, was still ‘in the last analysis’ the function of another underlying tendency, whose effects only slowly make themselves felt over the course of several such fluctuations.

Reuten is correct to insist that the profit-rate tendency, according to the logic of Marx’s own argument about the devaluation of constant capital, can also be subject to periodic reversals, if the counteracting tendencies are strong enough. But those reversals, whilst they may be a result of lengthy periods of crisis, accompanied by extensive devaluation of capital and a rise in the rate of exploitation, have no necessary regularity about them which would warrant the term cyclical. Reuten’s emphasis on Marx’s use of the term periodisch to refer to crises is correct,31 but that does not

29 See, for example, Marx 1981, p. 310, which clearly suggests that there are fluctuations in profit rates as a result of the cycle ‘of fat and lean years’. In *Theories of Surplus-Value*, Marx has an extended discussion of crises in terms of periodic overproduction, with an emphasis on capital’s need for a constantly expanding market (Marx 1969, Chapter 17 and p. 524 in particular on this point). See also the remarkable work by Pavel Maksakovsky written in the 1920s in Russia but only just published in English (Maksakovskiy 2002) which locates cycles as a function of systematic disproportionalities, both within production and between production and consumer demand. The crisis, of course, is a violent means of overcoming those disproportionalities.


31 Reuten refers to the failure of Marx’s English translators to translate periodisch as periodical at a key point in the text – Reuten and Campbell (eds.) 2001, p. 181 – but this is where Marx, in Chapter 15, has shifted to another level at which ‘the conflict of antagonistic tendencies finds vent in crisis’ (Marx 1981, p. 357). It is the crises which are periodic, not the underlying tendencies, or at least not in the same way. Reuten is not wrong to refer to the more ‘synthesising’ character of Chapter 15 compared to the earlier chapters on the ‘Law Itself and Counteracting Factors’.
necessarily imply any regular temporal pattern to the interaction of the underlying
tendencies and countertendencies. It all depends upon how all the different determinants,
outlined by Marx with great scientific conscientiousness, play out across the arena of
the world market.

There is, however, some evidence historically for long waves in the rate of profit
which, in turn, affect the intensity and amplitude of shorter-term cyclical fluctuations,
and that is especially clear since the mid-nineteenth century. As both Shaikh and
Duménil and Lévy have argued in different ways, the decline in the average rate of
profit manifests itself not automatically in falling rates of accumulation but in a greater
vulnerability to cyclical fluctuations and heightened sensitivity to interest-rate changes
or movements of the exchange-rate.32 The cycle itself, as a result, become more intense,
with more protracted and possibly deeper recessions and more speculative booms,
accompanied by acute financial crises and prolonged global restructuring. That certainly
fits the pattern of the last thirty years, although intervention by states has also strongly
influenced the cycle, but it is not an analysis which justifies any theory of long-term
stagnation, or breakdown.

It is necessary to conclude with some all-too brief comments on Reuten’s extensive
but unconvincing discussion of the relationship between managerial and financial
capital in contemporary capitalism. He does make some interesting comments upon
Marx’s own analysis of the division of surplus-value between profit of enterprise and
interest for money-capital. He rightly suggests that the generalisation of the joint-
stock company implied for Marx a transformation in that relationship, as shareholders,
in effect, also accepted the equivalent of interest. But his own attempt to sustain an
updated version of a similar division focuses on a conflict between managers of
corporations, on the one hand, and finance capital, on the other. This appears to rely
on the assumption of a potential conflict over the level of retained profit (managers
preferring a higher level of profit retained, presumably for accumulation, rather than
its distribution as dividends or interest) for any individual capital. Reuten, of all
people, should recognise that there are much more complex and historically variable
determinations at work affecting the retention of profits than can be summed up by
postulating a rather Keynesian notion of a conflict of interests between managers, on
one side, and banks and shareholders, on the other.33 Even across contemporary

33 Keynes, of course, referred to the rentier element of the capitalist class (those living off
interest or dividends) whose euthanasia he desired, rather than finance capital as such, which
surely has to include banking capital, whose interests are quite distinct. There is an important
capitalism, there persist differences, for example, between the bank-dominated financial systems of Germany and Japan, and the Anglo-Saxon model in which all senior executives are partly paid in stock options. Interestingly, it appears as if, for all its casino-like qualities, it is the second model which is more likely to prevail with the globalisation of world financial markets. But neither model can be adequately characterised with the categorial division proposed by Reuten, which counterposes a unified bloc of finance capital to the capital supposedly controlled by a class of managers with distinct interests.

A question of history

One reason for the difficulty Reuten has with developing categories appropriate to contemporary capitalism, is his overreliance, along with Arthur, on a systematic dialectic which focuses on social forms, rather than on the ‘laws of motion’ of capitalism.34 As I have already suggested, this procedure has yielded many illuminating insights and captures the most important methodological legacy of Hegel for Marx. But reliance on systematic dialectic alone leaves them with a problem as far as the concrete historical development of capitalism is concerned. Arthur and the others have quite rightly based themselves on the Marx of the Introduction to the Grundrisse, who insisted that the historical order of emergence of the categories is not the same as their order of logical priority for capitalism as a developed totality.35 But the actual historical path of capitalism, with all its uneven and combined development, still needs to be understood and that requires introducing the categories of the state, and the world market. Those categories cannot be simply derived in Hegelian fashion from the logic of capital. The necessity of some form of state is derivable from the character of class relations under capitalism, but not the existence of many states, hugely disparate in

34 See Arthur 1998 (now in a revised version in Arthur 2002) which provides the definitive account of the distinction between historical and systematic dialectic.
size and historical formation. States, from before the origins of capitalism as a totality in Arthur’s sense, demarcated their territories with national and imperial borders, creating obstacles to the free flow of commodities, capital and labour across the world market, and thus to the full implementation of the law of value globally. Even today, those obstacles have not been fully overcome. Having failed to recognise that truth, Arthur and Reuten are forced to make conceptual leaps to a contemporary capitalism which, for that reason among others, evades their grasp.36

Arthur, and, it seems, most of his co-authors, have rejected, for good reason, any form of historical dialectic which smacks of teleology. However, even though, for Arthur, the most profound statement in Capital is that capital can only be grasped ‘as a movement and not as a static thing’,37 the actual movement of capital across time and space is not addressed. There is at least an impression that his totalities have no real internal history at all. It can appear that there is merely a play of historical contingency counterposed to the essential features of capitalism, which remain always the same – at least since some unspecified point of emergence as a fully fledged totality. Capitalism persists as a totality, of course, but the difficult and contentious questions, of what counts as essential and how to incorporate other determinations of a more concrete character, cannot be answered without reference to the actual historical development.

For example, Arthur views the former USSR as a society without a coherent mode of production, one with no internal dynamic.38 He would, presumably, reject the relevance of a theory of the state acting as the collective capitalist, on the grounds that in the USSR the law of value was suppressed. But attempts by states to manipulate, resist or suppress the law of value, though rarely as far-reaching as in the USSR (or wartime Britain and Germany), have been a feature of capitalism since its origins.39 Arthur’s insistence that capitalism can only really exist as a totality when there is a ‘full development of the law of value’ would imply that capitalism in a pure form has never really existed at all, and exposes the dangers of his appropriation of Hegel.40

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36 See Reuten and Williams 1989, which includes a derivation of the state-form via the concept of civil society but fails to adequately deal with the issue of many states – although it does raise important questions about the lack of a ‘world-wide social subject’ or a world state and thus an adequate world money.
37 See Arthur in Arthur and Reuten (eds.) 1998, p. 106 (and the footnote in p. 127) for another admirable piece discussing the circuits of capital in Volume II.
39 Some advocates of a theory of state capitalism have attempted to argue that the law of value did prevail within the USSR. My own preference has always been for Cliff’s formulation that Stalinism involved the abolition of the law of value on the basis of the law of value – i.e. internal suppression of competition in a global context still governed by capitalist competition translated from the economic onto the military plane (Cliff 1964, Chapter 8). But, as we now know, the law of value is not so easily suppressed in the wider context of an unregulated but dynamic world market. In any event, Arthur’s claim, derived from Ticktin, that there was permanent stagnation in the USSR is simply false, even for the Brezhnev years, a period when oil and gas exports expanded rapidly. Arthur is closer to the truth when he notes the prioritisation of arms and arms-related production (Arthur 2002, pp. 212–13).
Engels did get it wrong in his logico-historical treatment of the formation of prices of production, although he was not quite as divergent from Marx on this as Arthur suggests. But Engels was much more acute on the question of the state acting as the collective capitalist, both hypothetically in *Anti-Dühring* and in his writing on the historical emergence of such a tendency in Bismarck’s Germany.

Once Marx moves on to the differentiation of capital in general into productive capital, commercial capital and money capital, and, equally, when he brings the forms of landed property into the picture, it becomes obvious that his analysis is tied at those moments to the real historical developments of his day. Any attempt to extend Marx’s analysis of money and credit or of rent to the contemporary world has to address the massive transformations of capitalism since the mid-nineteenth century, in both spheres, and the systematic intervention of states in the process of capital formation in both agriculture and industry. One virtue of Martha Campbell’s two contributions to this volume on ‘The Credit System’ and ‘Rent and Landed Property’ is that they acknowledge the historically derived limitations of Marx’s text, whilst defending the relevance of his categories. For example, Marx relied for his analysis of absolute rent on an assumption about lower levels of organic composition of capital in agriculture, which has long ceased to be valid for industrialised capitalism. But, as Campbell skilfully reveals, the essential point of his argument only requires private ownership of landed property precluding common use, which remains true today.

Campbell’s ‘The Credit System’ confronts a more controversial question – the disappearance of gold as commodity money removing in the process the foundation-stone of Marx’s analysis of credit, in the view of critics such as Bellofiore. However, Campbell, in this article and its predecessors, has developed a sustained defence of

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See also Arthur on ‘Engels as Interpreter of Marx’s Economics’ in Arthur (ed.) 1996. The Japanese Uno school does counterpose a ‘pure model’ of capital to a more historical ‘stages’ analysis (see Sekine 1997 and Albritton 1986 for helpful elucidation). Arthur’s references to Sekine and Albritton (Arthur 2002, p. 7) suggest he may share this perspective, but that is not explicit.

41 Arthur, quite rightly, in the same essays just referenced, excoriates those such as Engels and Meek who postulate a non-existent historical stage of simple commodity production at which exchange at values prevailed, before the shift to prices of production and equal profit rates with developed capitalism. The issue with respect to the transformation is not a matter of historical sequence but of levels of determination and the systematic ordering of categories necessary to relate these levels to each other. On all that we are agreed. But Arthur also suggests that, in ‘underdeveloped forms of commodity exchange’, there can be prices but not labour values, ‘unless we mean something relatively indeterminate by value’ – Arthur in Moseley and Campbell (eds.) 1997, p. 12. That position clearly contradicts what Marx himself says at various points in Volume III, not only in a passage mentioned by Arthur, but dismissed as a ‘false trail’ but in the whole chapter of historical material on merchant’s capital (Marx 1981, Chapter 20 and p. 277), which makes it clear that values are both theoretically and historically prior to prices of production, but with the latter determination having only a secondary significance for the argument. Arthur quotes Marx as saying the law of value is only fully developed with large-scale industry and free competition, but that is quite different from denying the applicability of the concept of value to exchange in earlier periods, or to later periods of monopolisation or states seeking to suppress or manage ‘free competition’.

42 See Engels in Marx and Engels 1987, p. 266; see also the alternative translation in Draper 1990, p. 87–8 and the accompanying discussion.
Marx’s theory, which does not rely on commodity money at all. Marx’s analysis of the vulnerability of the credit system, or financial fragility, retains, of course, a vital resonance with recent events, but Marx’s categories need ‘reconstruction’ given the changes in the structure of finance itself and the role of states and central banks.

One would want to say more on that particular theme but that would exceed the word limits of editors and perhaps the patience of readers. I hope, though, in far too compressed a space to do justice to many of the contributions, that I have done enough to suggest that this particular group of authors are still ahead of most of the field in their understanding of what Marx’s Capital was all about. My disagreements with Arthur and Reuten in particular should certainly be taken as testimony to the thought-provoking character of their collective endeavour over the years.

References


See Campbell, ‘Marx’s Theory of Money: A Defence’ in Moseley and Campbell (eds.) 1997. But there is the danger in such a defence that it underestimates the historical (as distinct from logical) necessity for commodity money to act as ‘world money’ and a means of payment, along with the destabilising effects for the system of attempting to abandon commodity money in the early 1970s when the dollar was detached from obligations to repay international holders in gold.


Mclellan, David 1973, Karl Marx: His Life and Thought, Basingstoke: Macmillan.


As Webb’s citations attest, a small industry of writers have claimed that the collapse of ‘really existing socialism’ puts the burden on socialists to create a model of what their desired society will look like. The horror show that the first successful workers’ revolution turned into is obvious to many millions of people, including worker activists, in every country. We have all experienced the question from those we were working with politically, ‘But why wouldn’t what happened in Russia happen again? And, in any case, what are you really trying to build?’ The natural response, when faced with such questions, is to roll up our sleeves to figure out what the new society will look like.

Webb argues that this response is mistaken. He holds – correctly, in my view – that the essence of Marx’s critique of utopian thought was that it pre-empted the proletariat, putting the right to define the goals of the socialist movement into the pens of one or two thinkers. This is wrong in at least two essential ways. First, because the liberation of the working class – which includes the collective working-out of what the new world should look like – has to be an act of self-emancipation. Second, because no handful of thinkers, no matter how intelligent, has the basis for foreseeing the creation of a whole new society over the course of several generations. Even Marx, Engels and their collaborators did not have that powerful a grasp on the future – and it is hard to see how a much more intelligent group could be assembled.

Nevertheless, many thinkers, such as Edward Bellamy, author of Looking Backward, 2000–1887 (1888), have written such utopias. Arthur Lipow argued that Bellamy provides a case study of how such utopias can be both undemocratic and ‘successful’ in terms of mobilising many into activism in their behalf. Unfortunately, Bellamy’s short-term success had a heavy long-term price by obscuring the ways in which the core of socialist transformation has to be workers’ democracy.1

Webb’s book focuses on the dilemma of a socialist theory that has to avoid promulgating a long-term vision of the society it aims to create and yet has to motivate

and inspire a movement to create it. His argument is detailed and precise. His conclusion is that ‘[r]adical political action is inherently adventuristic, and neither science nor utopia can prevent it being so’ (p. 167). That is, he argues that we cannot know what we are building, but, since this is true for all efforts to make the world a better place, we should accept this in a spirit of adventure and do our best to make a world worth working for and in. Although all of this seems reasonable, much more can and should be said. Indeed, I have recently undertaken the project of trying to work out some of what this non-utopian ‘more’ is; and I shall return to it, albeit briefly, at the end of this review.

Before doing so, however, I want to turn to an internal critique of Webb’s book. Since it took him 168 concisely-written pages, my effort to convey what he says will inevitably be incomplete. As I do so, I will subject his Marxology to critique, arguing that he frequently quotes Marx out of context in ways that further Webb’s argument by, in my opinion, distorting what Marx had to say.

Webb summarises his view of Marx’s critique of utopianism as follows. First, utopian socialism is wrong because you cannot predict the future; and this is particularly true in regards to ahistorical abstractions such as those which most forms of utopian socialism have put forward. Second, utopian socialism is politically anachronistic. It had value before the working class developed, but now is a dangerous step away from (a) the struggle of the present, and (b) workers developing their own paths to a new world. Webb then argues that ‘Marx’s anti-utopianism was actually founded on two thoroughly humanist principles – the principles of proletarian self-emancipation and self-determination’ (p. 33). Thus, it is not just a question of the utopians lacking a means to implement their ideas, but rather that the utopian socialists ‘foreclosed the future and denied the proletariat the right to form its own self-determining emancipatory strategy’ (p. 33).

Webb then spends a considerable amount of attention in Chapter 2 on Marx’s description of a ‘Lower Phase of Communism’, which, Webb says, Marx only mentioned in four works. Nonetheless, he sees the issue as worth discussing because Marx does go into detail about the (immediate) future and the workers’ plans for it – particularly in the programme presented in the Manifesto. Webb claims that Marx only meant this ‘lower phase’ and its programmes to apply to underdeveloped countries such as Germany and France, suggesting that ‘Marx only ever talked about the lower phase of communism in the context of countries which had yet to complete their bourgeois phase of development and whose economies were therefore relatively under-developed. The function of the lower phase in this context was then to develop the foundations of capitalism itself, as indeed the Manifesto’s ten-point programme was intended to do’ (p. 42). I view this as a dangerous form of ‘stageism’ analogous to that used by Stalin to justify revolutionaries’ failing to move towards workers’ power but instead to support capitalist parties such as the Kuomintang in the late 1920s. In addition,
Webb’s arguments in support of this interpretation of Marx misleadingly quote Marx out of context. For example, Webb, citing Marx’s *The Civil War in France*, says of the Paris Commune that

Marx specifically described the purpose of the Commune qua dictatorship of the proletariat, and this purpose was *not* the realization of full communism – it was the ‘revolutionary overthrow of the political and social conditions that had engendered the Second Empire, and, under its fostering care, matured into utter rottenness’. Its purpose was, in other words, to overthrow the remnants of the feudal relations that had been supporting the Second Empire since 1851, relations which had been ripe for overthrow in 1848 and which now, over two decades later, had become ‘utterly rotten’. . . . The Commune, in other words, was to free France of all the rotten feudal baggage that had been preventing the full development of communism’s ‘host’, i.e., capitalism. (pp. 50-1)

The trouble is, however, that Marx had already (in Section III) described these feudal relations as having been swept aside by the revolution that began in 1789. Marx then went on to say that the state power had more and more assumed the character of the national power of capital over labour. His analysis of Louis Napoleon’s Bonapartism was that it was ‘the only form of government possible at a time when the bourgeoisie had already lost, and the working class had not yet acquired, the faculty of ruling the nation’.

Webb discusses Marx’s discussion of ‘materialistically critical socialism’ in relation to his critique of the utopians. Webb holds that Marx intended this to provide optimism and to help set people in motion. Webb sees the material conditions of emancipation as the increasing anger of the masses and the simultaneous development of the means of production. Webb’s perspective here, however, seems to omit the dialectical element that Marx was positing as key: the movement itself, its history and the self-developing working-class subject. Although Webb spends many pages on the issues involved in the material conditions of emancipation, including a discussion of forces of production, historical progress and the classless society, he nowhere sees that the main historical force that Marx is discussing here is the development of a working class – through daily experience, struggle, discussion and thought – that is able to remake society in a thoughtful and liberatory way. This suggests to me that Webb might have benefited from a deeper consideration of the Hegelian roots of Marxism, and thus of the nature of the Marxist dialectic.

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2 Marx 1966, p. 66.
Webb then jumps on the Marx-was-wrong bandwagon in arguing that Marx had a stratification theory as well as a conflicting ‘class polarization theory’. He presents evidence that the working class is stratified, which is true, as if this necessarily means that class polarisation does not and cannot occur. This argument seems overstrained to me – as when he says that ‘The problem faced by Marx (and by all subsequent Marxists as well) was that the proletariat’s objective existence as a class had yet to translate into a subjective awareness of its existence as a class’ (p. 105) – which would have been news to Marx in 1848 and 1871, Lenin in 1917, Luxemburg and Lukács in succeeding years, Spanish Marxists in 1936, Solidarnosc in 1980 and COSATU in 1990. I would suggest that there may be a systematic element to this and some other issues where Webb and I disagree. Marx presents dialectical arguments about tendencies within processes, with these tendencies, indeed, often contradicting each other. By failing to see that these contradictions are the process by which the working class self-develops through internal and external battles and discussions, and through its own mistakes, Webb seems to fetishise those tendencies which struggle needs to overcome as being ‘end points’. While Webb correctly points to the continual tendency to competitive disunity as an important part of the dialectic of class struggle, he is wrong in seeing this as implying ‘that division rather than unity was the end result of the proletariat’s economic position within capitalism’ (p. 106). Marx, I would contend, would view this as just one piece of a transformation dialectic.

On this basis, then, Webb argues that Marx’s approach ‘failed to perform the function asked of it. It did not, that is, provide a convincing reason for believing that the emancipation of humanity lay in the material conditions of the present’ (p. 105). The problem with Webb’s argument here, however, is that he sees these conditions as primarily consisting of the anger of the masses, the development of the productive forces and the structural polarisation of classes, rather than as a working class that, over time and through struggle, develops itself as a revolutionary subject. Let me stress that I do not want to be Pollyanna-ish here. The socialist revolution is not foreordained, nor did Marx believe the revolution to be inevitable. I take the juxtaposition of ‘socialism or barbarism’ seriously; that is, I see both as being real possibilities. The tendencies Webb is discussing may indeed prevent ‘the revolution’, in which case ecological and other barbarisms are humanity’s future. However, these tendencies are just that – tendencies – and the problem is that Webb does not place them in the crucial framework of a dialectic of a self-developing working class.

In Chapter 5, ‘Marx the “Accidental” Utopian’, Webb says that Marx’s critique of the utopian socialists failed to ground the future existence of communism in the movement of the present (p. 109). He then argues that Marx addresses this weakness in his argument through developing (a) a teleological conception of history, (b) an analysis of the structural transformation of capitalism, and (c) a pragmatic grounding of radical needs. In Webb’s view, however, these concepts do not suffice, and leave
the ‘move to socialism’ as involving a ‘utopian leap’ via ‘a purely speculative category’ (p. 109). His discussion of Marx’s ‘teleological conception of history’ simply assumes that this conception is ‘widely enough accepted to obviate the need for further discussion’ (p. 111), although the views of many streams of Hegelian Marxism clearly belie this assumed consensus. Webb states that Marx bases this teleology on Hegel’s concept of ‘the cunning of reason’. He justifies this claim by citing a speech Marx gave at the anniversary of *The People’s Paper* in 1856. Unfortunately, he wrests this quotation out of context. If he had given the full context, he would have been forced to recognise that Marx is here discussing the contradictions of capitalism and the working class as the people who can resolve them, although he does not say that this is inevitable. (Marx also goes on to discuss the working class’ history of struggle, and how this history gets ignored – which, I would claim, accurately characterises one of Webb’s main weaknesses.)

In discussing the structural transformation of capitalism, Webb says that ‘the proletarian revolution will issue forth communism as opposed to some other not-capitalism because the structural logic of capitalist production means that this is the only possible outcome’ (p. 117). Although Webb spent considerable attention on the *Manifesto* earlier in the book, he once again is interpreting Marx as if Marx did not mean its opening lines about ‘The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles . . . in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in the revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or the common ruin of the contending classes’. He bases this interpretation in part on seeing Marx as using a ‘womb metaphor’ – the idea ‘that socialism is somehow “gestating” within capitalism’ (p. 117). He can interpret this as deterministic, it seems to me, only because he misunderstands what Marx means by it – that capitalism creates situations that help to organise the working class, and that the working class then has the possibility (and motivation, at least at times) to ‘create itself’ as a revolutionary class through its experience of ongoing struggles. My interpretation of Marx is, of course, anything but deterministic, since the working class may support reformist (non-) solutions rather than revolution, since capitalist forces can resolve a given period of class conflicts in their own favour (for example, through barbarisms such as fascism or world wars), and since the working class can even support the formation of non-socialist ‘resolutions’ of class conflict such as the coming to power of Stalinist exploitation-that-calls-itself-socialist (as, arguably, happened in China and Cuba).

Unfortunately, Webb fails to discuss concrete struggles or working-class history. (Deeply symptomatic, to me, is his failure to even list E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of*  

3 Marx and Engels 1992, p. 3.
the English Working Class (1963) in his bibliography.) Instead, he turns to a discussion of capitalism as developing via ‘the transformation of capitalistic private property, already practically resting on socialised production, into socialised property’, which he then (falsely) claims that Marx states will ‘inevitably ensue’ (p. 120). Webb also criticises Marx’s argument here as being based on the ‘claim that socialized production and socialized property are inseparable’ (pp. 120–1), rather than as seeing it as a statement that the capitalist intertwining and organising of production makes it easier for workers to organise themselves and then, potentially, to take over and re-organise their work activities and the society as a whole.

Webb’s discussion of ‘The Utopian Leap into “The Ontological Necessity of Labour”’, by which he means ‘the pragmatic grounding of radical needs’ (p. 126) is rather interesting. It starts with Marx’s discussion of the labour process as fundamental to human development both historically and for each individual. Since alienated capitalist production relationships clearly frustrate such development from the perspective of the individual, they generate ‘radical needs’ among workers. These needs cannot be fulfilled within capitalism and impel workers to become antagonistic to the system. As Webb continues, ‘The problem was, therefore, how a collection of alienated individuals could transform themselves into an association of self-determining producers consciously controlling the production process’ (p. 128). This involves ‘Labour as objectification here becom[ing] a subjective means toward self-liberation rather than an objective end towards which utopian energies should be directed. And consciousness of the fact that labour is objectification of the subject (a consciousness which only emerges within those who have been reduced to absolute poverty) constitutes the historical genesis of communism’ (p. 132). Webb then argues that ‘the self-creation of an ontological need for labour was also a theoretical conclusion (informed by a huge dose of optimism and hope) deduced from the premises of Marx’s description of alienation: Given alienation, by what possible mechanism could the need for its transcendence emerge from within it?’, adding that he hopes that ‘we can all agree with Heller and recognise that the ontological need for labour was a utopian category invented by Marx’ (p. 132). Webb then proposes that ‘the ontological need for labour was a need both invented and projected by Marx in order to establish a mechanism by which individuals become conscious of a self-created need, the satisfaction of which will guarantee a future world of self-determination’ (p. 133). In spite of the interesting exposition of the interactions among alienation and ‘the ontological need for labour’, Webb seems to me once again to have missed the point. Marx is here arguing, on the basis both of philosophy and of his and Engels’s concrete experiences with workers and the labour movement, that workers experience the work process in ways that create needs and discontents within them; and that they come together to discuss these issues, and then struggle to resolve them, in a process that leads to confrontations with their employers and, on occasion, with capital as a united force and with the
state. This is not an individual-level process (as implied by Webb’s ‘Given alienation, by what possible mechanism could the need for its transcendence emerge from within it?’). It is collective. Marx and Engels had practical political experience that made this clear to them, and I can confirm it, both from my own experiences with workplace-based struggles (both in colleges and in universities as an activist in the American Federation of Teachers and later as the main organiser of a Public Employees Federation union at the non-profit organisation where I still work) and also from my research into the labour movement. Unfortunately, Webb seems neither to have had such experience nor to have studied enough history or other studies of workers to recognise that Marx is here not spinning utopias but theorising the implications of workers’ experiences and struggles.

From these rather flawed analyses, Webb proceeds to his concluding chapter. This chapter first criticises those recent efforts to resuscitate utopian thought within the Left that argue that Marx himself opposed utopias only for ‘strategic’ reasons – that is, because the utopians did not propose adequate means by which to attain their goals. Webb, however, reiterates his fundamental (and, in my opinion, correct) view on this, which holds that Marx consistently rejected utopianism throughout his life as elitist and top-down. On the other hand, Webb argues, Marx nonetheless ‘presented us with a utopia’ (p. 139), albeit unintentionally. Webb further argues that ‘However “accidental” its construction may have been, it seems that Marx’s utopia may have survived the historical blasts which destroyed the other chambers in his house. For this reason, it could perhaps be viewed as the foundation upon which the house itself can be rebuilt’ (p. 140). Now, I do not agree that Marxism has been destroyed, and I have seriously criticised Webb’s attempts, in regard to a whole range of issues, to show that Marx was in error. Nonetheless, it does indeed seem reasonable that the social goals which Marx espoused may help to strengthen the social support for workers’ power and thus for socialism. Webb raises the ‘obvious’ difficulties with this view: that it is in itself a utopian ‘Blueprint to be Realised’, and that

the arguments for a Marxist utopianism need to come to terms with the various criticisms that have been leveled at Utopia conceived as a blueprint to be realised. . . . If the utopian process is not to be understood in terms of a single individual assuming the mantle of leadership and leading the people into a new world of harmony, then we must ask again, how is it to be understood? (p. 155).

What, then, does Webb propose? He argues that

Radical action is inherently adventuristic, and neither science nor utopia can prevent it from being so. . . . There are quite simply no guarantees. . . . The mistake made by the pro-utopians is that they equate ‘lack of hope’ with

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lack of utopias’ and then declare that the solution lies in ‘abundance of utopias. This, however, misses the point . . . (p. 167)

Whilst, therefore, socialists do need more than a critique of the self-evident (and even the oblique) evils of capitalism, this something more is not an abundance of utopias. What socialists do need, however, is to convince people that subjective action can and does serve a purpose – that one can act in the world and change it for the better. . . . It is a matter of kindling the will to take risks and to embark on an adventure. There is therefore still a world to gain; but this is not an abstract utopian world, existing in the ether of the present, nor a ‘concrete’ utopian world, disguised as ‘the truth’ or ‘what is right’. It is a world whose nature is as yet unknown, indeed is unknowable now, but whose nature will be known to us in the future because it will be our own creation. (pp. 167–8)

This proposal has three characteristics that I want to emphasise. The first is quite positive: it is a call to action, and, beyond that, a non-élitist perspective. The second is quite negative: it is a call phrased in terms of a call to ‘the people’ to take action. The basic foundation of Marxism, class struggle and class action, seems to have been abandoned. While this is hardly surprising, given Webb’s failure to discuss working-class history or workers’ actual experiences, thoughts and actions, it is still both disappointing and, I would strongly argue, potentially disastrous. The third characteristic is, as I outline below, that it says far less than can be said. It may not be possible or appropriate to postulate what the post-revolutionary world would or should be like (both because we cannot know and because to do so does tend to become élitist). But, if we take Marx’s core point seriously – that the making of the new world is the potential project of a self-developing working class that learns and formulates ideas through struggle – then we should be able to say a lot about the issues and struggles that can and must be faced ‘after the revolution’. And this, I would contend, can also be quite inspiring and energising.

As I see it, then, although Webb has written an intelligent and interesting book, he nonetheless presents a systematic misreading of Marx. Webb misses what I take to be the main point of Marxist dialectics – that the creation of the new society is the product of a working class that struggles, and that perhaps the major creation of these struggles is a working class that has revolutionised itself to the point where it can begin to revolutionise society. To put it epigrammatically, Webb’s analysis is ‘outside the dialectic’ that Marx himself saw as central. It was Marx’s analysis of how workers’ struggles would change workers collectively and individually that lay behind his ‘Theses on Feuerbach’, and that underpinned his belief that workers through struggles
both before and after (long after) the seizure of power would conceptualise a new world, build a new order, re-conceptualise it, rebuild it, re-conceptualise it again, and rebuild it again. His thought patterns as he did this were rooted in his own studies in the Hegelian dialectic, which Webb fails to treat with the seriousness it deserves.

I think that, in 2004, we are able to move further ahead in the task of projecting the future than Marx and his colleagues were. We can do this because we are not standing where Marx was in history. He was at the beginning of the capitalist age. This meant that he could develop remarkable insights into capital and its dialectic, but that he could just begin to discern the dialectic that the workers would create through their struggles. We have more than a century of disasters (and many partial victories that were one and all defeated, encapsulated or negated) from which to learn. Based on this, we can now use the logic of the dialectics of Marx and Hegel to begin to draw a non-utopian vision of some parts of what the early decades of socialism are likely to consist of. Specifically, we can forecast some of the structures that will be developed first (such as workers’ councils) and some of the struggles and contradictions with which our descendants will be faced at that time. Such struggles will involve a number of difficult issues. Some will revolve around ‘cleaning up the muck of ages’ by fighting against national hatreds and oppressions, structured and ideological gender inequalities, racisms, and homophobia – as well as more literally cleaning up the ‘muck’ that capitalism has created in the form of environmental destruction. Another set of struggles will revolve around the best ways to end the economic inequality among nations. In addition, we will have struggles around the extent to which decision-making should be localised versus globalised, community-based versus workplace-based, and the like. We will have debates and struggles around how workplace life and community life can be made healthy sites of creativity and social pleasure rather than alienation and drudgery.

In approaching these issues, I think we can usefully draw upon Hegel as well as Marx. To illustrate this, consider the situation immediately following the ‘best’ revolutionary outcomes I can imagine: workers’ councils have grown out of massive struggles around the world, and have dispersed the pre-existing states with minimal loss of life and minimal destruction. Of course, this presupposes a lot of pre-existing struggle, and probably a lot of economic difficulties, impending and current environmental disasters and other social ills and strife. In these circumstances, upon taking power, workers will have organisation, consciousness and considerable unity as they (we) go from being the done-upon and manipulated of history to being the new ruling class.

This will be, of course, a moment of maximum working-class unity and solidarity. (In the Hegelian terms of the Shorter Logic, the moment when the Freedom stage of
Essence transitions to the Subjective (first) stage of Notion.) But this moment of unity will bring the working class face-to-face with its disunity – with itself as Other. There are myriad necessities to be produced and distributed – at a time when workers are striving to go beyond necessity. At every workplace, authority is in the hands of workers’ elected delegates and/or a general assembly of the workers. Issues of reorganisation come to the fore at the workplace in terms of pay, fairness, improving safety, making jobs less inhuman and a host of other issues. These issues, and other issues that touch upon other forms of social reorganisation, come to the fore at every level – the world as a whole, the nation, the city, the workplace, the neighbourhood and the family. All stratifications are under challenge as all workers, and humanity generally, see this as their opportunity for a better, fairer and more dignified life. But, at every step, the need for production and distribution, and the pre-existing means of production, distribution and communication that were built around relationships of authority and alienation, are the Other to the momentum for immediate change.

Furthermore, in all probability, prior economic and environmental disasters (and perhaps wars) will have precipitated the revolutionary transformation. Such disasters raise the contradictions to matters of life and death – but do so differentially. Many workers and farmers will be facing starvation, disease, and/or life-threatening weather or drought – and some will lack housing to provide some level of protection. This level of need is likely to be greatest in the underdeveloped countries, but also will be present in the ghettos and reservations of the United States, and in similar places in some other developed countries – particularly if the pre-existing crisis has been severe. Other workers will be much better-off, and eager to move onwards to reorganise workplace relations at once, even if this reduces production for a while.

All needs must be accommodated, since all are backed by the political power of sections of the revolutionary populace. All needs are in competition, and perhaps in conflict. All authority is new. All authority is challenged.

Solidarity confronts disunity. There is a world of joy to create. Total collapse and barbarism confront the living possibilities of socialism.

The iron necessities of capitalism for profit, for a divided working class (and thus for racism and patriarchy), and for environmental degradation, have been negated. But the divisions – the lifetimes of superiority of some workers over others, the lifetimes of being degraded, the muck of ages – remain.

In this situation, where workers’ needs stand in stark internal contradiction, there is much to hope for and much to work with. The new organisations of workers – the workers’ councils, the mobilised primary work groups at every workplace, the neighbourhood committees of various kinds – provide the basis for action to eliminate obstacles and venues for making decisions. We can assume that, if the working class has come to power, millions, perhaps billions, of workers will have individually and collectively learned how to struggle for power – and thus how to build coalitions,
how to run meetings, how to resolve differences, how to postpone decisions that can be postponed, how to recognise decisions that cannot be postponed, how to mobilise goodwill and solidarity. Such learning is needed for successfully taking power – but such learning is likely to be put to use on behalf of conflicting desires, conflicting needs, conflicting agendas.

This is the beginning of the new age – what we might (building on Hegel as well as Marx) call the Notion stage of the workers’ dialectic. During the first part of the new age, the working class faces itself as Other, and, in what I anticipate will be a long process of working through these contradictions, will have to work its way through a series of serious social and environmental conflicts. Workers will slowly undo themselves as workers and begin the generations-long process of struggling toward a world of freely-associated labour.

I have recently begun to think about these issues, and about how Hegel’s discussion of Notion in his Logics might provide speculative guidelines about how these contradictions will present themselves; about how workers will struggle through them to new solutions, but these new solutions will themselves pose new contradictions; and about the tenor of times we can only begin to imagine. Undoubtedly, my and others’ efforts to analyse and speculate upon these issues will get tempos wrong, fail to see now what will appear obvious then, and in other ways be mistaken. But the attempt to unravel these possibilities – to define and discuss what the terrain of struggle will be once we remove the stifling power and necessities of capital – is itself exciting and appealing. I contend that it is more motivating than any of the utopias Webb criticises, and more exciting and more useful than Webb’s approach of ‘kindling the will to take risks and to embark on an adventure’ (p. 168).

In conclusion, then, I would suggest that discussing and writing about such visions of the struggles ahead is neither utopian in the pejorative sense nor pre-empting the working class. It simply poses some issues for workers to think about during the struggles ahead. Furthermore, the sheer hope of being able to come to grips with these contradictions, and to struggle to resolve these issues without the constraints of profits-in-command foreclosing any hope of major gains, are likely to be inspiring enough to motivate millions, indeed billions, to struggle in behalf of workers’ power.

References


Socialist Register 2001: Working Classes: Global Realities
Edited by LEO PANITCH and COLIN LEYS
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Reviewed by MATTHEW CAYGILL

The thirty-seventh volume of the Social Register takes up the theme of the state of the working class at the beginning of the twenty-first century – and, just for that, it deserves to be warmly welcomed.

The Preface (co-authored by Greg Albo and David Coates as well as Panitch and Leys) locates this collection in the renewed debate about globalised capitalism, a debate brought about by the impact of the global movements of resistance to neoliberalism. This intervention by the Social Register starts with the importance of the working class today, picking up on the huge scale of the contemporary global proletariat (2.5 billion according to the World Bank in 1995 – a doubling of numbers since 1975), but also speaks about the different experiences and circumstances of the working classes of the world. The Preface promises to make connections between the tasks of reconstructing the socialist movement and a serious and ‘refreshed’ take on class analysis, facing up to all the problems of speaking about the class being ‘for itself’ after the long period of neoliberal advance and the retreat of both class analysis and the working classes themselves.

The Preface also clearly sets out the intention to address issues and problems around the increased complexity of class issues, partly because of articulations between new and old forms of class structure, perhaps summed up by the development of a ‘cybertariat’ of IT workers alongside the continued existence of ‘peasantries’, but also because of the very complexity of dealing with so many different experiences and structures.

These promises are made in under four pages of the Preface and that makes this Social Register an exciting project. It starts in so many of the right places for anyone interested in Marxism, but offers sufficient complexity, especially in dealing with the interaction of multiple forms of diversity, to provide a potentially convincing take on a complicated world. The question is whether the next 390 pages live up to this promise.

The Contents pages suggest a feast – its twenty chapters cover a suitably wide range of topics: individual attention is given to different aspects of the working class in the US (three essays), India (twice), South Africa, Russia, Iran, Brazil, East Asia and

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Western Europe. We might have complaints about other examples and experiences not being covered, but this is, of course, unfair to the volume and its editors – they did not set out to provide an encyclopaedia. There is a continuing debate about the relevance of Chiapas and Zapatismo. Other chapters take up more general or theoretical themes – the ‘cybertariat’, issues between North and South, peasants, gender and feminist issues. Migration is dealt with in a very specific-looking chapter about Chinese workers in New York, so I had an initial feeling that this crucial area was going to be underrepresented. Finally there is a contribution to the latest debate about the work of Robert Brenner and an editor considers questions of strategy.

The very diversity of the material set against the claims of the Preface produces problems for any reviewer. However, I am going to give each chapter some detailed engagement, as I think that it is worthwhile.

Ursula Huws provides the opening theoretical essay, on ‘The Making of a Cybertariat? Virtual Work in a Real World’. Huws’s framework is the vast question of whether a single global capitalist economy and single global proletariat with a common consciousness is emerging, especially in terms of the wave of new information and communication technologies and associated workforces. Huws gives a brief and illuminating run through of the mostly sociological debates about ‘office work’ and class categories and gender, and the notes provide an excellent introductory guide to the literature. She goes on to discuss a variety of issues and confusions about how to conceptualise IT work and workers in the ‘delocalising’ economy. Her conclusion, although there is a cautious note about the need to know much more, is that there is ‘considerable potential for the emergence of a common class consciousness among information-processing workers, based in a common labour process, common employers and a common relation to capital’ (p. 19). On the other hand, she claims that there are also powerful counter-forces; Huws emphasises racism, but, from her own account, you could add employer strategies. Overall, this is a useful contribution that addresses and even does begin to clear the underbrush of conceptual confusions (as she promised) in an increasingly important area of analysis.

If Huws addresses one of the newest developments in class structure, Henry Bernstein deals with one of the oldest (but not doomed to extinction, in this perspective) in “The Peasantry” in Global Capitalism: Who, Where and Why?’. Bernstein’s starting point is the way that many traditions of Marxism, exemplified here by Eric Hobsbawm in Age of Extremes, have treated the peasantry as a residual, backward and anachronistic class – a social category to be treated as ‘persistent’ in a negative sense, weeds in the garden of clearer and more progressive social forms so to speak –, although the traditions associated with Maoism, or the relationship argued by Teodor Shanin between the late Marx, Narodnism and the Russian peasantry are not explored here. An alternative and, for Bernstein, a clearly superior approach, is to use Marxist categories to investigate the constitution and reproduction of peasants...
the social relations, divisions of labour and dynamics of accumulation of
capitalism/imperialism – without assumptions of backwardness, and although he
does not say it, there is an implicit criticism of the teleological assumptions potentially
(or allegedly) carried by some versions of Marxism. Bernstein’s approach raises all
sorts of fruitful theoretical questions about the relationship of capitalism to petty commodity production, especially the ways in which the spaces for petty commodity production are continually (re)created as well as being destroyed and that this can be
related to the continuing tendential processes of class differentiation among the peasantry. It is particularly welcome that the theoretical and political importance of
Lenin’s Development of Capitalism in Russia comes through here (although Bernstein
himself rejects the relevance of the Leninist concept of the party in favour of forms
of organisation suitable to popular and democratic struggles that contest multiple
forms of oppression in the light of the absence of what he consider to be ‘ideal(ist)’ single and pure class subjects such as the ‘proletariat’). This is all crucial theoretical
background for understanding the diversity of peasant experiences and the continuing
role of peasantries in the globalising world economy. We might celebrate the global
rise of the proletariat, but, in many parts of the world, as other essays in this volume
demonstrate, there is no clear and convenient divide between workers and peasants.
Bernstein also provides an illuminating account of the historical development of an
‘international political economy of food’ (drawing on the very valuable work of Harriet
Friedmann and others) and varieties in the ‘international food regime’ leading up to
the current era of globalisation and the uneven and unjust forms in which agricultural
producers are integrated and exploited in the global economy.

Bernstein here provides an important synthesising contribution to the debates about
globalisation that should not be ignored, as well as a strong challenge to those Marxists
who think that Marx’s ‘sack of potatoes’ gibe in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis
Bonaparte was the last word on the subject. To elaborate on this, Bernstein adds a too-
short section on agrarian political movements in Brazil and India. For Brazil, he bases
his comments on James Petras’s analysis of a ‘third wave’ of radical politics in Latin
America focused on a peasant resurgence, exemplified by the Brazilian MST (Landless
Workers Movement), which, in Bernstein’s view, combines an awareness of the
limitations and problems of its politics with a sense of their centrality to the resurgence
of mass democratic politics in that country. In India, there are ‘new farmers’ movements’,
(and the choice of ‘farmer’ over ‘peasant’ is of importance), the source of intense theoretical debates. Recent waves of opposition to global neoliberalism and the
movement for global justice has produced an arena in which our attention has been
cought by, among others, various rurally-based campaigns in India over the threat of
GM seeds and vast destructive dam projects such as Narmada; or, in France, by the
peasant-farmer campaigns against the effects of capitalist globalisation led by José
Bové and the Via Campesina. The old debates about the role of peasants or workers
on the ‘road to socialism’ seem badly out of date in the current context, although
issues as to whether workers are actually ‘privileged’ élites still crop up and still need
arguing out. This essay by Bernstein is, as we would expect from such a distinguished
authority, of importance, and I urge everyone concerned with the debates on
globalisation or the conditions faced by rural producers to read it.

The third theoretical chapter is ‘Workers North and South’ by Beverly Silver and
Giovanni Arrighi, which takes the conjuncture of global capitalist crisis and a global
‘crisis of labour’ since the 1970s as its starting point. Their argument is that the divide
between North and South is the main obstacle to the ‘formation of a homogenous
world proletarian condition’ (p. 53). This does raise questions as to whether we really
need ‘homogeneity’ for practical unity and a sufficient level of consciousness – has
there ever been ‘homogeneity’ even on a national level? The picture has always been
one of unevenness, even on national levels, and Trotsky’s diagnosis of ‘uneven and
combined development’ and the possibilities that opens up still seems relevant. Silver
and Arrighi build their explanation of how the double crisis of capital and labour
developed on an already formidable corpus of material in the world-systems perspective
(see especially Chaos and Governance in the World Economy), but the compression of
their argument did cause problems for this reviewer: there was too much I wanted
to challenge or clarify. On the way, they take issue with theorists such as Ankie
Hoogvelt and Nigel Harris – Harris analysing the ‘end of the Third World’ back in
the 1980s – and who, for Silver and Arrighi, presented an argument in which ‘geopolitics’,
especially the geopolitical inequalities of North and South, are irrelevant. They see a
political corollary of this in positions – quoting the editorial of The Nation, 27 December
1999, for evidence – over the Seattle protests that put MNCs and ‘Third World elites’
as allies in exploitation and environmental degradation, and the ‘red-green alliance’
of the Seattle protestors as being in international solidarity with Third-World workers.
Silver and Arrighi put forward a different interpretation, in which the growing
frustration of developing countries with the progress of trade negotiations leading
up to this WTO ministerial was the key factor in the débâcle of that gathering, and
that underlying the internationalist rhetoric of the protestors, especially with the
involvement of the AFL-CIO, was a ‘national-protectionist agenda’. Discourse about
labour and environmental standards for countries in the global South, even from a
noted critic of globalisation such as William Greider, comes across as reflecting the
interests of the American state and capital. They are right to challenge the strategy
priority of attempting to reform the agendas of the various multinational agencies of
global capitalism such as the WTO. They are right to challenge simplistic and
triumphalist interpretation of Seattle from inside the movement, especially as the
euphoric rhetoric of ‘Teamsters and Turtles United’ looks increasingly like a moment
against the trend of the AFL-CIO assertion of other agendas (on China see below, but
there is also the issue of the exploitation of Alaskan oil resources – ‘Teamsters and
However, the continued attempts to get the WTO agenda on the road again, especially at Doha in 2001, means we still need to be aware of the different and conflicting interests between the élites of the South and the millions of workers and peasants they claim to represent.

Silver and Arrighi continue with an exploration of the arguments about the politics of labour rights based on international protection. They make some absolutely correct points against the simplistic version of the ‘race to the bottom’ argument, including the examples of how large-scale direct investment, partly in search of cheap and docile (that is, repressed) workforces in countries such as Brazil, South Korea and South Africa, have played a role in the emergence of militant working classes in those countries, contributing to important and familiar movements for political change, and improving conditions and wages for workers. Silver and Arrighi, of course, draw limits to this process – all is not well with the workers of the world is how they put it – but I would add that, even in the case of a country such as Bangladesh, the growth of a cheap-labour textiles industry is making changes to the real lives of people in that country, and to the conditions and possibilities of class formation and struggle.

For Silver and Arrighi, drawing on the argument of Arrighi’s Long Twentieth Century, the spatial reorganisation of capital is not the fundamental feature of the restructuring of world capitalism. In their view, a shift from material to financial expansion is the primary feature, which they, following Fernand Braudel, take to be a major cyclical feature of the capitalist world economy that can be traced over the last 600 years. The financialisation of capital as a reaction to growing over-accumulation by the 1960s and crucially backed by state policies (especially in the US) is seen by Silver and Arrighi as the main cause of worsening conditions for workers North and South. But this transformation is also seen as radically boosting inequalities between the North and the South. They do not challenge the ideological collapse of the ‘Third World’ and political Third Worldism, but they do see a collapse in any possibility of development as the ‘Thatcher-Reagan counter-revolution’ created a cut-throat competition for mobile capital that the Third World was never going to win (and they see a key role played by an adherence to Reaganism in the US working class). This also provides an interpretation of the imperialist wars of the current period – starting with the Falklands War –, as ‘capital-intensive wars’, winnable alternatives to ‘labour-intensive wars’ and the defeat in Vietnam. But these wars are seen as subsidiary to the economic-financial destruction of Second and Third Worlds.

There is another important issue that Silver and Arrighi explore: ‘the China Syndrome’ (and thus partly answering some of my initial concerns about whether China would get enough attention). China’s protracted, difficult, but very important entry into the WTO was just coming to a head at the time of the Seattle protests and it is easy for Silver and Arrighi to find prominent voices in the anti-globalisation/global justice movement with concerns about China that certainly sound racist – and they quote
Alexander Cockburn to place these concerns in the context of the history of Western imperialism towards China. They also quote the low-points in the history of North American labour’s racism towards Chinese labour before reminding us of the follow-up to Seattle in the April 2000 demonstrations against the IMF and World Bank in Washington, DC, and how the AFL-CIO made opposition to PNTR (‘Permanent Normal Trading Relations’) central to their protests. In contrast to all this, Silver and Arrighi argue for the importance of Chinese economic development as an intrinsic challenge to the existing global hierarchy of wealth (despite an awareness of the ecological problems that will come with this growth), and look forward to the continuing emergence of the Chinese working class. But it is not clear where they stand on the unrest that is already a feature of this development.1 Silver and Arrighi also conclude on the ‘need to push for a new labour-friendly international regime’ (p. 72) – a return to ‘[t]he “labour-friendly” (for rich countries) and “development-friendly” (for poor countries) international regime established under US hegemony’ in the ‘Golden Age of Capitalism’ (p. 55), although they are well aware of the limitations on that ‘labour friendliness’ and that there can be no ‘simple return’ to the past. But, as the boom-bubble bursts and we seem to be well launched into the consequences, most vividly expressed on the national scale by the crisis in Argentina, but also with the accompaniment of the promise of ‘infinite war’, that prospect seems to be less realistic than ever. Silver and Arrighi make a strong case for the importance of North vs. South as the crucial paradigm for understanding contemporary developments. And yet, I do not think they are entirely convincing. What is missing is a stronger sense of the real effects of the integration of the world economy in terms of opening up possibilities for solidarity and the rhythms of class struggle; the large-scale approach they take makes that difficult. But this short article is so rich in detail it really calls for (and inspires) an engagement with their other works as well.

The US is dealt with in three chapters. Andrew Ross writes about ‘No-Collar Labour in America’s “New Economy”’. I am delighted to see Ross included, especially if it annoys the Marxist puritans who will be muttering about cultstuds, ‘pomo’ and the Sokal Affair.2 On the other hand, Ross’s collection No Sweat was an important contribution to one of the key energising issues of the new movement in the US in the 1990s. A shift in concerns from general field of identity politics and ‘political correctness’ to campaigns around sweatshops, is perhaps one indicator of a fundamental change in leftist intellectual discourse away from postmodernism and an inward-looking ‘identity politics’, and towards the rise of the global justice movement in the US.

1 See Leung 2002 and Pringle 2002 for recent discussion on this unrest.
2 Ross was an editor of the issue of Social Text that accepted Alan Sokal’s now celebrated spoof contribution on ‘Transgressing the Boundary: Towards a Transformational Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity’.
Here, Ross is dealing with issues similar to his exploration of ‘Silicon Alley’ in ‘Jobs in Cyberspace’ in his excellent *Real Love*, focusing on those highly skilled hip young people who know all about designing the trendy web-sites required by the ‘New Economy’. These key figures in the hip 1990s culture are placed by Ross in the context of a chronically overworked working class, which, for a long time even before the boom and bubble of the 1990s, was being restructured out of full-time jobs into part-time or temporary jobs – into what is now defined as ‘involuntary contingent’ work. In the 1990s heyday of the ‘New Economy’ hype, the cutting edge of the idea of workers as flexible free agents, making their own individualistic and aspirational way through the American Dream, surrounded by ideological images of sacrificial but still glamorous Bohemian artistic work, were precisely these people. Here, Ross nails the reality of net-slavery and a self-justifying low-wage workforce, a new form of sweatshop exploitation (even if the conditions are not entirely comparable to more orthodox forms of labour in the global sweatshop), with connections to the exploitation of part-time intellectual labour in higher education. Ross concludes with the challenge of organising the unorganised, with all the complications of dealing with young people with aspirations, working for the pleasure of it. One question, again reflecting the unfairness of reviewing a book so long after it has come out: this chapter is so pre-bubble burst that I really wanted to know much more about the impact of events since then.3

Eric Mann’s chapter, “‘A Race Struggle, a Class Struggle, a Women’s Struggle All At Once’: Organising on the Buses of LA’ takes us to the opposite end of the employment scene – LA’s bus drivers and bus riders. We know the ideological image – only the real marginals (criminals or victims) of LA society ride the buses in a city so compulsively (and sometimes compulsorily) oriented on the cult of the automobile. Of course, the reality is that the 400,000 daily users of LA’s mass transit system are components of the transnational working class of one of the key global cities – and overwhelmingly female, low-income and from minority groups at that.

The take here is from the point of view of a leading activist in the Labor/Community Strategy Center, part of a ‘National School for Strategic Organising’, developing cadres for mass organisation, with just a flavour of a modern urban Maoism about it (although there is a reference to Lenin’s *What Is to Be Done*?). This was all new to me and I was glad to discover it. The story Mann tells starts in the 1980s with the UAW ‘Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open’, which defended the 5,000-strong workforce of LA’s last big heavy industrial plant, through the bitter Reagan years, against ‘management rights’, against neoliberal orthodoxy, against the danger of the UAW’s bureaucracy concession-making. In particular, it focused on the multiracial nature of the working class and challenged the colour-blind approach that conceptualised the working class

3 Ross has since published a book on the no-collar workplace: see Ross 2003.
as already united and placed Latinos and blacks as members of classless communities. The campaign developed into a Labor/Community Coalition and, after management got particularly nasty in time-honoured American ways in the late 1980s, it turned itself into the ‘Labor/Community Strategy Center’. The background to this was defeat of the UAW Local and closure of the plant in 1992, and the disbanding of the entire UAW West Coast Region by 1994. This story of defensive struggles and defeat is horribly familiar from the period. The theme that emerges is how to organise a militant class-based movement in the context of massive defeat, but Mann finds the silver in the lining with the development of the Bus Riders’ Union (BRU) as a dynamic multi-racial form of community organisation with connections to other campaigns and unions (such as the Hotel and Restaurant Union), UNITE (the textiles and clothing workers union), Justice for Janitors (think of the methods employed in Ken Loach’s *Bread and Roses*, and a host of other social movements). The result is an impressive document of struggle and resistance, building solidarity and links, expanding from Los Angeles to other cities ‘in the absence of a Left political party’ (p. 271). ‘Building in the Downturn’ is how I would sum it up – but building courageously. Mann refers to the traditions of left-wing organisation in the US (CP, SNCC, SDS, Black Panthers) and clearly situates the Labor/Community Strategy Center in this tradition. I can only wish them well and try to find out more – I will certainly be on the lookout for Haskell Wexler’s 1999 documentary *Bus Riders Union*. These movements have come, sometimes made great achievements, and sometimes sadly withered or gone – I am eager to find out how the BRU is doing after Seattle.

The third chapter about the US is Peter Kwong’s ‘The Politics of Labour Migration: Chinese Workers in New York’, which also goes a long way to answering my earlier points about the importance of both labour migration and China in understanding the developing global proletariat. Kwong discusses both general issues about migration and China and his argument is to see immigrants as ‘indispensable strategic partners in the building of a powerful labour movement for socialist transformation’ (p. 295). His approach is to contrast the proletarian-internationalist aspirations of Marx and Engels and the tradition of the Internationals, with the actual practice of labour movements in which immigrants have been generally treated badly by domestic movements. Even the generally impressive ‘Knights of Labor’ and IWMA were hostile to Chinese migrants. Kwong makes important points, but perhaps a bit one-sidedly. Although issues of racism were crucial in the shaping of the American working class, it was at least an area of political contestation, with other possibilities – an issue reflected in the current controversies about the history of Chinese migration and labour responses.4

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4 See Lyman 2000 and the exchange between Gyory & Lyman 2000 for an introduction to the debate and indication of its depth and bitterness.
Kwong’s approach to the general issue of migration is rightly to present it as an important feature of capitalist restructuring. Illegal and undocumented Chinese migrant workers in the US are presented as facing conditions of indentured servitude – the forced labour system that both predated chattel slavery in the Atlantic economy and post-dated it as new systems to produce cheap labour had to be found after the various abolitions of slavery in that transoceanic economy. This is due to a combination of the activities of the criminal gangs of ‘snakehead’ human smugglers and the role of the state in tacitly going along with the demand – or addiction as Kwong puts it – for cheap immigrant labour while policing and restricting the supply. Kwong exposes the ‘employers sanctions’ component of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 as actually being a ‘slave law’ with employers’ powers over illegal workers being massively reinforced. This combination has resulted in greatly depressed wages and conditions both for undocumented migrant workers and for documented workers. The conditions that Kwong records are appalling – and are spreading as other national groups also start to pay large transportation ‘fees’. In this context, Kwong also indicts the contemporary role of American trade unions, or at least their bureaucratised leaderships. Even though the New York Chinatown garment industry has been organised by UNITE (which used to be the International Ladies Garment Workers’ Union), the process has been top-down, contracts have been weakly enforced, and it has all been tied to a perspective of co-operation and partnership. On the other hand, he is able to contrast official union indifference to a picture of potential militancy and combativity. Kwong even quotes a case of a garment manufacturer who moved his business from importing goods from China to the US in order to get the manufacturing done in New York because it resulted in being cheaper.

Kwong also briefly deals with how a China in which dynamic expansion has been accompanied by growing economic inequalities and class polarisation, privatisation and unemployment on a vast scale, and clear signs of a growing unrest among workers and peasants. There is also both internal migration on a huge scale and pressures for emigration. China’s accession to the WTO – both as a solution for the problems faced by the Chinese ruling class and as a source of new problems – means that issues for Chinese workers are increasingly global issues. Kwong makes a strong case for the importance of the new generations of Chinese migrants in the US and as a challenge to what he considers to be a labour movement in decline. My overall judgement is that Kwong makes an important contribution which deserves consideration alongside such analyses of the Latino experience as Mike Davis’s excellent Magical Urbanism. If this short chapter leads readers to Kwong’s books on the Chinese-American experience (and the wider literature that is now available) it will also have served a useful purpose.

These three chapters on the US provide glimpses into the complex realities of class experience and struggle in the US. There is still a need for a more synoptic account
of the situation in the US, which, after all, still remains the ‘heart of the beast’, and contains a working class that extends far beyond its trade-union movement, which has been squeezed and now faces uncertainties, a working class that includes increasing numbers of migrants. Leo Panitch, in his chapter, quotes a poll from 1996 in which 56 per cent of Americans defined themselves as working class. Without going into the limits of this kind of evidence, it does at least shake the common left intellectual view that marginalises the working class. Another chapter in the volume refers to the ‘American model’ of trade unionism and explores how is that model doing after the ‘New Economy’, after the rebirth of ‘labor wars’ in the 1990s, after the UPS strike, after Seattle and ‘Teamsters and Turtles’, and now in the early days of renewed economic turbulence. There is also an interesting contrast with the Canadian labour movement, especially in terms of its engagement with the anticapitalist movement at the protests against the ‘Summit of the Americas’ in Quebec City in April 2001, as against the aforementioned US slide back from ‘Teamsters and Turtles’ to ‘Teamsters and Bush’.

The vast working population of India also deserves a great deal of attention and it does get two chapters. Barbara Harriss-White and Nandini Gooptu’s essay is on ‘Mapping India’s World of Unorganized Labour’. They point out that although the labour force is 390 million strong, only 7 per cent are in the ‘organized sector’ (that is, receiving regular wages, subject to the framework of labour law) and only half of them are unionised. The unions themselves are badly fractured by political, regional and communal allegiances. The overwhelming number of workers are in the ‘unorganized sector’, although the boundary between sectors is clearly very blurred. This essay contains a wealth of fascinating detail about the peculiarities of Indian capitalism and workforce, showing in particular both the complex diversity of the Indian situation and the strong structural constraints – including relationships that can only be described as ‘neo-bondage’ – on the ability of many (especially rural) Indian workers to organise or engage in collective class resistance. The increase in female employment, the continuing role of child labour, and issues of caste are briefly dealt with. Harriss-White and Gooptu present a convincing argument for the fettered nature of class politics among unorganised sector work forces, albeit bringing out the expressions of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ and various social movements. They also consider the possibilities of the development of a politics of emancipation along the lines of a renovated unionism and public policy giving real legal rights. Harriss-White and Gooptu do admit that these vectors of change ‘lack significant social and political forces to drive them’ and talk about the potential of democratic politics to

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5 Mosisa 2002 points out that half the new entrants into the work force between 1996-2000 were foreign-born and that there has been a massive historical shift from European to Asian and Latin-American migrants.
give the Indian poor ‘some clout’. There has been some evidence of increased political participation – but, at the same time, the poor face a ‘conservative revolution’ in the shape of the electoral successes of the Hindu-chauvinist BJP (which is overwhelmingly supported by upper and middle castes and classes).

Rohini Hensman contributes a short chapter on ‘Organizing Against the Odds: Women in India’s Informal Sector’ (with slightly different statistics from Harriss-White & Gooptu – 92 per cent out of 397.2 million). A brief picture of the discriminatory situation faced by women in the unorganised sector is followed by case studies from the mid-1990s of different attempts to organise: cigarette (beedi) workers in Hyderabad, craft producers in West Bengal, and the SEWA co-operative. The outcome of each seems marked by a pattern of both success and failure in the face of structural insecurity and victimisation.

The prolific Patrick Bond, along with Darlene Miller and Greg Ruiters, contribute an essay on ‘The Southern African Working Class: Production, Reproduction and Politics’, taking on an area of great diversity and unevenness, currently dominated and even devastated by economic crisis and the ‘logic of neoliberalism’, with huge problems (including the devastating HIV/AIDS pandemic) and looking to answer the question of whether ‘a coherent, cross-border vision’ can emerge or, on the other hand, ‘will fragmentation prevail’. The framework for a cross-border vision is taken from Samir Amin’s UN World Institute for Development Economics Research project for regionalisation based on ‘grassroots labour-popular social hegemonies’.6

Bond et al. provide succinct accounts of the origins and development of a Southern-African proletariat in the context of imperial expansion, racial domination and, most importantly, a migrant labour system – rightly described as ‘diabolical’ – designed and enforced to provide cheap labour for the mining and agricultural centres of capital accumulation in the region. The heroic history of the black response leading to the highpoint of the struggles of COSATU in the 1980s is briefly sketched in, along with the serious debates about the relationship between socialism and nationalism inside the movement.

The structural economic decline of the region in the context of globalisation is also sketched in as background to severe economic crisis and a response in terms of an enforced neoliberalism that just made things much worse (embodied in South Africa as the ‘Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR)’ strategy). The devastating effects of all this are described with horrific economy. There is more than enough detail here to destroy the current media argument that presents the dictator Mugabe as the more-or-less sole and demonic cause of Zimbabwe’s crisis and famine, and the white farmers as the last best hope for the people of that country!

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6 See Amin 1999.
For the region as a whole (containing over 100 million people) something like 32 million are in the ‘labour force’, 10 million in formal employment and 4 million in trade unions. Slowly, unevenly and with severe limitations, and often great difficulty and heroism (as can be seen in Zimbabwe), there has been a regional movement to positions in opposition to governments.

These discussions bring us to the author’s question about a possible regional vision. There are alternative regional visions, including a proposed ‘Brasilia-Pretoria-Delhi-Beijing Consensus’. The reality of the 1990s was that regional strategies in the context of global neoliberalism got nowhere, precisely because of that context, leaving room open for at least criticism of the neoliberal direction of governmental policies. Although, in South Africa’s case, this is summed up as ‘talk-left, act-right’ policies, and a brief summary of political developments in Zimbabwe takes us through the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union’s (ZCTU) trajectory from being under the thumb of Mugabe and ZANU, to being critics of ZANU neoliberalism and playing a role in the formation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

The essay ends with a well-stated appeal to Gramscian optimism. The essay is a powerful contribution to the growing debate about the position of workers and potential strategies in the crisis-ridden political economy of Southern Africa. It did not shake my view about the centrality of the South African working class for the future of the whole region. If this is a first encounter with the work of Patrick Bond, I strongly recommend following up his many books and articles. At the same time, the time-delay effect operating in this review means much has happened that justifies both the appeal to optimism and the analysis. On the other hand, there have been new groupings, crucial debates, important struggles against privatisation and pharmaceutical companies, and protests at the ‘Earth Summit’.

Steve Jefferys on ‘Western European Trade Unionism at 2000’ acknowledges that he has had to miss much out in covering 15 states and 152 million workers and really only provides a detailed comparison of the French and British examples, and that the class experience is much wider than just developments in trade-union movements (given that the Italian movement after Genoa in 2001 and the general strike in 2002 looks so exciting, it is a shame that room was not found for this case). Jefferys does provide a useful background sketch of general developments in the nature of work, recording the usual kind of changes we expect: the continuing shifts from agriculture

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7 They provide a useful Gramsci quote that takes us beyond the usual references to optimism of the will, pessimism of the intellect: ‘It is absurd to think of a purely objective prediction. Anybody who makes a prediction has in fact a programme for whose victory he is working, and his prediction is precisely an element contributing to that victory’ (p. 139, from Gramsci 1971; p. 171).

8 Bond 2002d is a fascinating guide to the build-up towards the ‘W$$D’, as critics called this Earth Summit.
and industry to the service sector, shift to working in smaller units, the pronounced return of women to economic activity, work becoming more managerial, increased job insecurity and contingent work. He also traces the high levels of unemployment during the 1980s and 1990s, a result not just of structural and technological changes, but also of the political pursuit of monetarist strategies (broadly conceived and including labour-market flexibility, deregulation, privatisation and deflation). Jefferys goes on to track the impact of these contextual changes on trade unions, again telling a familiar story of retreat, with falling memberships, densities and strike levels (except in post-unification Germany). The (again familiar) sense of a general crisis of European trade unionism through the 1980s and 1990s, and the response in terms of a turn to a focus on the EU as a possible source of solutions, is well-established.

Jefferys provides a more detailed account of contrasting developments in France and Britain. The narrative about France takes in the crucial moments of Mitterrand’s election as President (although more could have been said about the impact of Mitterrand’s retreat after his first year or so), and the enormous explosion of public-sector strikes in 1995 leading on to the defeat of the Right in 1997 and the Jospin government’s subsequent policies, including the shorter working week. Unfortunately, Jefferys does not spell out why workers might be dissatisfied with this. He also provides a succinct account of the French bosses’ grievances against the work and welfare settlement in that country. He delivers a contrasting short picture for Britain, emphasising the success of the Conservatives in excluding the trade unions, opening income inequalities and shifting the balance of class forces to the employers. The narrative highlights the Falklands War, the defeat of the miners’ strike of 1984–5 in the context of 15 years of high unemployment, which had generally undermined trade-union effectiveness and, thirdly, the ‘fortuitous’ victory of the Conservatives in the 1992 election despite the ‘mass popular class rebellion’ against the poll tax two years earlier. Labour then fell into the hands of ‘Third-Way’ Blairism, ‘New Labour’, and the rejection of social democracy. In Jefferys’s picture, this has led to a shift in the trade-union movement to a newly homogenous discourse centred on ‘partnership’ and the virtual disappearance of the Left – although, as he notes, the resulting resentment helped Ken Livingstone win the London mayoralty in 2000. The end result for trade unions is then to become providers of services to ‘enterprise unionism’, a strategy taking them ever closer to the dismal American model.

Jefferys concludes on possible political futures. The context is provided by the difference between a political trajectory in France, in which the Socialist Party was not pulled significantly to the right (other than ‘by the “natural” effects of running a successful capitalist economy in an era of monetarism’), while being in coalition with parties to its left meant at least a rhetorical commitment to redistribution and regulation. This compared to a Britain where the absence of these ‘political mediations’ meant privatisation and the total undermining of effective trade-union action. In Britain, the
unions are presented as increasingly depoliticised, and although Jefferys finds some evidence for left potential, that potential is still weak. France is presented as having considerable political debate and clearly more vibrant new movements and protests, including additional massive strikes in the winter of 1998–9 – 1995 was not just a flash in the pan. In this vein, we can add the events of April-May 2002 when the shock of Le Pen’s vote in the first round of the Presidential election (and the surprisingly large vote for Trotskyist candidates, clearly overtaking the CP in that vote, even if not in the subsequent National Assembly elections) and the dismal collapse of Lionel Jospin, provoked both huge fears for the future of French politics and an inspirational and invigorating movement on the streets. Yet, all this happened without a counterpart in terms of organised working-class activity in workplaces or trade unions.

More generally, Jefferys advocates an agenda for trade unions of strengthened or re-established collective bargaining as a means towards labour-market-wide regulation of employment conditions, but with a much stronger political focus, and finally that unions should seek a texture that fits with a feminised, flexible, white-collar workers, rather than stereotypes of ageing white manual workers.

I would praise the amount of useful material Jefferys puts into this chapter. The precise assessment of the balance of class forces on a comparative basis, taking into account structural and conjunctural or contingent features, with a view to potential futures and strategies, is a difficult task. I do not think I have yet seen anything convincing in the period going back to the early 1990s. There are the overly optimistic accounts that have been more or less predicting the ‘end of the downturn’ and the start of something new and considerably more exciting since the start of the ’90s, maybe even going back to the health service and engineering strikes in Britain in the late ’80s. Again, I am writing with the benefit of hindsight, but even if I had been writing this when the volume appeared, I would have wanted to chide him for an overly pessimistic account of British trade unionism. This has been born out by some developments since then. Rather than further depoliticisation, we have seen the return of political debates, including questions around the role and possible democratisation of the political fund, and intense debate about the prospects of an invasion of Iraq at the 2002 TUC. The election of Mark Serwotka in the PCS and, even more interestingly, Derek Simpson in Amicus (overturning decades in which the electricians and engineers had been bastions of the Right in the trade-union movement, despite the obvious limitations on Simpson’s own political background), and the bizarre attempts by both of their right-wing predecessors to hold onto office after losing the votes, are notable examples of changes in the texture of trade unionism in Britain. The point is not to assume this necessarily means a complete change in the situation, or sudden escalation

9 Including Tommy Sheridan as a charismatic and energetic Scottish Socialist Party MSP – he is mistaken in the text when says ‘Socialist Alliance’.
in conscious class struggle, but that political debate remains important and possibilities remain open.

David Mandel asks the question “Why Is There No Revolt?” The Russian Working Class and Labour Movement, and provides an answer in terms of the legacy of the past, the current economic and political situation, and the strategy and practice of unions. The previous order is taken as an ‘incoherent amalgam’ of socialist and capitalist social relations that prevented (by repression if necessary) independent working-class practice and consciousness. Perestroika resolved into a ‘revolution from above’ to capitalism, in which workers played a subordinate role. In the present situation, workers suffer from such acute economic insecurity that social decomposition continues. The collapse of the economy is rehearsed and the shocking extent of the demographic collapse of Russia is indicated. Old centres of the working class have collapsed along with the economy – the ASM sector (automobile and agricultural machine-building) has lost 70 per cent of its jobs. Unemployment has risen to 30 per cent without much of a social safety net; instead, workers have to depend on families and ‘grey economy’ alternatives. And the union response has in the main been that of ‘partnership’ with management rather than solidarity. It is a grimly bitter picture that emerges, lightened only by a few more positive, even heroic, cases: the Kirov Tractor Assembly Shop, the small ‘Edintso’ union in Togliatti, Yaroslavl Motor Builders. Mandel talks about the need for economic recovery to help build a more effective independent labour movement. Perhaps the signs are there, but even if they are, they are weak, tenuous and vulnerable to further shocks in a rocky-looking world capitalism.

Haideh Moghissi and Saeed Rahnema discuss ‘The Working Class and the Islamic State in Iran’ – vital subjects in the light of the Islamic Middle-East’s role as geopolitical tinderbox. They present a useful brief survey of the working-class movement in Iran over the twentieth century, highlighting the importance of oil workers and the role of the working class in the revolution against the Shah in 1978–9, including the formation of shouras (‘workers’ and employees’ councils’). The political contradictions of the shouras are presented as a factor in the takeover by Islamic grassroots activists and state functionaries, and, more generally, as evidence for the weakness of the Iranian working class and Left. Moghissi and Rahneema then focus on the continuing weakness of the Iranian working class in terms of its relatively small size and continuing structural weakness. The working population is far from homogenous, highly segmented and differentiated, with vast numbers of especially young unemployed workers and a large population of the urban poor, a precarious ‘sub-proletariat’, whom the Islamists were much better at mobilising than the Iranian Left. The working population is also strongly segregated by gender, with the ideological imperatives of the Islamic régime meaning that female participation is still less than it was before the revolution, over

twenty years ago. The degree of disorganisation of the Iranian working class has been enormous; the mechanisms of control instituted by the Islamic régime have been substantial, including large elements of repression as well as aid and charity. But, at the same time, the authors point to the clashes between workers and régime and its ideology, patterns of disillusionment and delegitimation. The continued weaknesses of the Left and their strategies in the relation to the régime (basically, either forms of compromise or attempted confrontation) are sketched in – the bloody defeat of the Left in Iran after the revolution must count as one of our major defeats. At the same time, the level of spontaneous popular resistance comes through and, despite continuing weaknesses, the future remains difficult but open.

The importance of Moghissi and Rahneema’s essay is not just in the intrinsic interest of the Iranian situation, even though we should all remember the anti-Shah revolution as one of the great revolutions of the twentieth century. It also has an importance in the debates we ought to be having about the future of the Islamic Middle East, namely, the clear volatility of the area in the context of the Palestinians continued struggle and renewed prospects for imperialist war between the US and Iraq, and whatever disasters that might bring. The protests on the streets of major urban centres throughout the region have already played a role in determining the course of events (as they started to shape up in 1990–1, especially in Algeria); who knows what the future will bring. In this scene, the role of the region’s working classes, no matter how highly differentiated, segmented or contradictory, needs to be considered – especially in the light of the ideological and organisational role of Islamicist forces. Iran presents huge lessons that need to be analysed.

Huw Beynon & José Ramalho’s ‘Democracy and the Organization of Class Struggle in Brazil’ deals with another important and much analysed experience – the Workers’ Party (PT). The context in terms of Brazil’s size, inequalities, urbanisation, internal migration, regional differences, and so forth, is quickly drawn before the authors move on to the new trade unionism of the 1970s, based in the ABC region (Santo André, Sao Bernardo & Sao Caetano), and its role in the dynamic popular struggles for democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They trace the formation of the leftist-workerist CUT (Unified Workers’ Confederation) and PT, and the emergence of Lula as its leader – and a serious contender against Collor for the Presidency in 1989 (and gaining 48 per cent of the vote). Collor was eventually replaced by the influential leftist (social-democratic) intellectual Fernando Cardoso, who forged alliances with the Right to push through the neoliberal transformation of the country away from the corporatist protectionist past. Beynon and Ramalho give an impressively concise account of the scale of these changes as background to exploring the impact of neoliberalism on the militant trade unionism of the CUT. And, although CUT comes across as less militant, it still remains combative and popular. The authors do, however, pose the problems faced by CUT as it genuinely confronts issues posed by the continuing
relocation of industry inside Brazil, the increasing feminisation of the labour force and the continued exclusion of around a third of the economically active population from the formal labour market. Beynon and Ramalho provide a section dealing very positively with the MST (already briefly discussed by Bernstein in his essay) and finally they have a very positive discussion of PT’s achievements, including praise for the Porto Alegre participatory budget from Hilary Wainwright. Although the chapter is undeniably useful, the positive tone really needs to be balanced with more critical discussions about the PT and Porto Alegre. The Brazilian elections, and their context in terms of economic crisis and the role of the IMF, were clearly the most important elections anywhere in the world in 2002. But the weaknesses of Lula and the PT (more clearly revealed by events since the PT’s electoral victory in 2003 and the formation of a coalition government headed by Lula) need to be understood as sharply as the positive developments.

Gerard Greenfield on ‘Organizing, Protest and Working Class Self-Activity: Reflections on East Asia’ (the title is a bit misleading, the focus is overwhelmingly on Indonesia) provides a brief account of the renewed militancy of workers in the context of the crisis of 1998–9, albeit focused on the contradictions of the movement rather than just praising the inspirational quality of this militancy. The chief contradiction for Greenfield is that the pattern of worker organisation was strongly shaped by the history of state intervention, creating organisations to control working-class activity. Of course, this was an issue for the movement in Russia – police chief Zubatov’s unions in 1902–3 were intended to control the nascent working class, but they were also a vehicle for politicisation. The modern Asian version of this type of organisation benefited from a great deal of external assistance (especially from the US state, but also from international trade-union bodies such as the ICFTU), and even more so after the economic crisis. Greenfield gives more detail in the case of the SPSI (All-Indonesia Workers’ Union), which supposedly reformed itself (into Reformasi SPSI) after Suharto’s long-overdue departure, with a great deal of international support, and apparently a loss of membership. Greenfield sees the forced membership of state-sponsored unions as the ‘organizational displacement of working-class self-activity’. Meanwhile, independent unions, although genuinely more militant, were led by (ex-)student activists and shaped by NGOs, so they remain bodies for ‘helping’ rather than ‘organising’, and instead of being based on rank-and-file control, they are directed by elite activists. Again, historical parallels come to mind – such as the very useful role played by white liberals and students in the development of independent trade unionism in South Africa in the early 1970s. Strikes and protests in the overthrow of Suharto (Greenfield distances himself from the term ‘revolution’) were led and organised by students, and a closer analysis of the important strike at PT Tyfountex is made to demonstrate this. The point is not to attack the role of non-workers in working-class struggles, but to point to its limits and to challenge the analysis of the events in
Indonesia as a revolution made by Tony Cliff and others in the International Socialist Tendency. Greenfield’s essay is relatively short and would have benefited from being a head-on critique, rather than taking the relatively oblique approach that emerges here. Greenfield actually sees more of a diversion from genuine working-class struggles in the events and, in contrast, points to what he considers more radical processes in peasant struggles. However, he needs to make his case with a more fully developed argument, one that perhaps makes points about other examples in East Asia.

Justin Paulson’s ‘Peasant Struggles and International Solidarity: The Case of Chiapas’ is a reply to Judith Adler Hellman’s critique of the Zapatista solidarity movement in Socialist Register 2000 coming from the ‘webmaster’ of the Ya Basta web-site. Hellman has a comeback in ‘Virtual Chiapas: A Reply to Paulson’. The debate is of interest and importance, referring as it does to both a point of inspiration for the current movement against global neoliberalism and a key issue in debates about the use of the Internet in radical politics. Paulson finishes on the point that Vincente Fox won his historic victory against the PRI (after years in power) for the right-wing PAN, on the basis of a shift of mostly urban anti-PRI votes from Cárdenas’s PRD, this being a sign of the need for discussion of left alternatives in Mexico. Both authors say the other has said a lot of things they agree with, both say the other makes lots of mistakes in what they argue. Appropriately enough, if you visit the Socialist Register 2001 web-site, you can find the debate in full, including Paulson’s original article and a link to a very powerful critical intervention by Harry Cleaver.

Brigitte Young in ‘The “Mistress” and the “Maid” in the Globalized Economy’ provides a short take on the impact of neoliberal globalisation (related to the scaled-back provision of welfare, including forms of support for working women) on women’s work and migrants, especially looking at those low-skilled workers who are ‘invisible in the narrative of hypermobile capital’. The focus is on the figures of the ‘mistress’ in the globalised economy – professional women in the flexibilised workforce – who depend on ‘maids’ in household-oriented jobs – socially and economically invisible paid workers, often migrants (because they are cheaper and often afraid of being detected and deported – there is some similarity to the situation of Chinese migrants under the operations of the new ‘slave law’ described by Kwong elsewhere in the volume). ‘Mistress and maid’ is, of course, a powerful image of power and estrangement across racial, ethnic and class lines – think of the history of domestic relations in antebellum slave America, or apartheid South Africa and, although Young does not deal with this, the image can be extended to include the explosion of sex-work, often coerced or semi-coerced, that is such a bleak feature of contemporary globalisation. Young provides a sketched in background of changes in ‘gender regimes’: the integration of women into increasingly feminised workforces, flexibilisation of the labour market that undermines a separation between productive and reproductive economies and
work towards a redefinition of gender identities, and increasing inequalities between women, which are reinforced by the retreat of welfare states and privatisation. Young provides detailed information about the German case and debates different possible solutions, but seemed much weaker than the spotlight she puts on the issues around the polarisation between privileged professional women in the globalising privatising economy, and an ethnically defined female underclass (although, perhaps, the focus on issues of migrant status and citizenship need to be considered as strongly as ethnicity), as part of the issue of the ‘feminization of migration’.

Rosemary Warskett on ‘Feminism’s Challenge to Unions in the North: Possibilities and Contradictions’ is another relatively short account, arguing that feminism has made an important positive contribution to collective bargaining, the ideological separation between home and work, the functioning of union democracy, but without fundamentally changing the unions’ wider role and vision. The perspective is from the position of a socialist feminism interacting with a ‘working-class feminism’ that had its roots in the growing participation of women in the workforce and in unions, with much of the evidence drawn from Canada. All those contentious issues around separate organisation, on balance, led to marginalisation, while the success of second-wave feminism led to an institutionalisation of equal opportunities approaches (in the context of economic restructuring and political shifts to the right) that have fundamentally failed. In the end, it seems that the socialist-feminist transformative vision is still waiting to be tried.

Sam Gindin in ‘Turning Points and Starting Points: Brenner, Left Turbulence and Class Politics’ takes up the latest Brenner debate, much of it carried in Historical Materialism, of course, and makes an important contribution to that debate. Again, the time delay of this review means that things have moved on since 2000 – Brenner has transformed ‘The Economics of Global Turbulence’ into The Boom and the Bubble (will there be a similar debate, or are the protagonists exhausted?) and the bursting of the US stock-market bubble has happened. Back then, the focus was on why the boom was still continuing, why the Wall Street bubble had not burst. Gindin argues that Brenner’s focus on competition between capitalists as the centre of the contradictions leading to crisis as a ‘retreat from class’ (ironically adopting the title of Ellen Meiksins Wood’s important 1980s book), the ‘marginalization of class’, and a challenge to Marxist understandings of capitalism – and Gindin wants to use the debate as a means of assessing the ‘starting point’ for left politics. In contrast to Brenner, Gindin urges the central importance of class and class struggle. Gindin also makes important arguments about the distinction between ‘units of competition’ (p. 348) and the nationally aggregated or ‘nationally specific’ groups of capitalists and thus arguing that Brenner fails to pick up on the ‘direct and mutual interpenetration of capital’. Thank you, Sam Gindin for solidifying and clarifying (if those two processes can possibly go together!)
my feeling that Brenner, for his insights, failed to deal with the issues raised by ‘globalisation’. Gindin further argues that Brenner underestimates the role of the state and what he describes as the ‘American imperial state’, which leads to two particularly important points I want to pick up. Gindin talks about ‘The New Imperialism’ (here strongly influenced by Leo Panitch’s ‘The New Imperial State’, which certainly deserves close and positive attention, despite the shock of having to think about Poulantzas again after all these years) focused on the relationship between the US, Europe and Japan, and the non-territorial ‘induced reproduction’ of forms of political and economic subjugation. The US sets the rules, the other advanced capitalist powers play by those rules, and although there are challenges and tensions within that framework, American power is not contested. Gindin’s use of the example of the Daimler-Benz takeover of Chrysler to telling effect: although it was a challenge to American hegemony, it simultaneously represented a step to the Americanisation of German capital and the German state. Gindin’s and Panitch’s arguments deserve serious consideration in the new debate we must have about the contours of capitalist state and economic rivalry and imperialism as a counter to those who think that reference to the classical work of Lenin, Bukharin, and so forth, is more-or-less enough to understand contemporary imperialism. At the same time, their argument needs to be posed against the argument from Hardt & Negri that imperialism has become Empire and to speak of ‘American imperialism’ is to retain a centre to the system that no longer exists.\[1\]

The other point is the long-running debate on the dynamism of capitalism. Panitch joins with many in seeing the essential state of American capitalism as stagnant; not just crisis-prone, but crisis-ridden. The contrast between the long epoch of capitalist expansion in the 1950s and 1960s (although Gindin, in this essay, does refer to Webber & Rigby’s *The Golden Age Illusion* to show limits to the ‘Golden Age’), and the period since roughly 1973 is easily drawn. But Gindin mounts a powerful argument to the effect that the increases in productivity of American capital (and real per capita consumption, despite all the points about inequality and increased exploitation that he acknowledges) should not be ignored, and that this reflects the strength and dynamism of American capitalism. Gindin argues all this without falling into ‘New Economy’ hype, or writing off the possibilities for resistance. Furthermore, he does quote Brenner himself (1998) on the way that the Marxist tendency to ‘cry wolf’ makes for caution, but that prediction is no longer necessary, the economic downturn and ‘imminent collapse’ has already started. From the perspective of 2000, Gindin could write that capitalism entered the new century with a smile on its face – and his conclusion postpones the ‘wiping their smile away’ to the future and how working people will respond to the bursting of the bubble. That future is here now, and although

\[1\] But see Gindin & Panitch 2002.
we do not know how the crisis will proceed, Gindin’s essay retains its value and interest.

The volume finishes with Leo Panitch’s ‘Reflections on Strategy for Labour’, which also takes up some of the points raised in earlier chapters. Panitch stresses the relevance of class and class analysis against the claims of ‘civil society’ and seeks to explore potential strategies via a consideration of André Gorz, who was discussing this way back in 1964 in his *Strategy for Labour* and returned to the theme again in the 1990s with his *Critique of Economic Reason*. Panitch mentions Gorz’s very influential diagnosis of *Farewell to the Working Class* from the 1980s, but ignores the unfortunate prediction that never again would we see mass strikes in France, unfortunately published by the *Socialist Register* shortly after the May Events of 1968. The emphasis from Gorz is that labour movements must engage with other social movements, both for its own sake and for the potential of those other movements to be realised. For Panitch, the crucial thing about the current conjuncture is not just the range and scale of working-class activity (general strikes in Argentina, India, Korea, Nigeria, South Africa in a two-month period in 2000 are listed), but that labour is changing under the impact of women’s entry into the workforce and in consequence of migration, and that this recomposition of the working class is making it ‘a more inclusive social agent’. The very pluralism of the working classes makes the white-straight-male stereotype impossible to maintain. For Panitch, increased diversity ought to be a source of strength, calling for greater solidarity. Also, for Panitch, the old strategies of the labour movement and the Left have been failures – especially the strategies associated with social democracy and corporatism. Panitch quotes Gorz from 1964 to show this is not just a matter of hindsight, the problems were apparent even before the great neoliberal offensive. And after the neoliberal offensive, we are still faced with various advocates of ‘social partnership’ and ‘progressive competitiveness’ as a ‘misguided response to globalisation’. Panitch is clear on the need to address globalisation – and exceptionally clear on nation-states as authors of globalisation and states as representatives of capital. As a precursor to this, Panitch goes back to Gorz again on the EEC in the 1960s, confirmed by the sad story of ETUC’s top-down embrace of the EU bureaucracy in the 1980s and all the hopes for European social provision coming to so little, squeezed as it is by unemployment, the convergence and stability pact and search for greater flexibility.

Panitch also considers what strategies labour should evolve in the light of contemporary capitalist globalisation and the continuing agenda of international trade treaties. Should getting ‘labour standards’ and trade-union representation in international institutions and fora be top of the agenda, as it is for the ICFTU? Panitch quotes from Gerard Greenfield’s contribution to the recent *Monthly Review* collection on international labour which criticised the ICFTU approach and, instead of inclusion as a route to compromise, called for trade unions to exclude items from the WTO agenda as a
subsidiary to mobilisation. The strength of that mobilisation is what came to the fore at Seattle, but Panitch is clear that by the Washington DC demos the following April, a chauvinist-protectionist agenda had asserted itself, especially over the key issue of China and PNTR; to which Panitch rightly contrasts the possibilities of solidarity for Chinese workers. And, as an extension of that argument, Panitch stands against Samir Amin’s support for the leaders of the ‘active periphery’ who have a strategy for ‘national economic development’ against ‘globally dominant imperialism’.

Panitch’s own strategy is centred on ‘democratic investment control’ within each state. He puts some meat on this, but this is really the kind of muscular left-reformist effort, the ‘non-reformist reforms’, that are actually quite familiar – ‘reformist utopianism’ to its critics. We have seen that strategy fail – or be defeated by our enemies. So, despite Panitch’s comment on wariness about strategies that have failed because of their fundamental flaws, and the labour movement clinging on to flawed and failed strategies, he is still going back to one of the old strategies in the repertoire of the labour movement, and one which is undermined by globalisation. However, he still has much of value to urge on us for a strategy. To the call for the need for a new internationalism in the labour movement, a reinvention of solidarity, he adds the transformation of the labour movement itself: its reorganisation and democratisation. And he also urges the need for political organisation inside the ‘anticapitalist movement’, referring to the Canadian debate about a ‘structured movement’ as a form somewhere between party and coalition. The debate goes on, it is necessary it goes on, and Panitch has an important contributory voice. To quote Alex Callinicos,

We are only at a very early stage in the disintegration of the liberal hegemony, and we cannot predict the practical or theoretical forms that left alternatives to it may take, let alone what success they might have.

In this context, Leo Panitch as well as the whole Socialist Register project still plays a useful role.

So, there is much of value in this volume – even though, overall, it does not quite live up to the promise of its preface. All discussion on the current situation of the international working class is valuable. There is an emerging literature, with activist-writers such as Kim Moody and Pete Waterman in the forefront, but this volume deserves to considered alongside their work. The contributors are overwhelmingly academic, but I would argue that they collectively provide a good model of engagement on the part of scholars.
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General Editors: Michael Wayne and Esther Leslie

This new series aims to revive, renew and develop Marxism as an emancipatory tool for analysing media and cultural practices within capitalism and class society. The series seeks to attract proposals from writers who are able to demonstrate the explanatory power of Marxism to the many students and interested readers presently ill-served by the available literature. The focus is on both cultural practices as lived experience and specific artefacts, whether popular or avant-garde. With the extensive and intensive ratcheting up of exchange-value driving large numbers of people into anti-capitalist resistance across the world, the convergence of culture and economics across a range of social, political and aesthetic phenomena gives renewed relevance to traditional Marxist categories. The series is looking for book proposals across a number of areas, including:

- The intensifying commodification and branding of everyday life and modes of its critique.
- Theories of the subject and ideology in the context of the continued crisis of agency for Marxist politics.
- Developments in new technologies, their relation to capital and the contradictory role of the intelligentsia within media and culture institutions.
- Studies of the relations between culture and specific class formations.
- The interplay of class relations with other forms of identity and social being, such as ‘race’ and ethnicity, gender and sexuality.
- Marxist accounts of specific media that can explore the relations between political economy and signifying practices.
- Metatheoretical work on the history of Marxist cultural and media theory, its methodologies and various currents, assessments of Marxism’s relevance to 21st century cultural conditions and contexts and Marxist assessments of rival theoretical traditions.
Books already published or in press for this series include Mike Wayne, *Marxism and Media Studies* and Andrew Hemingway et al., *Marxism and Art History*.

*Pluto Press* is one of the UK’s leading independent publishers. It is committed to publishing the best in critical writing across the social sciences and humanities.

Pluto authors include Noam Chomsky, Sheila Rowbotham, Pierre Bourdieu, Jean Baudrillard, Frantz Fanon, Hal Foster, Augusto Boal, Susan George, Israel Shahak, Antonio Gramsci, John Pilger, Manning Marable, Edward S. Herman and bell hooks.

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Isaac & Tamara Deutscher Memorial Prize

The 2003 Prize was awarded jointly to two outstanding works:

Discovering the Scottish Revolution 1692-1746 by Neil Davidson published by Pluto Press

The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations by Benno Teschke published by Verso Books

Nominations are invited for the 2004 Prize

For further information, go to www.deutscherprize.org.uk
Authors Sought for HKWM

The *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism*, published by Argument Verlag, is currently searching for authors for a number of concepts (listed below) for Volumes 7 to 10. If you would like to write an entry, please contact Thomas Weber at <hkwmred@zedat.fu-berlin.de>.

More details regarding the project and guidelines for authors are available at <www.hkwm.de>.

**Vol. 7** (to be finished in 2005)
- barracks socialism (Kasernensozialismus)
- body (Körper, Leib)
- capital in general (Kapital im allgemeinen)
- capitalist class (Kapitalistenklasse)
- catastrophe (Katastrophe)
- causality (Kausalität)
- class domination (Klassenherrschaft)
- class hatred (Klassenhass)
- class in itself and for itself (Klasse an und für sich)
- class struggles (Klassenkämpfe)
- class-consciousness (Klassenbewusstsein)
- classical (klassisch)
- clientele system (Klientelismus)
- climate (Klima)
- collective action (kollektives Handeln)
- conflict (Konflikt)
- consensus (Konsens)
- consumer society (Konsumgesellschaft)
- contingency (Kontingenz)
- convertibility (Konvertibilität)
core structure (Kernstruktur)
crisis (Krise)
petty bourgeois socialism (kleinbürgerlicher Sozialismus)

**Vol. 8** (to be finished in 2007)
achievement (Leistung)
agricultural labour (Landarbeit)
artificial intelligence (künstliche Intelligenz)
boredom (Langeweile)
conduct of (one’s) life (Lebensführung)
Critical Rationalism (Kritischer Rationalismus)
critique of Marxism (Marxismuskritik)
Cuban Revolution (kubanische Revolution)
cultural imperialism (Kulturimperialismus)
fairytale (Märchen)
food (Lebensmittel)
labourism (Labourismus)
leftwing communism (Linkskommunismus)
leftwing socialism (Linksozialismus)
leftwing/rightwing (links/rechts)
legalism (Legalismus)
legitimation (Legitimation)
lesbian movement (Lesbenbewegung)
lie (Lüge)
life (Leben)
literary criticism
literary form (literarische Form)
livelihood (Lebensunterhalt)
Long March (langer Marsch)
long waves of the conjuncture (lange Wellen der Konjunktur)
Lorianism (Lorianismus)
lust, pleasure (Lust)
luxury (Luxus)
magic (Magie)
manufacture (Manufaktur)
market (Markt)
market price, market rate (Marktpreis)
Marxism-Leninism (Marxismus-Leninismus)
Marxology (Marxologie)
movement of the landless, squatters (Landlosenbewegung)
pain, suffering (Leid, Schmerz)
rural exodus (Landflucht)
sociology of art (Kunstsoziologie)
subcontracted labour (Leiharbeit)
wage form (Lohnform)
wage labour (Lohnarbeit)
wage labourer (Lohnarbeiter)
wage slavery (Lohnsklaverei)
wages (Lohn)

Vol. 9
Central Europe (Mitteleuropa)
fashion (Mode)
freedom of opinion/thought (Meinungsfreiheit)
history of materialism (Materialismusgeschichte)
majority/minority (Mehrheit/Minderheit)
mass intellectuality (Massenintellektualität)
mass movement (Massenbewegung)
mass party (Massenpartei)
mass society (Massengesellschaft)
material (Material)
material analysis (Materialanalyse)
material-technical infrastructure (materiell-technische Basis)
mechanical materialism (mechanischer Materialismus)
media aesthetics (Medienästhetik)
media imperialism (Medienimperialismus)
mercantilism (Merkantilismus)
meritocracy (Meritokratie)
metaphor (Metapher)
metaphysical materialism (metaphysischer Materialismus)
metaphysics (Metaphysik)
Middle East conflict (Nahost-Konflikt)
military Keynesianism (Militärkeynesianismus)
minimum wage (Mindesteinkommen)
minorities (Minderheiten)
moment, aspect (Moment)
monarchy (Monarchie)
monopoly (Monopol)
Monroe Doctrine (Monroedoktrin)
Moscow trials (Moskauer Prozesse)
multiversum (Multiversum)
mysticism (Mystizismus)
national Bolshevism (Nationalbolschewismus)
national communism (Nationalkommunismus)
national specificity (nationale Besonderheit)
nightwatchman state (Nachtwächterstaat)
putsch, coup d’état (by military) (Militärputsch)
rate of surplus value (Mehrwertrate)
refuse, garbage (Müll)
rent (Miete)
social relations of nature (Naturverhältnisse, gesellschaftliche)
surplus product (Mehrprodukt)

Vol. 10
defeat (Niederlage)
ecological balances (Öko-Bilanzen)
ecological economy (ökologische Wirtschaft)
ecological modernization (ökologische Modernisierung)
economic conjuncture (ökonomische Konjunktur)
economic-corporative (ökonomisch-korporativ)
fully developed personality (Persönlichkeit, allseits entwickelte)
lease (Pacht)
necessity (Notwendigkeit)
neoclassic political economy (neoklassische politische Ökonomie)
neocolonialism (Neokolonialismus)
neo-Fordism (Neofordismus)
the new (Neues)
new democracy (neue Demokratie)
New Left (Neue Linke)
new man (neuer Mensch)
New Political Economy (Neue Politische Ökonomie)
new social movements (neue soziale Bewegungen)
new working class (neue Arbeiterklasse)
new world economic order (neue Weltwirtschaftsordnung)
nominalism (Nominalismus)
normalisation (Normalisierung)
norms (Normen)
nothingness (Nichts)
nouvelle critique
Novum
nuclear winter (nuklearer Winter)
objectivism (Objektivismus)
objectivity (Objektivität)
October Revolution (Oktoberrevolution)
opium (Opium)
opportunism (Opportunismus)
optimism/pessimism (Optimismus/Pessimismus)
order (Ordnung)
organic composition (organische Zusammensetzung)
organized capitalism (organisierter Kapitalismus)
Owenism (Owenismus)
pantheism (Pantheismus)
party of a new type (Partei neuen Typs)
patriarchy (Patriarchat)
patriotism (Patriotismus)
personality cult (Personenkult)
phenomenology (Phänomenologie)
public service (öffentlicher Dienst)
Revolution of the Carnations (Nelkenrevolution)
victim (Opfer)