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MARX

AFTER

MARX

history and time in the expansion of capitalism

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INTRODUCTION

deprovincializing marx

There have been few more important episodes in the history of Marxism than its provincialization in the figure of what the Soviets named “Western Marxism,” to differentiate their own discussions from Georg Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*. This naming made it clear that the intention was to show how Lukács represented a shift from preoccupations with labor and the production process, as such, to the force of the commodity form to structure thought and culture. In our time, this tendency has become so hegemonic or commonsense among Marxist and non-Marxian interpreters of cultural studies that it has managed to mask its own culturally and politically specific origins and run the risk of making its claims complicit with capitalism’s self-representation.¹ This reflection undoubtedly derives from the presumption that the commodity relation has been finally achieved everywhere, signaling the final realization of what Marx named “real subsumption” and announcing the final completion of capitalism’s domination of everyday life. The apparent consequence in this changed perspective that assumes capital’s completion has been the accompanying conviction that all of society has been subsumed, whereby value has trumped history. This capacity recalls Marx’s explanation of how capital “becomes a very mystical being, since all the productive forces of social labour appear attributable to it, and not to labour, as

such, as a power springing forth from its own womb.”² In this narrative the importance of labor has been demoted to residual status, since, as Massimo Tomba explains, value is made to appear to proceed directly from the productive process and consumption, and its culture is elastically expanded to fill every pore of society and inform all human activity.

This perspective on Marx was in part produced by the so-called Frankfurt School’s earlier (prewar) intervention and appropriation of Lukács’s analysis of reification and its successive expansion into cultural disciplines, as well as being reinforced in the later work of Antonio Negri and his followers, who have presumed the final completion of the commodity relation everywhere—the putative realization of “real subsumption”—to reaffirm capitalism’s own self-image in the pursuit of progress. Both cases share the common ground of this changed perspective that assumes capitalism’s final externalization and naturalization, where it has subsumed the whole of society. With Frankfurt Marxism, it is the explicit transfer to circulation, whereas in Negri, productive labor is envisioned as intellectual and immaterial, expressed now in the sovereign subject of the “General Intellect.” What both commonly propose are the unimportance or secondary stature of industrial labor, as such, and the expansion of the commodity relation to mediate all sectors of society. Both, moreover, “submitted history to process, a sort of auto-reflection. Unilinear historical progress allowed the measuring of the level of (Western) civilization attained by populations with histories different from those of Europe, thus justifying the domination of those who were represented as lower down the scale.”³ Deprovincializing Marx entails not simply an expanded geographic inclusion but a broadening of temporal possibilities unchained from a hegemonic unilinearism.

The self-image that calls attention to the completion of the commodity relation—the regime of real subsumption—congeals into a representation of society that Tomba has described as “phantasmagoria,” without either head or body. As early as *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx perceived in the appearance of this phantasmagoric representation (which was of a piece with his deployment of gothic metaphors like vampires, ghosts, and specters) the imaginary scene of shadows no longer inhabited by bodies but only phantoms terrorizing the proletarian masses in the name of a farcical existing order that possessed no more substantiality. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire* it described the Second Empire, but in *Capital* this idea would be

enlarged to become the specific form of the social totality, proclaiming the formation of a new “phenotype” resulting in a new kind of human produced by the capitalist inversion of use-value into exchange-value, the expansion of the domain of needs, and the accelerated production of a world of commodities that led to the domination of “consumerism.” This became the dominion of the abstract, of value over the concrete, and the appearance of the individual, who creates its own nature and is without history, first revealed in the silhouette of the Robinsonades, what Marx momentarily called “social man” (*gesellschaftlicher Mensch*).⁴ This is a familiar story in cultural studies, a staple of current accounts among Marxists and non-Marxists alike that has become a classic cultural cliché. But it is important because it signifies a change in perspective that has become indistinguishable from what we have come to know as Western Marxism, that presumed to stand-in for Marxism itself.

For Marxism, it was the particular circumstances of the Cold War conjuncture that not only eclipsed the claims associated with its long history in Russia and the Soviet Union but also overlooked and even excluded Marxian readings that occurred in the colonial and semicolonial world of Euro-America’s periphery before World War II and throughout what came to be named the Third World in the postwar years. It was as if colonialism was an effect of capitalist modernity rather than an interactive relationship, as Marx proposed in his chapter on “settler colonialism” and Edward Wakefield’s theory in volume I of *Capital*. Constraints of space and lack of expertise prevent me from detailing the fate of the former—Soviet Marxism—and permit only a brief profiling of the latter, the diversity of Marxisms in the former Third World. Marxian thinking in the interwar period in the Soviet Union was largely subsumed under Stalinist modernization, whereas the peripheral world beyond Euro-America—the colonial world—was consigned to the classification of backwardness and underdevelopment—temporally retrograde, belonging to modernity’s past even though paradoxically immanent with modern society—that could be overcome through the helping hand of Western developmentalist assistance. While the Marxism in the industrial periphery during the interwar period was temporarily yoked to the Comintern and its internationalist aspirations, this putative unity quickly splintered into fragmentary constituencies, primarily because of the war. During the Cold War interim, Western Marxism, itself, sacrificed a rich and heterogeneous

genealogy for the figure of a homogenous interpretative strategy, founded on the presupposition of a unity based on geographical contiguity that had long given up on the anticipated “withering of the state” or indeed the prospect of an imminent worldwide social revolution⁵ for critical cultural analysis of capitalism’s domination of the social formation. Much of this was undeniably a response to the perception, made explicit by Walter Benjamin, that historical materialism itself was literally infected by the idea of progressive developmentalism introduced by the Second and Third Internationalist revisions (even though Benjamin showed little interest in the world outside Europe apart from the Soviet Union). This meant taking onboard comparative trajectories that classified societies according to a ranking system that situated them along a developmental arc from advanced to backward. Benjamin’s powerful intervention aimed to rescue historical materialism from this fatal affliction, which had made Marxian historical practice resemble bourgeois historiography, joining both at the hip of social history. Maurice Merleau-Ponty used the term “Western Marxism” in the early postwar years to differentiate Lukács’s earlier intervention (*History and Class Consciousness*) from the Soviet readings of Marx, beginning with Lenin’s *Materialism and Empiriocriticism*. According to Karl Korsch, Lukács’s Soviet critics described his now classic text as Western Marxism.⁶ For Merleau-Ponty, the postwar moment and the violence he identified with Soviet Communism and the party, which he described as hiding in the “shadow of Marx,” provided the occasion to retread the Marxian path to determine where the immense departures and distortions took place. In a sense, this return to Marx in the postwar era, which is usually attributed to Louis Althusser, was, in effect, inaugurated by Merleau-Ponty a decade earlier, despite its chosen path to resuscitate a more humanistic vision.

With this move to cultural critique, the inadvertent effect of promoting the figure of Western Marxism was to reinforce the realization of capitalism’s claim to “real subsumption” and the completion of the commodity relation, which often seemed to trumpet the triumph of capitalism. In fact, this presumption accompanied a turn to the “autonomous” status of the commodity form as an all-encompassing structuring force of the social formation, whereby value supplants use-value, presenting itself as self-determining, and the individual misrecognizes the latter for the former. Once capital finally appears as an “automaton,” signaling the moment it produces its own pre-

suppositions, singularly personified as money making, it occludes value's source in living labor and the perspective has changed to circulation.⁷ This image of an achieved capitalist society in the West dramatized further the contrast between advanced development—modernization, as it was named—and backwardness, resulting in a further abandonment of a meticulous historical materialism founded on a close investigation of specific and often singular contexts sensitive to identifying real differences in the experiences of capitalist development. Yet we must note the Cold War provenance of this particular emphasis on the West as a successful modular example of advancement and progress in a contest of competing theories of modernization. Parochializing Marx thus resulted in adhering to a rigid conception of a Marxian historical trajectory constrained to upholding a particular progressive narrative all societies must pass through, on the template of a geographically (and culturally) specific location exemplified by England as Marx sketched its genesis of capitalism in volume I of *Capital*. This scenario was subsequently reproduced in the imaginary of the nation-form to become its principal historical vocation. It is ironic that the proponents of Western Marxism in the Cold War struggle to win the hearts and minds of newly decolonized unaligned nations were more preoccupied with philosophy, as such, than history, whose movement remained bonded to the promise of development leading to capitalism's present or to the identification of a time lag—a discordant temporality announcing its difference from normative social time—that nations beyond Euro-America had yet to cover in their effort to “catch up.” What apparently had been forfeited was a perspective capable of recognizing the very unevenness lived by all societies, both the putatively advanced and the backward, as a condition of fulfilling capital's law of accumulation. Yet, in the new Cold War alignment, Western Marxism's progressive distancing from the economic for the cultural, especially in the domain of aesthetic production, art and literature, which contributed to valorizing a specific (and provincial) cultural endowment as unique, superior, and universal, regardless of its critical intent, constituted a modality of thinking more reminiscent of Max Weber than a critical undermining of capitalism's “superstructural” strongholds. Specifically, the principal casualty resulting from the preoccupation with a matured capitalism—the relations of the immediate process of production—risked sacrificing historical capitalism, if not the historical itself, as a subject of inquiry. The

consequence of this neglect meant overlooking both the depth and complexity of its multiple precapitalist formations, what Marx called “historical presuppositions” and which functioned to show both the historicity of modes of production and how capitalism had naturalized historic social relationships into a new individuality. But it also signaled a failure to take notice of the “distinct configurations, forms of the accumulation process, implying other combinations” for a commitment to one “unique configuration.”⁸ What this closing down of such historical complexity demanded is an evolutionary pathway based on a universal model requiring replication everywhere. An example of this compulsion traditionally articulated in Marxian historiography is the insistence on identifying and accounting for the figure of the classic transition from feudalism to capitalism, when no such agenda ever appeared in mature texts like *Grundrisse* (feudalism is rarely mentioned and only to explain how the archaic Germanic communities evolved into this form), while in *Capital* Marx appeared more concerned with primitive or original accumulation and its continuation, and feudalism is mentioned for illustrative purposes to explain the process in England, the West, and in an often observed footnote referring to Japan’s feudalism. But the centrality accorded to the category of feudalism, simply reflecting a local variant of tribute, reinforced the West’s claim to a privileged universalism, providing an unquestioned model of imitation in the development of capitalism in societies outside Europe. The paradox of this presumption is the consensus that has persistently overlooked Marx’s own observation concerning the process of original accumulation: “The history of this expropriation (in original accumulation) assumes different aspects in different countries, and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs. Only in England, which we therefore take as our example, has it the classic form.”⁹ Marx altered the wording of this passage in the French edition to underscore that the portrayal of a particular modality of original accumulation was limited to Western Europe: “but the basis of the whole development is the expropriation of the cultivators. So far, it has been carried out in a radical manner only in England: therefore this country will necessarily play the leading role in our sketch. But all the countries of Western Europe are going through the same development, although in accordance with the particular environment it changes its local color, or confines itself to a narrower sphere, or shows a

less pronounced character, or follows a different order of success.”¹⁰ The way was opened to envisioning other forms of expropriation outside of Europe.

If Marx envisaged history as embodying distinct and multiple economic forms, especially in Western Europe, and the heterogeneity of such forms, modes of production that differed from each other, it is also true that when he referred to the example of England he denied that his “historical sketch” of the origins of capitalism was anything more than a description that applies to Western Europe and not “a historico-philosophical theory of a general course fatally imposed on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they find themselves placed. . . . Success,” he concluded in his letter to a Russian journal, “will never come with the master-key of a general historico-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical.”¹¹ By contrast, the political and economic vitality characterizing Western Europe overshadowed the “monotony” and image of static histories of Asia, which became another way of speaking of “nondevelopment.”¹² The Asia that figured in the Asiatic mode of production included a vast region from the Middle East to China, as well as Russia (which Lenin early described as an “Asiatic State”), apparently based on the absence of private property and where the ruling class was subsumed in a state dominating a population inhabiting a large number of stagnant and isolated village communities. But Jairus Banaji has rightly called this mode a “default-category.” We know that in *Grundrisse* Marx showed a particular interest in the global prevalence of communities founded on the recognition of communally held property, where proprietors also worked the land as cultivators. In this text, Marx distinguished these archaic settlements as “natural communities” and “agricultural communities,” a later development, which varied from time and place but eventually signified a persisting tributary system as the preeminent precapitalist form. By the time he got around to reading M. M. Kovalesky’s close account of India (1870s), his notes disclose he had abandoned any fidelity to earlier ideas of an all-encompassing Asiatic mode of production, especially one differentiated by the absence of private property and classes between the sovereign and the isolated village communities.¹³ But he was, according to his notes, opposed to Kovalesky’s categorization of precapitalist India as feudal.

Even before Marx turned to these ethnologies, he had already reformulated his views concerning the “labor process” or “organization of labor”

shaped by the received circumstances of certain kinds of production in industry and agriculture.¹⁴ It is with the introduction of the category of formal subsumption (and its corollary real subsumption), appearing in the “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” which had not been available to earlier generations until the early 1930s, that supplied the necessary analytic optic through which to grasp the refractions of specific forms (not stages) informing the “restructuring of the labour processes to generate surplus value.”¹⁵ The completed process was called real subsumption, which Marx related to the realization of “relative surplus value” and the role played by the introduction of technology and the factory system. Whether Marx actually believed capital would ultimately realize the completion of the commodity relation (thus eliminating the last traces of unevenness) is hard to say. What seems certain is that he needed such a concept in order to present capitalism as a completed totality, to literally imagine it, which would allow him to submit it to the analysis and critique that characterizes *Capital*. This was particularly evident in his account of accumulation and the process in which surplus value is transformed into capital. Here, Marx acknowledges that in the process of conversion, “we take no account of the export trade, by means of which a nation can change articles of luxury either into means of production or means of subsistence, and vice versa. To examine the object of our investigation in its integrity, free from all disturbing subsidiary circumstances, we must treat the whole world of trade as one nation, and assume that capitalist production is established everywhere and has taken possession of every branch of industry.” Here, Marx has posited the achievement of real subsumption as a model, perhaps as a proto-ideal type, that envisions the possible realization and completion of the commodity relation in an as yet unreached future, in a last instance that never comes. For its methodological function has stripped capitalism of “disturbing subsidiary circumstances” and imagined a society constituted only of capital and labor.¹⁶

But this is not to suggest that forms of subsumption, and especially the vastly overlooked idea of hybrid forms of subsumption Marx mentioned in *Capital*'s chapter on absolute and relative surplus value, are simply substitutes for the overstated category of transition, nor is it to gesture toward some form of historicist stagism in disguise. It is, however, a way to reinvest the historical text with the figure of contingency and the unanticipated appearance

of conjunctural or aleatory moments. Marx referred to such specific processes in several texts (apparently first in notebooks and in *Grundrisse*)¹⁷ and emphasized the coexistence of different economic practices in certain moments and the continuing persistence of historical temporal forms, rather than merely “remnants,” from earlier modes in new historical environments. It should be recognized that this identification of subsumption was first and foremost expressed as form, with diverse manifestations, which often prefigured a specific content and invariably outlasted its moment. Moreover, this reformulation of the labor process was consistent with views that disavowed a unitary model and welcomed the prospect of different routes to national economic development. More important, an accounting of the specific ways that labor has been subsumed in a formal modality opens the way to considering both the historical or epochal dimensions of the mode of production as it restructured the labor process, as well as its contingent direction, but also widens the angle of vision to include the world beyond Western Europe. It should be remembered that Marx repeated, on a number of occasions, that “*formal subsumption*” “is the general form of every capitalist process of production; at the same time, however, it can be found as a *particular* form alongside the *specifically capitalist mode of production in its developed form*, because although the latter entails the former, converse does not necessarily obtain.”¹⁸ This was especially true of how formal subsumption behaved in its inaugural moment, in societies where there was no clear differentiation between the domains of economic practice, culture, politics, and even religion, which often were seen as integral to the performance of work in these persisting modes of production. Yet it is possible to acknowledge how practices from the noneconomic realm have continued to be pressed into service of capitalist production in societies in Asia and Africa and are frequently seen as indistinguishable from the enactment of work. But it is also true that Marx envisaged the operation of formal subsumption as an ongoing process, continuing with and alongside the development of capitalism. This predisposition for appropriating what was useful from older modes of production and those at hand conveyed the copresence of primitive accumulation it embodied in some cellular form, as Lenin suggested when he observed that “the labour-service system passes into the capitalist system and merges with it to the extent that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish one from another” in the Russian countryside.¹⁹ The importance of the copresence of both formal subsumption

and primitive accumulation in future presents alongside capitalist accumulation relays the vague profile of prior histories that advanced capitalism is pledged to erasing. Rosa Luxemburg hinted at this copresence early, and it constitutes one of the principal arguments of this book.

If Marx showed less interest in the putative “historicity” of precapitalist formations than in the immediacy of the capitalist present, he nevertheless recognized in contemporary instantiations of persisting communal societies the form of archaic society he had outlined in *Grundrisse* and political and economic resources for later development. Far from shifting his own perspective, Marx in the 1860s and after extended and enlarged it to give further substance to offset the effect of the inversion that “spatialized time” and restore the reality of the “temporalization of space.”²⁰ In this broadened scheme of possibilities, the most appropriate figure for development was unevenness and the temporal disorder it is capable of producing. Each present, then, supplies a multiplicity of possible lines of development, as Marx proposed in his draft letters to Vera Zasulich, when he both began to change his mind on historical progress and envisioned the promise of the Russian commune freeing itself gradually from the fetters of primitiveness to promote production on a national scale. Yet “precisely because it is contemporaneous with capitalist production, the rural commune may appropriate all its positive achievements without undergoing its (terrible) frightful vicissitudes.” Hence, “everyone would see the commune as the element in the regeneration of Russian society, and an element of superiority over countries enslaved by the capitalist regime.” For Marx, the Russian commune confronted a crisis that will end only “when the social system is eliminated through the return of the modern societies to the ‘archaic’ type of communal property. . . . We should not, then, be too frightened of the word ‘archaic.’”²¹ What appeared important for Marx was the status of the contemporary coexistence of archaic and modern forms of economic production—their copresence—and the realization that the relocation of an archaic silhouette in the present redefined the surviving residue by stripping it of cultural and economic associations belonging to the mode of production in which it initially existed and originally functioned. I should also suggest the possibility that because subsumption was presented as a form, it could embrace coexisting cultural, political, institutional, and social contents as material embodiments, no longer part of systems in which they originated and set loose

from functions they once might have executed to now play new roles in a different configuration. Finally, we must also take into account the different temporal associations represented by these historical-temporal forms and the new mode of production. Actually, these surviving practices from prior modes of production were not “remnants,” as such, but rather appeared as historical temporal forms no longer bound to the moment and context in which they had originated, now acting in a different historical environment serving the pursuit of surplus value. Here, Marx was moving toward envisioning plural possibilities for transformation among societies beyond Europe. In this scenario, such societies no longer needed to depend on the pathway marking the moments of capital’s ascent in the West mandated by stage theory, especially the overdetermined category of transition. The category of transition, it should be noted, provided this narrative in Europe with a bridge for maintaining a continuous linear development from past to present—a narrative that came to be situated at the center of national history to explain the exceptional evolution of its modern society, thereby supplying a historical *deus ex machina*, so to speak, to explain a linear continuity from origins to completion, past to present. One of its principal problems was the indeterminacy raised by how feudalism dissolved and capitalism emerged, whether certain agents like monarchical and aristocratic ambition worked directly to bring down feudalism in order to secure what actually replaced it, instead of supposing that feudalism collapsed of its own accord (internal contradictions) and the pieces were reconfigured into a new constellation. Behind it lurked a fateful and unyielding binary that upheld a trajectory that successively ran from the premodern to the modern. As far as the specific controversy is concerned, its most important function has been to keep alive the transition yet to come from capitalism to socialism, which may constitute the true vocation of retaining the model of a historicist transformation that marked the end of the medieval and the beginnings of modernity.

In any event, the excluded societies on the periphery were no longer required to replicate the European mode promoted by the colonial experience, as thinkers from the margins of the capitalist world like Rosa Luxemburg recognized in Africa (and Eastern Europe, no doubt) and José Carlos Mariátegui observed of Peru in the 1920s, and could draw on a number of surviving historical temporal forms from earlier modes of production to create a new register of either “formal” or “hybrid” subsumption or bypass capitalism

altogether. In one of his earliest essays, “The British Rule in India” (1853), Marx already raised the question of whether mankind could fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia. If not, he replied, whatever may have been the crimes the British committed, the nation was the unwitting tool of history in bringing about the revolution. But only if Asia fails to do so on its own and from its resources.²² In this regard, *Grundrisse* was more hopeful and geographically expansive when Marx remarked that “when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc. created through universal exchange? . . . The absolute working out of . . . creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historical development,” whereby mankind “strives not to remain something . . . [it] has become, but in the absolute movement of becoming.”²³

With the move of Western Marxism to cultural critique and progressive distancing from the economic for the status of contemporary culture and the regime of consumption came the risk of sacrificing historical capitalism, if not the historical itself, and overlooking the persisting role played by pre-capitalist formations, what Marx called “historical presuppositions,” which would show both the historicity of modes of production and how capitalism naturalized its process to efface its own historical emergence. But it also signaled failure to discern in the process of accumulation the possibility of producing distinct configurations based on singular experiences in specific sites. Under these circumstances, the problem of capitalism’s genesis passed unnoticed and reverted back to the model of a singular origin in the West. Even though Marx designated England as the “classic form” in explaining the process of production, the model was limited to Western Europe at most and to the idea that changes occur according to particular and different spatial and temporal environments. At the end of his famous chapter “The Secret of So-Called Primitive Accumulation,” he located the “first sporadic traces of capitalist production” in the early fourteenth or fifteenth centuries “in certain towns of the Mediterranean,” which already opened up the possibility of multiple different origins of capitalism.²⁴ What he proposed instead was the “restructuring of the labor processes to generate surplus value,” which could be secured through the analytic prism provided by the operation of “formal subsumption.” The operation of formal subsumption—referring to

the encounter of capitalism and received practices at hand, appeared first in the appropriation of labor practices belonging to a prior mode of production, which invariably meant taking on the baggage of older forms of exploitation and resituating them alongside and within newer capitalist demands to create value. Under such circumstances, the older forms of exploitation manifest in the appropriated modes of labor proved to be more than compatible with capitalism. But it would be wrong, as Jairus Banaji has warned, to identify the form of exploitation with the mode of production or automatically assume the coexistence of different modes of production. The operation of formal subsumption set up the temporal structure of every present, through its mission to appropriate what it found useful in prior practices and procedures. If capitalism seeks to establish the force of the value form and achieve a sameness in the commodity relation, it paradoxically also produces the very difference it is trying to eliminate with its propensity to challenge every present with a new content in part derived from the past and the shadowing trace of primitive accumulation. This is what Marx described in *The German Ideology* as the tempo of development that proceeds slowly, “the various stages and interests are never completely overcome, but only subordinated to the prevailing interest,” and is retained in the “possession of a traditional power in the illusory community . . . a power which in the last resort can only be broken by a revolution.”²⁵

In this way, the excluded societies on the periphery were released from the constraint of reproducing the singular narrative attributed to the “classic form” promoted by the colonial experience, even though the colonized could recognize in colonial expropriation a principal agent in the development of capitalism. In fact, the experience of colonial expropriation repeated precisely the initial process by which the nation-form, as a specific territorial unit, was configured and enclosed a specific group and fictionalized into a unified and homogeneous “people” who were now said to belong to it. Moreover, this relationship between the formation of nationhood and colonialism implied the copresence of the latter in the former and the mutual implication of these political forms in the emergence of capitalism. In this regard, “so-called primitive accumulation” was actually coterminous with the construction of the nation-form and colony since they all—primitive accumulation, nation-form, and colony—shared the common impulse of “seizure,” “theft,” and “capture” that ultimately grounds their kinship and thereby implicates

each in the other.²⁶ The really important feature of Marx's conceptualization of formal subsumption as the principal logic of capitalist development was its capacious aptitude for appropriating what it found near at hand, thus designating a division between what was outside of it, what was seen as "different," and what was inside, and incorporating and combining it with the capitalist production process as if it naturally belonged there, literally metabolizing it in such a way that it was retrojected back and seen as an "always-already" presupposition of capital's claim to a natural history. The actual process of what Marx described as capital's "becoming" consistently required absorbing these outside, noncapitalist elements and making them part of its metabolic system, which, in every phase of development, would present itself as completed and identical with its origins. I shall say more about this process when I turn to the way Marx envisioned this process, but it should be said here that I will also be interested in following this particular trajectory in diverse thinkers like V. I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, José Carlos Mariátegui, Wang Yanan, Uno Kōzō, and, down to our present, Jairus Banaji and a number of others from South Asia and Africa, who shared a ground based on seeing through the logic of capitalist development in the process of production that brought together received practices from different pasts at different times with the new forces of capitalism in the establishment of the wage labor form and the inversion of use-value into exchange-value. For when Marx advised a fusion of the archaic Russian commune and capital, or when Lenin acknowledged the capitalist nature of medieval village handcraft production in Russia, followed by Luxemburg's call for combining noncapitalism with capitalist accumulation, her insistence on the necessity of capital to rely on noncapitalism to achieve expanded reproduction, Gramsci's recommendation to join Italy's northern industry and the South's semifeudal agriculture, Mariátegui's identification of Inca communalism, Spanish feudalism, and modern capitalist elements as coexisting in Peru, and more, we have, I believe, instances of how these historical temporal forms retained from prior modes of production behaved in the new temporal environment once they encountered capitalism, how the logic of development was virtually thought through and made manifest in different ways and circumstances, incorporated as if they naturally belonged to capital's internal mechanism and its operations. I should also add in this connection that all those present-day declarations attesting to an exceptionalist

capitalism, such as “Japanese-style” capitalism, “Confucian capitalism,” and “Indian capitalism,” self-promoting and overstated, reveal the trace of this process whereby the development of capitalist production encounters and appropriates what it finds nearest at hand. Moreover, we must not forget that in the development of capitalism in diverse regions of the world, capitalism itself, with the nation-state form serving as its placeholder, often “re-created” these surviving residues.

It should be pointed out at this juncture that most of our social theory, dedicated to defining the modern or modernity, has been cast into opposing polarities and thus based on making a clean separation between two competing representations of the social. Starting with Ferdinand Tönnies’s classic division of the dyad of “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) and “society” (*Gesellschaft*), there have been Emile Durkheim’s “mechanical” and “organic” solidarity, Max Weber’s formulation of a relationship of a means/end rationality grounded in a singular (as against other) religio-cultural endowment, Gabriel Tarde’s conception of a socialization founded on lower-class imitation of the upper classes, Georg Simmel’s belief in the central importance of interaction, Talcott Parsons’s privileging of greater differentiation, and especially the coupling of modernity and tradition as the foundation of a theory of modernization he formulated with Edward Shils. What these and other theorists of the social aimed to accomplish was an intellectual and research agenda that would make society work better by devising forms of socialization to secure greater coherence among populations as a hedge against the recurrence of conflict and disruption. All these theories of the social and more were thus designed to separate the modern—actually the capitalist present—from precapitalism, the premodern, implying a progressive linear trajectory from one less developed and founded on different principles to a more advanced stage of achievement which even Marxists of a certain stripe have shared in their charting of the “transition” from feudalism to capitalism. Yet the emphasis on the transition to capitalism implied that once the trajectory had completed its course, capitalism and its social formation had been achieved and the state of “real subsumption” realized. The consequences of this strategy have been overlooked and have thus resulted in displacing any real consideration of the kind of society that supposedly was produced once the transition had ended. Ever since Luxemburg put into question the completion of real subsumption by suggesting it was nothing

more than a heuristic device Marx employed to totalize capitalism, thinkers outside of Euro-America have, in one way or another, underscored a conception of the social that embodied an uneven mix of practices of prior modes of production alongside the newer innovations of capitalism, even though they occupied a subordinate position in this new society. This was surely the meaning of Uno Kōzō's conceptualization of "late development," as we shall see, Gramsci's political recoding of formal subsumption into the concept of "passive revolution," and Mariátegui's original formulation of contemporaneous noncontemporaneity (expressing synchronous nonsynchronicity) into a palimpsest-like paradigm for both Peru and the whole of Latin America, to name the more obvious examples of this intellectual direction. But Marx, it is well to repeat, with his meditations on formal subsumption as the general rule of all capitalist development, provided a glimpse of a conception of the social that embraced both the forms of the past and the present, precapitalist residues—what he named "historical presuppositions"—and capitalism at the same moment in a continuing dialectical encounter with forms and temporalities that have reached down to our present. In this sense, the conception of the social implied has always been open, incomplete, and exempt from the constraints imposed by binary polarities and its fixed boundaries. Why this orientation appeared more pronounced in societies outside of Euro-America than in the "heartland of capitalism," and why the latter cleaved to the promise offered by a clean separation from the "enchancements" of the precapitalist past for the uninterrupted rewards of a progressive modernity, are the central questions that need to be addressed. This tectonic shift was accompanied by the surety offered by a one-way transitional bridge and the promise of undisturbed and unwanted intrusions and reminders from beyond the modern present, reinforced by the conceits of affirming conceptions of social science. Part of the problem derived from the impulses of modernist and modernization ideologies and the *trompe l'oeil* imaginary of a progressive future, what Marx earlier called the "illusory community," projected on the present to displace the immense unevenness capitalism was ceaselessly dedicated to producing everywhere it established its dominion. It is the argument of this book that the production of unevenness, like capitalism's organization of the workday, was empowered to act as an agent disposing people into disciplined routines, creating the occasions for animating political events and action. Beyond that, it might additionally

be suggested that the experience of the interaction of “lateness” and necessity of living through more intensely and consciously the spectacle of unevenness early persuaded societies like Japan to recognize that they were being forced to live comparatively. Marx’s description of the results of this logic of development was closer to what Etienne Balibar much later described as permanent transition.

There are several reason behind this reading to see a completed capitalism, which, again, Marxists have also reflected in their impatient desire for the accomplishment of real subsumption. What this dialectic produced has been great unevenness not always observed by the enthusiasts of a completed modernity and capitalism. Yet we must recognize in Marx’s observations on the general form of capitalist development, whereby “capital proper does nothing but bring together the mass of hands and instruments which it finds on hand” and “agglomerates them under its command,”²⁷ that its practical application outlined the silhouette of a conception of the social founded on the ceaseless dialectical interaction of capitalism’s appropriation of what it was able to utilize from the received past by incorporating it as the constant demonstration of the past acting in the present. This image of a social constituted of the interaction of pasts and presents stands in marked contrast to a good deal of subsequent social theory that has sought to deliberately separate the present from the past. Much of this theorizing on the social, with its implications for implementing an instrumental social science, was also a response to the combined emergence of capitalism in the nineteenth century and Marx’s own critique of it. In fact, much of it, in one way or another, valorized capitalism and its social formation and sought to envisage a counter-critique against the Marxian alternative, especially the role it apparently accorded to a conflict theory of change leading to revolutionary transformation. At the same time this modernist theory of the social relied on Marx’s privileging of the present as the principal object of analysis. However, it sought to free itself from this reliance over its attempt to dismiss the past and, by implication, the position of history. Marx and Engels, as early as *The German Ideology*, had already proposed that the past, as such, does not necessarily lead to the present or constitute its cause; at the same time, this new historical perspective opened the path to the past that is constantly seen as mingling with the present, depositing in every present its residual traces that embodied untimely temporalities announcing their unevenness

and difference. This is the juncture from which a good deal of social theory has made its point of departure in the quest to chart a course capable of circumventing the past itself as the source of enduring problems. In this effort, the aim has been to liberate the capitalist present from suffering any longer from the encumbrances of the dead. In this sense, social theory converged with the formation of the modern nation-form in its distrust of history and the challenging spectacle of unscheduled untimeliness.

Modern social theory has not only desired to separate present from the contaminations of the historical past by definitively delinking them in good modernist fashion, inasmuch as the capitalist present was recognized as having already absorbed its antecedents. Appealing to a binary logic of oppositions like modern and premodern, advanced and backward, rational and unrational, even geographical differentiations between West and East, the constraint of this dyadic organization made it obligatory to consider the past as a historical continent that the modern present was now required to sever itself from and eliminate since there could be no adulterated mixing or lingering signs of a surviving past. The reminder of such remainders would immediately be seen as an interference of (or a retrograde contradiction to) the modern or capitalism. One way to prevent the “contagion” of history from creeping into the modern present was to see it—the present—and its nonmodern other—the past—as belonging to different temporal registers, even though they might paradoxically be immanent to each other or simply chronologically copresent. In this regard, modern social theory and its translation into an operational social science seemed excessively eager to keep the present remote and immune from the historical contamination posed by the past.

Marx’s conception of capitalism’s general form of development—the logic of formal subsumption—had no trouble supplying capital with its true but forgotten history, which dramatized the constant interaction of coexisting times and practices in a ceaseless process that might lead to the final realization of capital but probably not everywhere. Rather, it projected an idealized vision where the modern social exceeds its antecedent historical other in such a way as to make the capitalist present appear timeless, eternal. Even Max Weber, whose conception of social science appeared to be steeped in history and the primacy of historical development, proposed that the “ideal type,” his leading methodological organizing principle, was a heuristic de-

vice *of* history but not necessarily found *in* history, as a way of purifying the historical and thus acting as a form of phenomenological bracketing. Social theorists like Durkheim and Tarde through Parsons and Alfred Schütz had no interest in history, as such, nor did Simmel in his sociological work, concerned increasingly with lasting cultural form, on the one hand, and microcosmic sociological interactions and differentiation that signaled “sociation” (*Vergesellschaftung*), on the other, while Tönnies’s paradigmatic division of “community” and “society” constituted merely the imaginary of an idealized typology. Freud was perhaps one of the very few theorists who conceived of the social based on the constant intrusion of a personal past in the present. But in most cases, modern social theory and its subsequent transmutation into an operational social science appeared inimical to the historical, if not outright hostile to the past, as well as to any conception that saw the modern present as a heterogeneous and uneven mixture of pasts and presents. It is interesting to note that even among Marxists, a theory of the social that comprised an intricate and changing mixture of past and presents at any given moment in the capitalist epoch still remains as a recessive but unattended vocation of historical materialism.

What the appeal to Marx’s conceptualization of formal subsumption offers is a way out of both the vulgate Marxian and modernizing bourgeois historical narratives constrained to fulfilling teleologically determined agendas of capitalism that have claimed the unfolding of a singular trajectory everywhere. Such a perspective requires us to take into account the accompanying demand in seeing the “effectivity” of practices and institutions and the role played by uneven temporalities produced by incorporating and metabolizing pasts in the present. In this regard, the plural instances of how the logic of development was thought through and mediated by close considerations of received historical circumstances and contemporary local conditions disclosed the possible shape of a world history Marx had earlier announced that was yet to be written. The very unevenness shared by different presents put into question the illusory claim of capitalism’s inevitable completion everywhere and its claims to sameness and supplied inducements to consider instances attesting to successful resistances to the prevailing forms of capitalism beyond Euro-America. Attention to the different ways capitalism developed in singular and specific sites and times affirms Marx’s decision to privilege the global theater reflected in the formation of the

world market as the principal organizing principle in envisioning any possible world history. Examining the differences denoted by different histories, as Kyoto philosophers proposed before World War II, and the uneven combinations of capitalist and precapitalist remainders demanded taking into account their singular and specific stories, whose meanings escaped the contaminations of “history’s reason” to restore contingency back to the historical text. If capitalism failed to completely control the uneven mix, the practices and institutions embodying the different historical temporalities it retained from the past to serve the pursuit of value, it was because it needed to produce unevenness as a condition of its own continuing condition.

In this study I am concerned with examining only selected individual texts of thinkers and authors instead of trying to provide comprehensive accounts of their collected works. I make no claim for archival authority and the ambition to provide in this account a definitive comprehensiveness encompassing the lives and thinking of the people I have chosen. My purpose has been to show how each, working within the “constraints” and historical necessity of their time and place, produced analyses of their current situation as they sought to chart the prospect of capitalist development as it was specifically mediated by received historical circumstances. Each case discloses a similar but different relationship between the molar and molecular, which invariably reveals how the individual work was able to play the double role of text and context, background and foreground. Yet, at the same time, the collectivity of cases constitutes a possible intimation of the kind of world history Marx imagined when he repudiated Hegel’s universalistic philosophy of history: “this transformation of history into world history is by no means an abstract act on the part of ‘self-consciousness,’ the world-spirit, or of any other metaphysical spectre, but a quite material empirically verifiable act . . . the proof of which every individual furnishes as he comes and goes, eats, drinks and clothes himself.”²⁸ At all times, the individual cases examined reveal the extent to which each individual operated at a local level of being that provided the perspective to realize the “being” of an empirical “world historical existence.”²⁹