
Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital

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The shadow of cultural diversity—the diverse ways in which we “world” this earth—now falls across all universalistic assumptions about history or human nature that often underlie propositions of modern political philosophies. Their inherent Eurocentrism is what makes these assumptions suspect in the eyes of practitioners of the human sciences today. But neither cultural nor historical relativism is seen as an answer—and rightly so, for an absolutist relativism can easily be shown to be self-contradictory. Understandably, therefore, many post-colonial debates on political philosophies such as Marxism or liberalism often try to work out a middle ground between the two options of universalism and relativism. Critical energies are focused on questions such as how and where one

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locates this middle ground, how one delineates its contours, ways one can get out of the universalism/relativism binary, and so on and so forth. But, as discussions of human rights increasingly make clear, universalistic assumptions are not easily given up, and the tension between universalism and historical difference is not easily dismissed. The struggle to find a middle ground remains. “Strategic essentialism” (associated with Gayatri Spivak [1988]), “hybridity” (associated with Homi Bhabha [1994]), “cosmopolitanism,” and the like are expressions that remind us of particular strategies formulated in the course of this struggle.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the tension between universalism and historical difference in the logic of Marx’s category “capital.” I do not need to demonstrate the relevance of this category. True, it belongs to the nineteenth century, but suffice it to say that, to the extent that we think of globalization as a process of globalization of capital, the category remains of interest. However, there is a need to rethink the category, and especially so in a world where Marx’s key assumption that capital, by its own logic, would call forth its own dissolution through the agency of labor, has not been borne out. How do we think about an alternative to capital in such a context? Clearly, one cannot any longer think of the “beyond of capital” as something that is totally opposed to capital (such as “socialism” or “communism”). Does it even make sense to think of such a “beyond” when everything in the world seems to be coming more and more under the sway of capital itself? I read some selected texts by Marx to revisit this question. How does capital, a universal category by definition, negotiate historical difference in Marx’s exposition? Does Marx’s account of this negotiation carry any hints that can help us think the question of human belonging in a globe increasingly made one by the technologies of capital?

To answer these questions, I pursue two of Marx’s ideas that are inseparable from his critique of capital: his views on abstract labor and on the relationship between capital and history. Marx’s philosophical category capital is planetary (or global) in its historical aspiration and universal in its constitution. Its categorical structure, at least in Marx’s own elaboration, is predicated on Enlightenment ideas of juridical equality and abstract political rights of citizenship.¹ Labor that is juridically and politically free—and yet socially unfree—is a concept embedded in Marx’s category of “abstract labor.” Abstract labor combines in itself Enlightenment themes of juridical freedom (rights, citizenship) and the concept of the universal and abstract human being who is the subject of this freedom. More important, it is also a concept central to Marx’s explanation of why capital,

1. This proposition is discussed in and taken as the founding premise of Chakrabarty 1989.

in fulfilling itself in history, necessarily creates the ground for its own dissolution. Examining the idea of abstract labor then enables us to see what may be politically and intellectually at stake today—for postcolonial scholars who do not ignore Marx’s legacy—in the universalist humanism of the Enlightenment.

The idea of abstract labor also leads us to the question of how the logic of capital relates to the issue of historical difference. The idea of “history,” as all students of Marx would know, was central to Marx’s philosophical critique of capital. Abstract labor gave Marx a way of explaining how the capitalist mode of production managed to extract, out of peoples and histories that were all different, a homogenous and common unit for measuring human activity. Abstract labor may thus be read as an account of how the logic of capital sublates into itself the differences of history. In the concluding part of the essay, however, I try to develop a distinction Marx made between two kinds of histories, which I call History 1 and History 2, respectively: pasts “posited by capital” itself and pasts that do not belong to capital’s “life-process.” I explore this distinction to show how Marx’s own thoughts may be made to resist an idea central to Marx’s critique of capital: that the logic of capital sublates differences into itself.

Capital, Abstract Labor, and the Sublation of Difference

Fundamental to Marx’s discussion of capital is the idea of the commodity. And fundamental to the conception of the commodity is the question of difference. Commodity exchange is about exchanging things that are different in their histories, material properties, and uses. Yet the commodity form, intrinsically, is supposed to make differences—however material they may be—immaterial for the purpose of exchange. The commodity form does not as such negate difference but holds it in suspension so that we can exchange things as different from one another as beds and houses. But how could that happen? How could things that apparently had nothing in common come to form items in a series of capitalist exchanges, a series that Marx would think of as continuous and infinite?

Readers will remember Marx’s argument with Aristotle on this point. Aristotle, in the course of his deliberations in *Nicomachean Ethics* on such issues as justice, equality, and proportionality, focused on the problem of exchange. Exchange, he argued, was central to the formation of a community. But a community was always made up of people who were “different and unequal.” On the ground, there were only infinite incommensurabilities. Every individual was different. For exchange to act as the basis of community, there had to be a way of finding a common measure so that what was not equal could be equalized.

Aristotle (1981: 125–27) underscores this imperative: “They must be equalized [with respect to a measure]; and everything that enters into an exchange must somehow be comparable.” Without this measure of equivalence that allowed for comparison, there could not be any exchange and hence no community.

Aristotle, as is well known, solved this problem by bringing the idea of “convention” or law into the picture. For him, money represented such a convention: “It is for this purpose [of exchanging dissimilar goods] that money has been introduced: it becomes, as it were, a middle term. . . . it tells us how many shoes are equal to a house” (1981: 125). Money, according to Aristotle, represented some kind of a general agreement, a convention. A convention was ultimately arbitrary, it was held in place by the sheer force of law that simply reflected the will of the community. Aristotle introduced into his discussion the note of a radical political will that, as Cornelius Castoriadis comments, is absent from the text of *Capital*.² In Aristotle’s words: “Money has by general agreement come to represent need. That is why it has the name of ‘currency’; it exists by current convention and not by nature, and it is in our power to change and invalidate it” (1981: 126). The translator of Aristotle points out that “the Greek word for ‘money,’ ‘coin,’ ‘currency’ (*nomisma*) comes from the same root as *nomos*, ‘law,’ ‘convention’” (Aristotle 1981: 126, n. 35).

Marx begins *Capital* by critiquing Aristotle. For Aristotle, what brought shoes and houses into a relationship of exchange was a mere “convention”—“a makeshift for practical purposes,” as Marx translated it. Yet it was not satisfactory for Marx to think that the term that mediated differences among commodities could be simply a convention, that is, an arbitrary expression of political will. Referring to Aristotle’s argument that there could not be a “homogeneous element, i.e., the common substance” between the bed (Marx’s copy of Aristotle seems to have used the example of the bed and not that of the shoe!) and the house, Marx asked: “But why not? Towards the bed the house represents something equal, in so far as it represents what is really equal, both in the bed and the house. And that is—human labour” (1990: 151).

This human labor, the “common substance” mediating differences, was Marx’s concept of abstract labor, which he described as “the secret of the expression of value.” It was only in a society in which bourgeois values had acquired a hegemonic status that this “secret” could be unveiled. It “could not be deciphered” wrote Marx, “until the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion.” This, in turn, was possible “only in a

2. See also Castoriadis 1984: 260–339, in particular, 282–311.

society where the commodity-form [was] the universal form of the product of labour” and where therefore “the dominant social relation [was] the relation between men as the possessors of commodities.” The slave-holding nature of ancient Greek society was what, according to Marx, occluded Aristotle’s analytical vision. And by the same logic, the generalization of contractual equality under bourgeois hegemony created the historical conditions for the birth of Marx’s insights (Marx 1990: 152). The idea of abstract labor was thus a particular instance of the idea of the abstract human—the bearer of rights, for example—popularized by Enlightenment philosophers.

This common measure of human activity, abstract labor, is what Marx opposes to the idea of real or concrete labor (which is what any specific form of labor is). Simply put, abstract labor refers to an “indifference to any specific kind of labour.” By itself, this does not make for capitalism. A “barbarian” society—Marx’s expression!—may be so marked by the absence of a developed division of labour that its members “are fit by nature to do anything” (Marx 1973: 105). By Marx’s argument it was perfectly conceivable that such a society would have abstract labor though its members would not be able to theorize it. Such theorizing would be possible only in the capitalist mode of production in which the very activity of abstracting became the most common strand of all or most other kinds of labor.

What indeed was abstract labor? Sometimes Marx would write as though abstract labor was pure physiological expenditure of energy. For example: “If we leave aside the determinate quality of productive activity, and therefore the useful character of the labour, what remains is its quality of being an expenditure of human labour-power. Tailoring and weaving, although they are qualitatively different productive activities, are both a productive expenditure of human brains, muscles, nerves, hands, etc.” (Marx 1990: 134). Or this: “On the other hand, all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power, in the physiological sense, and it is in this quality of being equal, or abstract, human labour that it forms the value of commodities” (Marx 1990: 137). But students of Marx from different periods and as different from one another as Isaak Il’ich Rubin, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jon Elster, and Moishe Postone have shown that to conceive of abstract labor as a thing-like substance, as a Cartesian *res extensa*, to reduce it to “nervous and muscular energy,” is either to misread Marx (as Rubin [1975: 131–38] and Postone [1993: 144–46] argue) or to repeat a mistake of Marx’s thoughts (as Castoriadis [1984: 307–8] and Elster [1995: 68] put it). Marx does speak of abstract labor as a “social substance” possessing “objectivity,” but he immediately qualifies this objectivity as spectral, “phantom-like” rather than

“thing-like”: “Let us now look at the products of [abstract] labour. There is nothing left of them in each case but the same *phantom-like objectivity*: they are merely congealed quantities of homogenous human labour, i.e., of human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure. . . . As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values—commodity values” (Marx 1990: 128; emphasis added). Or as he explains elsewhere in *Capital*: “Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodity as values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities as physical objects,” and also, “commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, . . . their objective character as value is purely social” (Marx 1990: 138–39).

How then is abstract labor to be conceptualized? If we do not share Marx’s assumption that the exchange of commodities in capitalism necessarily forms a continuous and infinite series, then abstract labor is perhaps best understood as a performative, practical category. To organize life under the sign of capital is to act *as if* labor could indeed be abstracted from all the social tissues in which it is always already embedded and which make any particular labor—even the labor of abstracting—perceptibly concrete. Marx’s “barbarians” had abstract labor. Anybody in that society could take up any kind of activity. But their “indifference to specific labour” would not be as visible to an analyst as in a capitalist society, because in the case of these hypothetical barbarians, this indifference itself would not be universally performed as a separate, specialized kind of labor. That is to say, the very concrete labor of abstracting would not be separately observable as a general feature of the many different kinds of specific labor that society undertook. In a capitalist society, by contrast, the particular work of abstracting would itself become an element of most or all other kinds of concrete labor and would thus be more visible to an observer. As Marx (1973: 104) put it: “As a rule, 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.” “Such a state of affairs,” writes Marx (104–5), “is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society—in the United States. Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category ‘labour,’ ‘labour as such,’ labour pure and simple, becomes true in practice.” Notice Marx’s expression “the abstraction . . . becomes true in practice.” Marx could not have written a clearer statement indicating that abstract labor was not a thing-like entity, not physiological labor, not a calculable sum of muscular and nervous

energy. It referred to a practice, an activity, a concrete performance of the work of abstraction, similar to what one does in the analytical strategies of economics when one speaks of an abstract category called “labor.”

Sometimes Marx writes as if abstract labor was what one obtained after going through a conscious and intentional process—much like in certain procedures of mathematics—of mentally stripping commodities of their material properties:

If . . . we disregard the use-value of commodities, only one property remains, that of products of labour. . . . If we make abstraction from its use-value, we also abstract from the material constituents and forms which make it a use-value. It is no longer a table, a house, a piece of yarn or any other useful thing. All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished. . . . With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract. (Marx 1990: 128; emphasis added)

Expressions like “if we disregard,” “if we abstract,” and “they can no longer be distinguished” may give the impression that Marx is writing here of a human subject who disregards, abstracts, or distinguishes. But Marx’s discussion of factory discipline makes it clear that he does not visualize the abstraction of labor inherent in the process of exchange of commodities as a large-scale mental operation. Abstraction happens in and through practice. It precedes one’s conscious recognition of its existence. As Marx (1990: 166–67) put it: “Men do not . . . bring the products of their labour into relation with each other as values because they see these objects merely as the 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.” Marx’s logic here, as in many other places in his writings, is retrospective.³

Marx agreed more with Aristotle than he acknowledged—abstract/abstracting labor, one could indeed say, was a capitalist “convention” so that the middle term in exchange remains a matter of convention after all. But Marx’s position that the convention was not the result of prior conscious decision to abstract would not have allowed Aristotle’s voluntarism in regard to this convention (“it is in

3. Cf. Meek 1979: 168: “The ‘averaging’ process, Marx’s argument implies, takes place in history before it takes place in the minds of economists.”

our power to change and invalidate”).⁴ Abstract labor is what Marx decodes to be a key to the hermeneutic grid through which capital requires us to read the world.

Disciplinary processes are what make the performance of abstraction—the labor of abstracting—visible (to Marx) as a constitutive feature of the capitalist mode of production. The typical division of labor in a capitalist factory, the codes of factory regulation, the relationship between the machinery and men, state legislation guiding the organization of factory lives, the foreman’s work—all these make up what Marx calls discipline. The division of labor in the factory is such, he writes (1990: 465), that it “creates a continuity, a uniformity, a regularity, an order, and even an intensity of labour quite different from that found in an independent handicraft.” In sentences that anticipate a basic theme of Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* by about a hundred years, he describes how the “overseer’s book of penalties replaces the slave-driver’s lash [in capitalist management].” “All punishments,” Marx writes (1990: 550), “naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages.”

Factory legislation also participates in this performance of disciplinary abstraction. Marx argues (1990: 635) that such legislation “destroys both the ancient and transitional forms behind which the domination of capital is still partially hidden. . . . in each individual workshop it enforces uniformity, regularity, order and economy” and thus contributes to sustaining the assumption that human activity is indeed measurable on a homogenous scale. But it is in the way the law—and through the law, the state and the capitalist classes—imagines laborers through biological/physiological categories such as adults, adult males, women, and children that the work of the reductive abstraction of labor from all its attendant social integuments is performed. This mode of imagination, Marx further shows us, is also what structures from within the process of production. It is dyed into capital’s own vision of the worker’s relationship with the machine.

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx has recourse to the rhetorical ploy of staging what he calls the “voice” of the worker in order to bring out the character of his category labor. (To forestall misunderstanding, I should reiterate that Marx is writing about the relationship between categories and not between empirical peo-

4. Castoriadis (1984: 328–29) erects a possible picture of voluntarist revolutionary politics by adopting this Aristotelian position into his Marxism: “To propose another institution of society is a matter of a political project and political aim, which are certainly subject to discussion and argument, but cannot be ‘founded’ in any kind of Nature or Reason. . . . Men are born neither free nor unfree, neither equal nor unequal. *We will them to be* (we will ourselves to be) free and equal” (Castoriadis’s emphasis).

ple.) This voice shows how abstracted the category “worker” or “labor” is from the social and psychic processes we commonsensically associate with “the everyday.” For example, this voice reduces age, childhood, health, and strength to biological or natural physiological statements, separate from the diverse and historically specific experiences of ageing, of being a child, of being healthy, and so on. “Apart from the natural deterioration through age, etc.,” Marx’s category worker says to the capitalist in a voice that is introspective as well, “I must be able to work tomorrow with the same normal amount of strength, health, and freshness as today.” This abstraction means that “sentiments” are no part of this imaginary dialogue between the abstracted laborer and the capitalist who is also a figure of abstraction. The voice of the worker says: “I . . . demand a working day of normal length . . . without any appeal to your heart, for in money matters sentiment is out of place. You may be a model citizen, perhaps a member of the R.S.P.C.A., and you may be in the odour of sanctity as well; but the thing you represent as you come face to face with me has no heart in its breast” (Marx 1990: 342–43). It is in this figure of a rational collective entity, the worker, that Marx grounds the question of working-class unity, either potential or realized. The question of working-class unity is not a matter of emotional or psychic solidarity of empirical workers. It is not, in other words, anything like what numerous humanist-Marxist labor historians, from E. P. Thompson on, have often imagined it to be. The “worker” is an abstract and collective subject by its very constitution.⁵ It is within that collective and abstract subject that, as Spivak (1988: 277) has reminded us, the dialectic of class-in-itself and class-for-itself plays itself out.⁶ The “collective worker,” writes Marx (1990: 468), “formed out of the combination of a number of individual specialized workers, is the item of machinery specifically characteristic of the manufacturing period.”

Marx constructs a fascinating and suggestive, though fragmentary, history of factory machinery in the early phase of industrialization in England. This history shows two simultaneous processes at work in capitalist production, both of them critical to Marx’s understanding of the category worker as an abstract, reified

5. This is reminiscent of Georg Lukács’s (1971: 51, 197) contention that “class consciousness” was not a category that referred to what actually went on inside the heads of individual, empirical workers. David Harvey (1984: 114) writes: “The duality of worker as ‘object for capital’ and as ‘living creative subject’ has never been adequately resolved in Marxist theory.” I have criticisms of Harvey’s reading of Marx on this point—one could argue, for instance, that, for Marx, the worker could never be a thing-like “object for capital” (see later in this essay)—but Harvey’s statement has the merit of recognizing a real problem in Marxist histories of “consciousness.”

6. The opposition of class-in-itself and class-for-itself, Spivak (1988: 277) clarifies, does not define a program of “an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level.”

category. The machine produces “the technical subordination of the worker to the uniform motions of the instruments of labour” (Marx 1990: 549; see also 535).⁷ It transfers the motive force of production from the human or the animal to the machine, from living to dead labor. This can only happen on two conditions: the worker is first reduced to his or her biological, and therefore, abstract body, and then movements of this abstract body are broken up and individually designed into the very shape and movement of the machine itself. “Capital absorbs labour into itself,” Marx (1973: 704) would write in his notebooks, quoting Goethe, “as though its body were by love possessed.” The body that the machine comes to possess is the abstract body it ascribed to the worker to begin with. Marx (1990: 504) writes: “Large-scale industry was crippled in its whole development as long as its characteristic instrument of production, the machine, owed its existence to personal strength and personal skill, [and] depended on the muscular development, the keenness of sight and the manual dexterity with which specialized workers . . . wielded their dwarf-like instruments.” Once the worker’s capacity for labor could be translated into a series of practices that abstracted the personal from the social, the machine could appropriate the abstract body these practices themselves posited. One tendency of the whole process was to make even the humanness of the capacity for labor redundant: “It is purely accidental that the motive power happens to be clothed in the form of human muscles; wind, water, steam could just as well take man’s place” (Marx 1990: 497). At the same time, though, capital—in Marx’s understanding of its logic—would not be able to do without living, human labor.

Abstract Labor as Critique

The universal category abstract labor has a twofold function in Marx: it is both a description and a critique of capital. If capital makes abstractions real in everyday life, Marx uses these very same abstractions to give us a sense of the everyday world that capitalist production creates—witness, for example, Marx’s use of such reductively biological categories as “women,” “children and adult males,” “childhood,” “family functions,” and the “expenditure of domestic labour” (1990: 517, 518 n. 39, 526, 546, 547). The idea of abstract labor reproduces the central feature of the hermeneutic of capital—how capital reads human activity.

Yet abstract labor is also a critique of the same hermeneutic because it—the

7. Marx (1990: 505 n. 18) discusses how the modern machine, in its early history, incorporated into its design the motions of the live, physical, and animate body.

labor of abstracting—defines for Marx a certain kind of unfreedom. He calls it “despotism.” This despotism is structural to capital; it is not simply historical. Thus Marx (1990: 395) writes: “Capital is constantly compelled to wrestle with the insubordination of the workers.” And he describes discipline as the “highly detailed specifications, which regulate, with military uniformity, the times, the limits, the pauses of work by the stroke of the clock, . . . developed out of circumstances as natural laws of the modern mode of production. Their formulation, official recognition and proclamation by the state were the result of a long class struggle.” Marx (1990: 489–90) is not speaking merely of a particular historical stage, of the transition from handicrafts to manufactures in England, when “the full development of its [capital’s] own peculiar tendencies comes up against obstacles from many directions . . . [including] the habits and the resistance of the male workers.” He is also writing about “resistance to capital” as something internal to capital itself. As Marx writes elsewhere, the self-reproduction of capital “moves in contradictions *which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited.*” He adds, just because capital gets ideally beyond every limit posed to it by “national barriers and prejudices,” “it does not by any means follow that it has *really* overcome it” (Marx 1973: 410; emphasis added).

But from where does such resistance arise? Many labor historians think of resistance to factory work as resulting either from a clash between the requirements of industrial discipline and preindustrial habits of workers in the early phase of industrialization or from a heightened level of worker consciousness in a later phase. In other words, they see it as resulting from a particular historical stage of capitalist production. In contrast, Marx locates this resistance in the very logic of capital—that is, he locates it in the structural “being” of capital rather than in its historical “becoming.” Central to this argument is what Marx sees as the “despotism of capital.” This despotism has nothing to do with the historical stage of capitalism. It would not matter for Marx’s argument if the capitalist country in question were a developed one. Resistance does not refer to the empirical worker’s consciousness or to a historical stage of capital. It is the Other of the despotism inherent in capital’s logic. This argument is integral to Marx’s larger point that if capitalism were ever to realize itself fully, it would also posit the conditions for its own dissolution.

Capital’s power is autocratic, writes Marx. Resistance is rooted in a process through which capital appropriates the will of the worker. Marx (1990: 549–50) writes: “In the factory code, the capitalist formulates his autocratic power over his workers like a private legislator, and purely as an emanation of his own will.” This will, embodied in capitalist discipline, Marx describes as “purely despotic;”

and he uses the analogy of the army to describe the coercion at its heart: “An industrial army of workers under the command of capital requires, like a real army, officers (managers) and N.C.O.s [noncommissioned officers] (foremen, overseers), who command during the labour process in the name of capital. The work of supervision becomes their exclusive function” (Marx 1990: 450).⁸

Why call capitalist discipline “despotic” if all it does is to act as though labor could be abstracted and homogenized? Marx is clear that this has nothing to do with the onerousness of work under capitalism. He would even use the term *torture* to describe “the lightening of labor.” Marx’s writings on this point underscore the importance of the concept of abstract labor—a version of the Enlightenment figure of the abstract human—as an instrument of critique. He thought of abstract labor as a compound category, spectrally objective and yet made up of human physiology and human consciousness, both abstracted from any empirical history. The consciousness in question was pure will. Marx writes: “Factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost; at the same time, [through specialization and the consequent privileging of the machine,] it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and *confiscates every atom of freedom*, both in bodily and intellectual activity. Even the lightening of labour becomes a torture” (Marx 1973: 548; emphasis added).

Why would freedom have anything to do with something as reductively physiological as “the nervous system . . . [and] the many-sided play of the muscles”? Because, Marx (1973: 296) explains, the labor that capital presupposes “as its contradiction and its contradictory being” and which in turn “presupposes capital” is a special kind of labor—“labour not as an object, but as activity, . . . as the living source of value.”⁹ Marx continues, “As against capital, labour is the merely abstract form, the mere possibility of value-positing activity, which exists only as a capacity, as a resource in the bodiliness of the worker” (Marx 1973: 298). Science aids in this abstraction of living labor by capital: “In machinery, the appropriation of living labour by capital achieves a direct reality. . . . It is, firstly, the analysis and application of mechanical and chemical laws, arising directly out of science, which enables the machine to perform the same labour as that previously

8. Foucault (1979: 163) comments on these military analogies in Marx. But whereas, for Foucault, disciplinary power creates “the docile body,” Marx posits the living body as a source of resistance to discipline.

9. This is why Harvey’s contention (1984: 113) that Marx’s “theory shows that, from the standpoint of capital, workers are indeed objects, a mere ‘factor’ of production . . . for the creation of surplus value” seems mistaken to me. The worker is a reified category, but the reification includes an irreducible element of life and (human) consciousness.

performed by the worker. However, the development of machinery along this path occurs only after . . . all the sciences have been pressed into the service of capital” (Marx 1973: 703–4).

The critical point is that the labor that is abstracted in the capitalist’s search for a common measure of human activity is “living.” Marx would ground resistance to capital in this apparently mysterious factor called “life.” The connections between the language of classical political economy and the traditions of European thought that one could call “vitalist” are an underexplored area of research, particularly so in the case of Marx. Marx’s language (such as his use of the words *life* and *living*) and his biological metaphors, however, often reveal a deep influence of nineteenth-century vitalism: “Labour is the yeast thrown into it [capital], which starts it fermenting.” And furthermore, for Marx labour-power “as commodity exists in his [the labourer’s] vitality. . . . In order to maintain this from one day to the next . . . he has to consume a certain quantity of food, to replace his used-up blood, etc. . . . Capital has paid him the amount of objectified labour contained in his vital forces” (1973: 298, 323). These vital forces are the ground of constant resistance to capital, the abstract living labor—a sum of muscles, nerves, and consciousness/will—that, according to Marx, capital posits as its contradictory starting point all the time. In this vitalist understanding, life, in all its biological and conscious capacity for wilful activity (the “many-sided play of the muscles”) is the excess that capital, for all its disciplinary procedures, always needs but can never quite control or domesticate.

One is reminded here of G. W. F. Hegel’s discussion, in his *Logic*, of the Aristotelian category “life.” Hegel accepted Aristotle’s argument that life was expressive of a totality or unity in a living individual. “The single members of the body,” Hegel writes, “are what they are only by and in relation to their unity. A hand, e.g., when hewn off from the body is, as Aristotle has observed, a hand in name only, not in fact” (1975: 280; see also article 216 Additions). It is only with death that this unity is dismembered and the body falls prey to the objective forces of nature. With death, as Charles Taylor (1978: 332) puts it in explaining this section of Hegel’s *Logic*, “mechanism and chemism” break out of the “subordination” in which they are held “as long as life continues.” Life, to use Hegel’s expression, “is a standing fight” against the possibility of the dismemberment with which death threatens the unity of the living body (Hegel 1975: 281).¹⁰ Life, in Marx’s analysis of capital, is similarly a “standing fight” against the process of abstraction that is constitutive of the category labor. It was as if the process of

10. I have preferred Taylor’s translation of this passage to that of William Wallace.

abstraction and ongoing appropriation of the worker's body in the capitalist mode of production perpetually threatened to effect a dismemberment of the unity that the "living body" itself was.

This unity of the body that life expressed, however, was something more than the sheer physical unity of the limbs. "Life" implies a consciousness that is purely human in its abstract and innate capacity for willing. This embodied and peculiarly human "will"—reflected in "the many-sided play of the muscles"—refuses to bend to the "technical subordination" under which capital constantly seeks to place the worker. Marx writes: "The presupposition of the master-servant relation is the appropriation of an alien will." This will could not belong to animals, for animals could not be part of the politics of recognition that the Hegelian master-slave relation assumed. A dog might obey a man, but the man would never know for certain if the dog did not simply look on him as another bigger and more powerful dog. As Marx (1973: 500–501) writes: "The animal may well provide a service but does not thereby make its owner a master." The dialectic of mutual recognition on which the master-servant relationship turned could only take place between humans: "The master-servant relation likewise belongs in this formula of the appropriation of the instruments of production. . . . It is reproduced—in mediated form—in capital, and thus . . . forms a ferment of its dissolution and is an emblem of its limitation."

Marx's immanent critique of capital begins at the same point where capital begins its own life-process: with abstraction of labor. Yet this labor, while abstract, is always living labor to begin with. The "living" quality of the labor ensures that the capitalist has not bought a fixed quantum of labor but, rather, a variable "capacity for labor." Still, being "living" is what makes this labor a source of resistance to capitalist abstraction. The tendency on the part of capital would therefore be to replace, as much as possible, living labor with objectified, dead labor. Capital is thus faced with its own contradiction: it needs abstract and living labor as the starting point in its cycle of self-reproduction, but it also wants to reduce to a minimum the quantum of living labor it needs. Capital will therefore tend to develop technology in order to reduce this need to a minimum. This is exactly what will create the conditions necessary for the emancipation of labor and for the eventual abolition of the category labor altogether. But that would also be the condition for the dissolution of capital: "Capital . . .—quite unintentionally—reduces human labour, expenditure of energy, to a minimum. This will redound to the benefit of emancipated labour, and is the condition of its emancipation" (Marx 1973: 701).

The subsequent part of Marx's argument would run as follows. It is capital's

tendency to replace living labor by science and technology—that is, by the shared results of man’s “understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body”—that will give rise to the development of the “social individual” whose greatest need would be that of the “free development of individualities.” For the “reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum” would then correspond to “the artistic, scientific, etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.” Capital would then reveal itself as the “moving contradiction” it was: it both presses “to reduce labour time to a minimum” and posits labor time “as the sole measure and source of wealth.” It would therefore work “towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production” (Marx 1973: 700, 705, 706).

Thus would Marx complete the loop of his critique of capital. His critique, by definition, looks to a future beyond capital. But it does so by attending closely to the contradictions in capital’s own logic. He powerfully uses the vision of the abstract human embedded in the capitalist practice of abstract labor to generate a radical critique of capital itself. He recognizes that bourgeois societies in which the idea of “human equality” had acquired the fixity of popular prejudice allowed him to use the same idea to critique them. But historical difference would remain sublated and suspended in this particular form of the critique.

Histories and the Analytic of Capital

Yet Marx was always at pains to underline the importance of history to his critique of capital: “Our method indicates the point where historical investigation must enter in” (Marx 1973: 460; see also 471–72, 488–89, 505). Or elsewhere: “Bourgeois economy [always] point[s] towards a past lying beyond this system” (Marx 1973: 460–61). Marx writes of the past of capital in terms of a distinction between its being and becoming. “Being” refers to the structural logic of capital—that is, the state when capital has fully come into its own. Marx would sometimes call it (using Hegel’s vocabulary) real capital, capital as such, or capital’s being-for-itself. “Becoming” refers to the historical process in and through which the logical presuppositions of capital being are realized. Becoming is not simply the calendrical or chronological past that precedes capital but the past that the category retrospectively posits. Without the connection between land/tool and laborers being somehow severed, for example, there would never be any workers available to capital. This severing would have to happen wherever there was capitalist production—this is the sense in which a historical process of this kind is indeed a process in the course of which the logical presuppositions of capital are

worked out. A past of this kind is posited logically by the category capital. While this past is still being acted out, capitalists and workers do not belong to the being of capital. In Marx's language, they would be called *not-capitalist* (Marx's term [1973: 495]) or, one could say, *not-worker*.¹¹ These "conditions and presuppositions of the *becoming*, of the *arising*, of capital," writes Marx, "presuppose precisely that it is not yet in being but merely in becoming; they therefore disappear as real capital arises, capital which itself, on the basis of its own reality, posits the condition for its realization" (Marx 1973: 459; Marx's emphasis).

It goes without saying that it is not the actual process of history that does the "presupposing"; the logical presuppositions of capital can only be worked out by someone with a grasp of the logic of capital. In that sense, an intellectual comprehension of the structure of capital is the precondition of this historical knowledge. For history then exemplifies only for us—the investigators—the logical presuppositions of capital even though, Marx would argue, capital needs this real history to happen and even if the reading of this history is only retrospective. This is the sense of a retrospective reading of the past that Marx inscribed in his famous aphorism: "Human anatomy contains a key to the anatomy of the ape." His own gloss went as follows: "The intimations of higher development among the subordinate species . . . can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient" (Marx 1973: 105). He made a very similar point elsewhere: "Man comes into existence only when a certain point is reached. But once man has emerged, he becomes the permanent pre-condition of human history, likewise its permanent product and result" (Marx 1978: 491). Marx therefore does not provide us so much with a teleology of history as with a perspectival point from which to read the archives.

In his notes on "revenue and its sources" in the posthumously collected and published volumes entitled *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx gave this history a name: he called it capital's antecedent "posited by itself." Here free labor is both a precondition of capitalist production as well as "its invariable result" (Marx 1978: 491). This is the universal and necessary history we associate with capital. It forms the backbone of the usual narratives of transition to the capitalist mode of production. Let us call this history—a past posited by capital itself as its precondition—History 1.

Marx opposes to History 1 another kind of past that we will call History 2.

11. Nothing in this sense is inherently "precapitalist." Precapitalist could only ever be a designation used from the perspective of capital.

Elements of History 2, Marx argues, are also “antecedents” to capital—in that capital “encounters them as antecedents,” but—and here follows the critical distinction I want to highlight—“not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life-process” (Marx 1978: 468). To say that something does not belong to capital’s “life-process” is to claim that it does not contribute to the self-reproduction of capital. I therefore understand Marx to be saying that antecedents to capital are not only the relationships that constitute History 1 but also other relationships that do not lend themselves to the reproduction of the logic of capital. Only History 1 is the past “established” by capital because History 1 lends itself to the reproduction of capitalist relationships. In other words, Marx accepts that the total universe of pasts that capital encounters is larger than the sum of those elements in which the logical presuppositions of capital are worked out.

Marx’s own examples of History 2 take the reader by surprise. They are money and commodity, two elements without which capital cannot even be conceptualized. Marx once described the “commodity-form” as something belonging to the “cellular” structure of capital. And without money, there would be no generalized exchange of commodities.¹² Yet entities as close and as necessary to the functioning of capital as money and commodity do not necessarily belong by any natural connection to either capital’s “own life-process” or to the past “posited by capital.” Marx recognizes the possibility that money and commodity, as relations, could have existed in history without necessarily giving rise to capital. They did not look forward to capital as such. Relations, whose reproduction does not contribute to the reproduction of the logic of capital, make up the kind of past I have called History 2. This very example of the heterogeneity Marx reads into the history of money and commodity shows that the relations that do not contribute to the reproduction of the logic of capital can actually be intimately intertwined with the relations that do. Capital, maintains Marx, has to destroy this first set of relationships as independent forms and subjugate them to itself (using, if need be, violence—that is, the power of the state): “[Capital] originally finds the commodity already in existence, but not as its own product, and likewise finds money in circulation, but not as an element in its own reproduction. . . . But both of them must first be destroyed as independent forms and subordinated to industrial capital. Violence (the State) is used against interest-bearing capital by means of compulsory reduction of interest rates” (Marx 1978: 468).

12. Cf. Marx 1990: 90: “For bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form.”

Marx thus writes into the intimate space of capital an element of deep uncertainty. In the reproduction of its own life-process, capital encounters relationships that present it with double possibilities. These relations could be central to capital's self-reproduction, and yet it is also possible for them to be oriented to structures that do not contribute to such reproduction. History 2's are thus not pasts separate from capital; they are pasts that inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital's own logic.

History 1, argues Marx, has to subjugate or destroy the multiple possibilities that belong to History 2. There is nothing, however, to guarantee that the subordination of History 2's to the logic of capital could ever be necessarily complete or total. True, Marx wrote about bourgeois society as a "contradictory development"—"relations derived from earlier forms will often be found within it only in an entirely stunted form, or even travestied." But he also at the same time described some of these "remnants" of "vanished social formations" as "partly still unconquered," signalling by his metaphor of conquest that the site of a "survival" of that which seemed pre- or noncapitalist could very well be the site of an ongoing battle (Marx 1973: 105–6). There remains, of course, a degree of ambiguity of meaning and an equivocality about time in this fragment of a sentence from Marx. Does "partly *still* unconquered" refer to something that is "not yet conquered" or something that is in principle "unconquerable"?

We have to remain alert to—or even make good use of—certain ambiguities in Marx's prose. At first sight, Marx may appear to be offering a historicist reading. Marx's categories "not-capitalist" or "not-worker," for example, could appear to belong squarely to the process of becoming of capital, a phase in which capital "is not yet in being but merely in becoming" (Marx 1973: 459). But notice the ambiguity in this phrase: What kind of a temporal space is signalled by "not yet"? If one reads the expression "not yet" as belonging to the historian's lexicon, a historicism follows. It refers us back to the idea of history as a waiting room, a period that is needed for the transition to capitalism at any particular time and place. This is the period to which the Third World is often consigned.

Marx himself warns us against understandings of capital that emphasize the historical at the expense of the structural or the philosophical. The limits to capital, he reminds us, are "constantly overcome but just as constantly posited" (Marx 1973: 410). It is as though the "not yet" is what keeps capital going. Marx allows us to read the expression "not yet" deconstructively as referring to a process of deferral internal to the very being (that is, logic) of capital. "Becoming," the question of the past of capital, does not have to be thought of as a process outside of and prior to its "being." If we describe becoming as the past

posited by the category capital itself, then we make being logically prior to becoming. Difference-with-capital (Marx's figure of the *not-[yet]-capitalist*) would then also be a figure of difference-in-capital—that is, an outside that is inside as well. In other words, History 1 and History 2 considered together precisely destroy the usual topological distinction between outside and inside that marks debates about whether the whole world can be properly said to have fallen under the sway of capital. Difference, in this account, is not something external to capital. Neither is it something subsumed into capital. It lives in intimate and plural relationships to capital, relationships that range from opposition to indifference.

This is the possibility that, I suggest, Marx's underdeveloped ideas about History 2 invite us to consider. History 2 does not spell out a positive program of writing histories that are alternatives to the narratives of capital. History 2's do not constitute a dialectical Other of the necessary logic of History 1. To think thus would be to subsume History 2 to History 1. History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the negative function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1.

Let me illustrate this point further with the help of a logical fable about labor power. Let us imagine the embodiment of labor power, the laborer, entering the factory gate every morning at 8 A.M. and departing in the evening at 5, having put in his/her usual eight-hour day in the service of the capitalist (allowing for an hour's lunch break). The contract of law—the wage contract—guides and defines these hours. Now, following my preceding explanation of Histories 1 and 2, one may say that this laborer carries with himself or herself, every morning, practices that embody these two kinds of pasts. History 1 is the past that is internal to the structure of being of capital. The very fact that the worker at the factory represents a historical separation between his/her capacity to labor and the necessary tools of production (which now belong to the capitalist) shows that he or she embodies a history that has realized this logical precondition of capital. *This worker does not therefore represent any denial of the universal history of capital.* Everything I have said about abstract labor will apply to him or her.

While walking through the factory gate, however, my fictional person also embodies other kinds of pasts. These pasts, grouped together here in my analysis as History 2, may be under the institutional domination of the logic of capital and exist in proximate relationship to it, but they also do not belong to the life-process of capital. They enable the human bearer of labor power to enact other ways of being in the world, other than, that is, being the bearer of labor power. We cannot ever hope to write a complete or full account of these pasts. They are

partly embodied in the person-cum-laborer's bodily habits, in unself-conscious collective practices, in his or her reflexes about what it means to relate—as a human being and together with other human beings in the given environment—to objects in the world. Nothing in it is automatically aligned with the logic of capital.

The subjugation/destruction of History 2 is what the disciplinary process in the factory is in part meant to accomplish. In effect, capital says to the laborer: I want you to be reduced to sheer living labor—muscular energy plus consciousness—for the eight hours for which I have bought your capacity to labor. I want to effect a separation between your personality (that is, the personal and collective histories you embody) and your will (which is a characteristic of sheer consciousness). My machinery and the system of discipline are there to ensure that this happens. When you work with the machinery that represents objectified labor, I want you to be living labor, a bundle of muscles and nerves and consciousness but devoid of any memory except the memory of the skills the work needs. “Machinery requires,” as Max Horkheimer (1994: 22) put it in his famous critique of instrumental reason, “the kind of mentality that concentrates on the present and can dispense with memory and straying imagination.” To the extent that both the distant and the immediate pasts of the worker—including the work of unionization and citizenship—prepare him or her to be the figure posited by capital as its own condition and contradiction, those pasts do indeed constitute History 1. But the idea of History 2 suggests that even in the very abstract and abstracting space of the factory that capital creates, ways of being human will be acted out in manners that do not lend themselves to the reproduction of the logic of capital.

It would be wrong to think of History 2 (or History 2's) as necessarily precapitalist or feudal, or even as something inherently incompatible with capital. If any of these were the case, there would be no way humans could be at home—dwell—in the rule of capital: no room for enjoyment, no play of desires, no seduction of the commodity.¹³ Capital, in that case, would truly be unrelieved and absolute unfreedom. The idea of History 2 allows us to make room, in Marx's own analytic of capital, for the politics of human belonging and diversity. It gives us a ground on which to situate our thoughts about multiple ways of being human and their relationship to the global logic of capital. But Marx does not himself think through this problem while his method, if my argument is right, allows us to

13. Marxist arguments have often in the past looked on advertising as merely an instance of the “irrationality” and “waste” inherent in the capitalist mode of production. See Williams 1993: 320–26.

acknowledge it. There is a blind spot, it seems to me, built into his method—this is the problem of the status of the category “use value” in Marx’s thoughts on value.¹⁴ Let me explain.

Consider, for instance, the passage in the *Grundrisse* where Marx discusses, albeit briefly, the difference between making a piano and playing it. Because of his commitment to the idea of “productive labor,” Marx finds it necessary to theorize the piano maker’s labor in terms of its contribution to the creation of value. But what about the piano player’s labor? For Marx, that will belong to the category of “unproductive labor” which he took over (and developed) from his predecessors in political economy.¹⁵ Let us read closely the relevant passage:

What is *productive labour* and what is not, a point very much disputed back and forth since Adam Smith made this distinction, has to emerge from the direction of the various aspects of capital itself. *Productive labour* is only that which produces capital. Is it not crazy, asks e.g. . . . Mr Senior, that the piano maker is a *productive worker*, but not the piano player, although obviously the piano would be absurd without the piano player? But this is exactly the case. The piano maker reproduces capital, the pianist only exchanges his labour for revenue. But doesn’t the pianist produce music and satisfy our musical ear, does he not even to a certain extent produce the latter? He does indeed: his labour produces something; but that does not make it *productive labour* in the *economic sense*; no more than the labour of the mad man who produces delusions is productive. (Marx 1973: 305; Marx’s emphasis)

This is the closest that Marx ever would come to showing a Heideggerian intuition about human beings and their relation to tools. He acknowledges that our musical ear is satisfied by the music that the pianist produces. He even goes a step further in saying that the pianist’s music actually—and “to a certain

14. The excellent discussion of “use value” in Rosdolsky 1977: 73–95 helps us appreciate how, as a category, “use value” moves in and out of Marx’s political-economic analysis. Spivak puts it even more strongly by saying that, as a category of political economy, use value can appear “only after the appearance of the exchange relation” (1993: 106; Spivak’s emphasis). Spivak categorically states, rightly I think, that “Marx left the slippery concept of ‘use value’ untheorized” (1993: 97). My point is that Marx’s thoughts on use value do not turn toward the question of human belonging or “worlding.” For Marx retains a subject-object relationship between man and nature. Nature never escapes its “thingly” character in Marx’s analysis.

15. As Marx defines it in the course of discussing Adam Smith’s use of the category “productive labor”: “only labour which produces capital is productive labour.” Unproductive labor is that “which is not exchanged with capital but *directly* with revenue.” He further explains: “An actor, for example, or even a clown, . . . is a productive labourer if he works in the service of a capitalist” (Marx 1969: 156–57; Marx’s emphasis).

extent”—“produces” that ear as well. In other words, in the intimate and mutually productive relationship between one’s very particular musical ear and particular forms of music is captured the issue of historical difference, of the ways in which History 1 is always already modified by History 2’s. We do not all have the same musical ear. This ear, in addition, often develops unbeknownst to ourselves. This historical but unintended relation between a music and the ear it has helped “produce”—I do not like the assumed priority of the music over the ear but let that be—is like the relationship between humans and tools that Heidegger calls “the ready to hand”: the everyday, preanalytical, unobjectifying relationships we have to tools, relationships critical to the process of making a world out of this earth. This relationship would belong to History 2. Heidegger does not minimize the importance of objectifying relationships (History 1 would belong here)—in his translator’s prose, they are called “present at hand”—but in a properly Heideggerian framework of understanding, both the present-at-hand and the ready-to-hand retain their importance: one does not gain epistemological primacy over the other.¹⁶ History 2 cannot sublimate itself into History 1.

See what happens in the passage quoted: Marx both acknowledges and in the same breath casts aside as irrelevant the activity that produces music. For his purpose, it is “no more than the labour of the mad man who produces delusions.” This equation between music and a mad man’s delusion is baleful, however. It is what hides from view what Marx himself has helped us see: histories that capital anywhere—even in the West—encounters as its antecedents but which do not belong to its life-process. Music could be a part of such histories in spite of its later commodification because it is part of the means by which we make our “worlds” out of this earth. The “mad” man, one may say in contrast, is world-poor. He powerfully brings to view the problem of human belonging. Do not the sad figures of the often mentally ill, homeless people on the streets of the cities of the United States, unkempt and lonely people pushing to nowhere shopping trolleys filled with random assortments of broken unusable objects—do not they and their supposed possessions dramatically portray this crisis of ontic belonging to which the “mad” person of late capitalism is condemned? Marx’s equation of the labor of the piano player with that of the production of a mad man’s delusions shows how the question of History 2 comes as but a fleeting glimpse in his analysis of capital. It withdraws from his thoughts almost as soon as it reveals itself.

16. Heidegger (1985: division I, chapter 3) explains these terms in the section entitled “The Worldhood of the World.” The more recent translation of *Being and Time* by Joan Stambaugh (Heidegger 1996: 64, 69) replaces “ready-to-hand” with “handiness” and “present-at-hand” with the expression “objectively present.”

If my argument is right, then it is important to acknowledge a certain indeterminacy that we can now read back into many historical—and I may say, historicist—explanations of capitalist discipline. Recall, for example, E. P. Thompson's (1974: 66) classic statement in this regard: "Without time-discipline we could not have the insistent energies of the industrial man; and whether this discipline comes in the form of Methodism, or of Stalinism, or of nationalism, it will come to the developing world." If any empirical history of the capitalist mode of production is History 1 already modified—in numerous and not necessarily documentable ways—by History 2's, then a major question about capital will remain historically undecidable. Even if Thompson's prediction were to come true and a place like India suddenly and unexpectedly boasted human beings as averse to "laziness" as the bearers of the Protestant ethic are supposed to be, we would still not be able to settle one question beyond all doubt. We would never know for sure whether this condition had come about because the time discipline that Thompson documented was a genuinely universal, functional characteristic of capital, or whether world capitalism represented a forced globalization of a particular fragment of European history in which the Protestant ethic became a value. A victory for the Protestant ethic, however global, would surely be no victory for any universal. The question of whether the seemingly general and functional requirements of capital represent very specific compromises in Europe between History 1 and History 2's, remains, beyond a point, an undecidable question. The topic of "efficiency" and "laziness" is a good case in point. We know, for instance, that even after years of Stalinist, nationalist, and free market coercion, we have not been able to rid the capitalist world of the ever-present theme of laziness. Laziness has remained a charge that has always been levelled at some group or other ever since the beginnings of the particular shape that capital took in Western Europe.¹⁷

No historical form of capital, however global its reach, can ever be a universal. No global (or even local, for that matter) capital can ever represent the universal logic of capital, for any historically available form of capital is always already a provisional compromise made up of History 1 modified by somebody's History 2's. The universal, in that case, can only exist as a placeholder, its place always usurped by a historical particular seeking to present itself as

17. A classic study on this theme remains that by Syed Hussein Alatas (1977). The theme of laziness, however, is a permanent theme within any capitalist structure, national or global. What would repay examination is the business school literature on "motivation" in showing how much and how incessantly the organic intellectuals of capitalism wrestle with an unsolvable question: What motivates humans to "work"?

the universal. This does not mean that one gives away the universals enshrined in post-Enlightenment rationalism or humanism. Marx's immanent critique of capital was enabled precisely by the universal characteristics he read into the category capital itself. Without that reading, there can only be particular critiques of capital. But a particular critique cannot by definition be a critique of capital, for such a critique could not take capital as its object. Grasping the category capital entails grasping its universal constitution. My reading of Marx does not in any way obviate that need for engagement with the universal. What I have attempted to do is to produce a reading in which "capital"—the very category itself—becomes a site where both the universal history of capital and the politics of human belonging are allowed to interrupt each other's narrative.

Capital is a philosophical-historical category—historical difference is not external to it but is constitutive of it. Its histories are History 1 constitutively but unevenly modified by more and less powerful History 2's. Histories of capital, in that sense, cannot escape the politics of the diverse ways of being human. An engagement with capital therefore becomes a double-sided engagement. Possessing in its constitution the necessary ideas of juridical equality and citizenly rights, capital brings into every history some of the universal themes of the European Enlightenment. Yet, on inspection, the universal turns out to be an empty placeholder whose unstable outlines become barely visible only when a proxy, a particular, usurps its position in a gesture of pretension and domination. And that, it seems to me, is the restless and inescapable politics of historical difference to which global capital consigns us. In turn, the struggle to put in the ever empty place of History 1 other histories with which we attempt to modify and domesticate that empty, universal history posited by the logic of capital brings intimations of that universal history into our diverse life practices.

The resulting process is what historians usually describe as the "transition to capitalism." This transition is also a process of translation of diverse life worlds and conceptual horizons about being human into the categories of Enlightenment thought that inhere in the logic of capital. For instance, to think Indian history in terms of Marxian categories is to translate into such categories the existing archives of thought and practices about human relations in the subcontinent. At the same time, it is to modify these thoughts and practices with the help of these categories. The politics of translation involved in this process work both ways. Translation makes possible the emergence of the universal language of the social sciences. It must also, by the same token, destabilize these universals. This translation constitutes the condition of possibility for the globalization of capital across diverse, porous, and conflicting histories of human belonging. At the same

time, it ensures that this process of globalization of capital is not the same as the universal realization of what Marx regarded as its logic. And yet, for the reasons I have explained here, we cannot dismiss the universals inherent in this logic. If my argument is right, then there is no “beyond of capital” that would also be its absolute Other. Capital’s Other constantly comes into being—and constantly dissolves—in the unstable space of unremitting tension that is created as History 1 perennially negotiates our numerous and different History 2’s. It is only sometimes given to us to act as self-conscious agents in this process.

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