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## CHAPTER 2

### The Two Histories of Capital

THIS CHAPTER presents a selective but close reading of Marx. Marx's critique of "capital" builds into the category two aspects of nineteenth-century European thought that have been central to the history of intellectual modernity in South Asia: the abstract human of the Enlightenment and the idea of history.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Marx makes these two elements of thought into critical tools for understanding the capitalist mode of production and modern European imperialism. Debates of privilege and social justice in India are still animated by the rationalism, humanism, historicism, and anti-imperialism of this legacy. The project of *Subaltern Studies* would have been unthinkable without the vibrant tradition of Marxist historiography in India.<sup>2</sup> Marx's writings thus constitute one of the founding moments in the history of anti-imperial thought. To revisit them is to rework the relationship between postcolonial thinking and the intellectual legacies of post-Enlightenment rationalism, humanism, and historicism. A book such as this one cannot afford to ignore Marx.

There are various ways of thinking about the fact that global capitalism exhibits some common characteristics, even though every instance of capitalist development has a unique history. One can, for one, see these differences among histories as invariably overcome by capital in the long run. The thesis of uneven development, on the other hand, sees these differences as negotiated and contained—though not always overcome—within the structure of capital. And third, one can visualize capital itself as producing and proliferating differences. Historicism is present in all of these different modes of thought. They all share a tendency to think of capital in the image of a unity that arises in one part of the world at a particular period and then develops globally over historical time, encountering and negotiating historical differences in the process. Or even when "capital" is ascribed a "global," as distinct from a European, beginning, it is still seen in terms of the Hegelian idea of a totalizing unity—howsoever internally differentiated—that undergoes a process of development in historical time.

E. P. Thompson's deservedly celebrated essay on "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism" is a good example of historicist thought. Thompson's argument, fundamentally, is something like this: the worker in the history of advanced capitalism has no option but to shed precapitalist habits of work and "internalize" work-discipline. The same fate awaits the worker in the third world. The difference between these two figures of the worker is a matter of the secular historical time that elapses in the global career of capitalism. Thompson writes: "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."<sup>3</sup>

This statement sees capitalism as a force that encounters historical difference, but encounters it as something external to its own structure. A struggle ensues in this encounter, in the course of which capital eventually cancels out or neutralizes the contingent differences between specific histories. Through however tortuous a process, it converts those specificities into historically diverse vehicles for the spread of its own logic. This logic is ultimately seen not only as single and homogeneous but also as one that unfolds over (historical) time, so that one can indeed produce a narrative of a putatively single capitalism in the familiar "history-of" genre. Thompson's argument both recognizes and neutralizes difference, it is difficult for it to avoid a stagist view of history.

Even the liberal idea that capital works not so much by canceling out historical differences as by proliferating and converting differences into sets of preference, into taste, can harbor an implicit faith in historicism. A recent discussion on the Indian market in the financial press provides a good example of this view. "Repeat after me," the *Wall Street Journal* of 11 October 1996 has the Indian "marketing guru" Titoo Ahluwalia saying to potential American explorers of the Indian market: "'India is different, India is different, India is different.'"<sup>4</sup> (Ahluwalia, a person from the business world, has clearly not had the academic fear of "Orientalism" instilled in him!) The aim of his statement is help transnational capital appreciate and transform (Indian) historical and cultural differences so that such differences could be treated as measures of preference or taste. Making different life choices would then be like choosing between different brands of products.

Difference initially appears intractable in this discussion among capitalists. The same issue of the *Wall Street Journal* quotes Daralus Ardeshir, managing director of Nestle India Ltd., the local unit of the Swiss food company, as saying, "When I visit my father's house, I still kiss his

feet.'" The journal's columnist remarks: "Indians who study in the US and Britain often return home to arranged marriages. Even many people who have chosen their own spouses opt to move in with their extended families. Such traditional family bonds inhibit Western marketeers' access. Yuppies, deferring to their elders, don't make household purchasing decisions." Indian social practices appear to have the effect of deferring—and thus making different—India's adoption of certain themes generally held to be canonical for both classical and late-capitalist modernity. India seems to resist these capitalist ideals: dissolution of the hierarchies of birth (Indians continue with paternal/parental authority); sovereignty of the individual (the norm of the extended family persists); and consumer choice (yuppies defer to their elders). The enduring quality of these features in Indian society so baffles the sensibility of the *Wall Street Journal* experts that they end up having recourse to a figure of paradox familiar in discussions of India. This is a trope that depicts the Indian capitalist/consumer subject as capable of doing the impossible: "Indians are capable of living in several centuries at once."<sup>5</sup>

These quotations show how obdurately and densely a certain idea of history and historical time as indicative of progress/development inhabit the everyday language with which an article in a leading American capitalist publication seeks to explain the nature of the Indian market. The "several centuries" in question above are identifiable as such precisely because the speaker has supposedly seen them separated and clearly laid out in some other (that is, European) history. This is what allows him to claim that in a place such as India, these different historical periods look as if they have been all telescoped into a confusing instant. This is merely an aesthetic variety of the thesis of "uneven development." Images of this kind are very popular in modernist descriptions of India. It is almost a cliché to describe India as precisely that state of contradiction in which an ancient temple can stand by the side of a modern factory, or a "nuclear scientist" can start the day "by offering *puja* (devotional offerings) to a clay god."<sup>6</sup>

These readings of the relationship between the logic of capital and historical difference appear to sustain historicism in different ways. In Thompson's position, historical time is the period of waiting that the third world has to go through for capital's logic to be fulfilled. One can modify the Thompsonian position by the thesis of "uneven development" and make distinctions between "formal" and "real" subsumption to capital.<sup>7</sup> But that still keeps in place the idea of empty and homogenous historical time, for it is over such time that the gap could ever close between the

two kinds of subsumption. (In other words, one assumes that “real” capitalism means “real” subsumption.) Or one can also, it seems, speak through an image that collapses historical time into the aesthetic paradox of Indians “living in several centuries at once.”

My analysis of the relationship between historical difference and the logic of capital aims to distance itself from this historicism. In what follows, I pursue Marx’s philosophical concept “capital” in order to examine closely two of his ideas that are inseparable from his critique of capital: that of “abstract labor” and the relation between capital and history. Marx’s philosophical category “capital” is global in its historical aspiration and universal in its constitution. Its categorial structure, at least in Marx’s own argumentation, is predicated on the Enlightenment ideas of juridical equality and the abstract political rights of citizenship.<sup>8</sup> Labor that is juridically and politically free—and yet socially unfree—is a concept embedded in Marx’s category of “abstract labor.” The idea of “abstract labor” thus combines the Enlightenment themes of juridical freedom (rights, citizenship) and the concept of the universal and abstract human who bears this freedom. More importantly, it is also a concept central to Marx’s explanation of why capital, 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 is politically and intellectually at stake—both for Marx and for the students of his legacy—in the humanist heritage of the European 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. As is well known, the idea of “history” was central to Marx’s philosophical understanding of “capital.” “Abstract labor” gave Marx a way of explaining how the capitalist mode of production managed to extract from peoples and histories that were all different a homogenous and common unit for measuring human activity. “Abstract labor” may thus be read as part of an account of how the logic of capital sublates into itself the differences of history. In the second part of this chapter, however, I try to develop a distinction that Marx made between two kinds of histories: histories “posited by capital” and histories that do not belong to capital’s “life process.” I call them History 1 and History 2, and I explore the distinction between them to show how Marx’s thoughts may be made to resist the idea that the logic of capital sublates differences into itself. I conclude this chapter by trying to open Marxian categories up to some Heideggerian ruminations on the politics of human diversity.

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. Marx emphasizes the point that the process of generalized exchange through which things assume the commodity form is one that actually connects differences in the world. That is to say, commodity exchange is about exchanging things that are different in their histories, material properties, and use-value. Yet the commodity form, intrinsically, is supposed to make differences—however material they may be in their historical appearance—immaterial for the purpose of exchange. Commodity form does not negate difference, but it holds it in suspension so that we can exchange things as different from one another as beds and houses. But how could that happen? That is the question Marx begins with. How could things that apparently have nothing in common form items in a series of capitalist exchanges, a series that Marx would come to conceptualize as being, in principle, continuous and infinite?

Readers will remember Marx’s argument with Aristotle on this point. Aristotle, in the course of his deliberations in *Nichomachean 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. In order for exchange to act as the basis of community, there had to be a way of finding a common measure so as to equalize that which was not equal. Aristotle 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 be no exchange and hence no community.<sup>9</sup>

Aristotle solved this problem by calling on the idea of “convention” or law. 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. . . . [I]t tells us how many shoes are equal to a house.”<sup>10</sup> Money, according to Aristotle, represented a kind of a general agreement, a convention. A convention was ultimately arbitrary, held in place by the sheer force of law that simply reflected the will of the



community. Aristotle would therefore introduce into his discussion the note of a radical political will that, as Castoriadis comments, is absent from the text of *Capital*. 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."<sup>11</sup> The translator of Aristotle points out that "the Greek word for 'money,' 'coin,' 'currency' (nomisma) comes from the same root as *nomos*, 'law,' 'convention.'"<sup>12</sup>

Marx begins *Capital* by critiquing Aristotle. For Aristotle, what brought shoes and houses into a relationship of exchange was mere convention—"a makeshift for practical purposes," as Marx translated it. It was not satisfactory for Marx to think that the term that mediated between 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 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."<sup>13</sup>

This human labor, the common substance mediating differences, was Marx's conception 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 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 the society of ancient Greece, 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.<sup>14</sup> 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 labor." By itself, this does not make for capitalism.

A "barbarian" society—Marx's expression—may be marked by the absence of a developed division of labor such that its members "are fit by nature to do anything."<sup>15</sup> By Marx's argument, it was conceivable that such a society would have abstract labor even 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."<sup>16</sup> 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."<sup>17</sup> But students of Marx from different periods and as different from one another as I. I. Rubin, Cornelius Castoriadis, Jon Elster, and Moishe Postone have shown that to conceive of abstract labor as a substance, as a Cartesian *res extensa*, to reduce it to "nervous and muscular energy," is either to misread Marx (as Rubin and Postone argue) or to repeat a mistake of Marx's thoughts (as Castoriadis and Elster put it).<sup>18</sup> Marx does speak of "abstract labor" as a "social substance" possessing objectivity, but immediately qualifies this objectivity as spectral, "phantom-like" rather than thinglike: "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."<sup>19</sup> 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. . . . [C]ommodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as value is purely social."<sup>20</sup>

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 embedded and which make any particular labor—even the labor of abstracting—concrete. Marx’s “barbarians” had abstract labor: anybody in that society could take up any kind of activity. But their “indifference to specific labor” 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 that society undertook. In a capitalist society, on the other hand, the particular work of abstracting would itself become an element of most or all other kinds of concrete labor, and would be thus be more visible to an observer. As Marx 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.”<sup>21</sup> “Such a state of affairs,” says Marx, “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.”<sup>22</sup> 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 substantive 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 as 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.<sup>23</sup>

Expressions like “if we disregard” or “if we abstract,” “they can no longer be distinguished,” and so on, may give the impression that Marx is writing of a human subject who either “disregards,” “abstracts,” or “distinguishes.” But Marx’s discussion of factory discipline makes it clear that Marx 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 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.”<sup>24</sup> Marx’s logic here, as in many other places in his writings, is retrospective.<sup>25</sup>

Marx agreed with Aristotle more than he acknowledged—abstract labor, one could indeed say, was a capitalist convention, so the middle term in commodity 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: “it is in our power to change and invalidate [this convention].” (Castoriadis erects a picture of voluntarist revolutionary politics by adopting this Aristotelian position into his Marxism.)<sup>26</sup> Marx decodes abstract labor as 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, 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.”<sup>27</sup> In sentences that anticipate a basic theme of 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,” he writes, “naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wages.”<sup>28</sup>

Factory legislation also participates in this performance of disciplinary abstraction. First, says Marx, it “destroys both the ancient and transitional forms behind which the domination of capital is still partially hidden. . . . [I]n 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.<sup>29</sup> But it is in the way the law—and through the law, the state and the capitalist classes—imagine laborers through biological/physiological categories such as “adults,” “adult males,” “women,” and “children” that the work of 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 uses the rhetorical ploy of staging what he calls the “voice” of the worker in order to bring out the character of his category “labor.” This voice shows how abstracted the category “worker” or “labor” is from the social and the psychic processes that we common-sensically associate with “the everyday.” Firstly, it reduces age, childhood, health, strength and so on to biological or physiological statements, separate from the diverse and historically specific experiences of aging, 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 himself 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.”<sup>30</sup> In this figure

of a rational collective entity, the worker, 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, as 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.<sup>31</sup> It is within that collective and abstract subject that, as Gayatri Spivak has reminded us, the dialectic of class-in-itself and class-for-itself plays out.<sup>32</sup> The “collective worker,” says Marx, “formed out of the combination of a number of individual specialized workers, is the item of machinery specifically characteristic of the manufacturing period.”<sup>33</sup>

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 category. The machine produces “the technical subordination of the worker to the uniform motions of the instruments of labour.”<sup>34</sup> 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: that the worker be first reduced to his or her biological, and therefore, abstract body, and that the movements of this abstract body be then broken up and individually designed into the very shape and movement of the machine. “[C]apital absorbs labour into itself,” Marx would write in his notebooks, quoting Goethe, “‘as though its body were by love possessed.’”<sup>35</sup> The body that the machine comes to possess is the abstract body it ascribed to the worker to begin with. Marx 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.”<sup>36</sup> 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 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.”<sup>37</sup> 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. Whereas 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,” “adult males,” “childhood,” “family functions,” or the “expenditure of domestic labour.”<sup>38</sup> 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 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 writes that “capital is constantly compelled to wrestle with the insubordination of the workers,” and he says that discipline, “[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.”<sup>39</sup> Here Marx is not speaking merely of a particular historical stage, 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.”<sup>40</sup> 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*.” Just because, he adds, 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.”<sup>41</sup>

From where does such resistance arise? Many labor historians think of resistance to factory work as the result of either a clash between the requirements of industrial discipline and preindustrial habits of workers in the early phase of industrialization or a heightened level of worker consciousness in a later phase. In other words, they see it as the result of a particular historical stage of capitalist production. Marx, in contrast, locates this resistance in the very logic of capital. That is to say, he locates it in the structural “being” of capital rather than in its historical “becom-

ing.” Central to this argument is what Marx sees as the “despotism of capital,” which has nothing to do with either the historical stage of capitalism or the empirical worker’s consciousness. It would not matter for Marx’s argument whether the capitalist country in question were a developed one or not. Resistance is the Other of the despotism inherent in capital’s logic. It is also a part of Marx’s point about why, if capitalism were ever to realize itself fully, it would embody 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 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.”<sup>42</sup> 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 (foremen, overseers), who command during labour process in the name of capital. The work of supervision becomes their exclusive function.”<sup>43</sup>

Why call capitalist discipline “despotic” if all it does is to act as though labor could be abstracted and homogenized? 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.”<sup>44</sup>

Why would freedom have to do with something as reductively physiological as “the nervous system . . . [and] the many-sided play of muscles”? Because, Marx 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.”<sup>45</sup> “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.”<sup>46</sup>

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 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."<sup>47</sup>

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 one could call "vitalist" are an underexplored area of research, particularly in the case of Marx. Marx's language and his biological metaphors often reveal a deep influence of nineteenth-century vitalism: "Labour is the yeast thrown into it [capital], which starts it fermenting." And labor power as "commodity exists in his [the laborer'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."<sup>48</sup> These vital forces are the ground of constant resistance to capital. They are the abstract living labor—a sum of muscles, nerves, and consciousness/will—which, according to Marx, capital posits as its contradictory starting point. In this vitalist understanding, life, in all its biological/conscious capacity for willful activity (the "many-sided play of muscles"), is the excess that capital, for all its disciplinary procedures, always needs but can never quite control or domesticate.

One is reminded here of 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."<sup>49</sup> 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 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."<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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 is as if the process of abstraction and ongoing appropriation of the worker's body in the capitalist mode of production perpetually threatens to effect a dismemberment of the unity of the "living body."

This unity of the body that "life" expresses, however, is something more than the 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 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 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. . . . [I]t is reproduced—in mediated form—in capital, and thus . . . forms a ferment of its dissolution and is an emblem of its limitation."<sup>52</sup>

Marx's critique of capital begins at the same point where capital begins its own life process: the abstraction of labor. Yet this labor, although 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," and 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 but 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: "[C]apital . . . —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."<sup>53</sup>



The subsequent part of Marx's argument runs as follows. It is capital's tendency to replace living labor by science and technology—that is, by 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 will be that of the "free development of individualities." For the "reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum" would 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 is: it both presses "to reduce labour time to a minimum" and at the same time posits labor time "as the sole measure and source of wealth." It would therefore work "towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production."<sup>54</sup>

Thus would Marx complete the loop of his critique of capital, which looks to a future beyond capital by attending closely to the contradictions in capital's own logic. He 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." Or elsewhere: "*bourgeois economy*" always "point[s] towards a past lying beyond this system."<sup>55</sup> 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's "being" are realized. "Becoming" is not simply the calendrical or chronological past that precedes capital but the past that the category retrospectively posits. Unless the connection between land/tool and laborers is somehow severed,

for example, there would never be any workers available to capital. This would happen anywhere so long as there was capitalist production—that is the sense in which a historical process of this kind is indeed a process through which the logical presuppositions of capital are worked out. This is the past 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) or *not-worker*.<sup>56</sup> 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."<sup>57</sup>

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 capital, Marx would argue, needs this real history to happen, even if the reading of this history is only retrospective. "Man comes into existence only when certain point is reached. But once man has emerged, he becomes the permanent pre-condition of human history, likewise its permanent product and result."<sup>58</sup> Marx therefore does not so much provide us 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 and "its invariable result."<sup>59</sup> 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. Elements of History 2, Marx says, are also "antecedents" of 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."<sup>60</sup> 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 “antecedent 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. Marx accepts, in other words, that the total universe of pasts that capital encounters is larger than the sum of those elements in which are worked out the logical presuppositions of capital.

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.<sup>61</sup> Yet Marx appears to suggest that entities as close and 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. Since they did not necessarily look forward to capital, they make up the kind of past I have called History 2. This 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 be intimately intertwined with the relations that do. Capital, says 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 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.”<sup>62</sup>

Marx thus writes into the intimate space of capital an element of deep uncertainty. Capital has to encounter in the reproduction of its own life process 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 2s are thus not pasts separate from capital; they inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital’s own logic.

History 1, says 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 2s to the logic of capital would ever be complete. 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 at the same time, he described some of these “remnants” of “vanished social formations” as “partly still unconquered,” signaling by his metaphor of conquest that a site of “survival” of that which seemed pre- or noncapitalist could very well be the site of an ongoing battle.<sup>63</sup> There remains, of course, a degree of ambiguity of meaning and an equivocation 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, a version of what I called a “transition narrative” in the previous chapter. Marx’s categories “not-capitalist” or “not-worker,” for example, could appear to belong squarely to the process of capital’s becoming, a phase in which capital “is not yet in being but merely in becoming.”<sup>64</sup> But notice the ambiguity in this phrase; what kind of a temporal space is signaled by “not yet”? If one reads “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, as I have said, the third world is often consigned.

But 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.”<sup>65</sup> It is as though the “not yet” is what keeps capital going. I will have more to say in the final chapter about nonhistoricist ways of thinking about the structure of “not yet.” But for now let me note that Marx himself 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.” In other words, History 1 and History 2, considered together, destroy the usual topological distinction of the outside and the inside that marks de-



bates about whether or not 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. Nor is it something subsumed into capital. It lives in intimate and plural relationships to capital, ranging from opposition to neutrality.

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 program of writing histories that are alternatives to the narratives of capital. That is, History 2s 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 function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1.

Let me illustrate this point further with the help of a logical fable to do with the category "labor power." Let us imagine the embodiment of labor power, the laborer, entering the factory gate every morning at 8 A.M. and leaving it 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 explanation of Histories 1 and 2 above, one may say that this laborer carries with himself or herself, every morning, practices embodying these two kinds of pasts, History 1 and History 2. History 1 is the past that is internal to the structure of being of capital. The fact is, that 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) thereby showing 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 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's bodily habits, in unselfconscious collective practices, in his or her reflexes about what it means to relate to objects in the world as a human being and together with other human beings in his given environment. Nothing in it is automatically aligned with the logic of capital.

The disciplinary process in the factory is in part meant to accomplish the subjugation/destruction of History 2. Capital, Marx's abstract category, 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 Horkheimer 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."<sup>66</sup> To the extent that both the distant and the immediate pasts of the worker—including the work of unionization and citizenship—prepare him 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 2s) as necessarily precapitalist or feudal, or even inherently incompatible with capital. If that 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.<sup>67</sup> Capital, in that case, would truly be a case of 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, although his method, if my argument is right, allows us to 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.<sup>68</sup> 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 labor of the piano



player? For Marx, that will belong to the category of “unproductive labor” that he took over (and developed) from his predecessors in political economy.<sup>69</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

This is the closest that Marx would ever 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 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 modified by History 2s. 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.<sup>71</sup> History 2 cannot sublimate itself into History 1.

But 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, however, between music and a madman's delusion is baleful. 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, 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 America, 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 madman'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 has revealed itself.

If my argument is right, then it is important to acknowledge in historical explanations a certain indeterminacy that we can now read back into Thompson's statement at the beginning of this chapter: “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 modified—in numerous and not necessarily documentable ways—by History 2s, 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 not be victory for any universal. The question of whether the seemingly general and functional requirements

of capital represent specific compromises in Europe between History 1 and History 2s 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.” It has remained a charge that has always been leveled at some group or other, ever since the beginnings of the particular shape that capital took in Western Europe.<sup>72</sup>

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 a provisional compromise made up of History 1 modified by somebody’s History 2s. The universal, in that case, can only exist as a place holder, its place always usurped by a historical particular seeking to present itself as 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 the very category “capital” 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—that is, historical difference is not external to it but is rather constitutive of it. Its histories are History 1 constitutively but unevenly modified by more and less powerful History 2s. Histories of capital, in that sense, cannot escape the politics of the diverse ways of being human. Capital brings into every history some of the universal themes of the European Enlightenment, but on inspection the universal turns out to be an empty place holder 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. At the same time, 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 in turn brings intimations of that universal history into our diverse life practices.

The resulting process is what historians usually describe as “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. To think of 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; but it is also to modify these thoughts and practices with the help of these categories. The politics of translation involved in this process work in both ways. Translation makes possible the emergence of the universal language of the social sciences. But it must also, by the same token, enable a project of approaching social-science categories from both sides of the process of translation, in order to make room for two kinds of histories. One consists of *analytical* histories that, through the abstracting categories of capital, eventually tend to make all places exchangeable with one another. History 1 is just that, analytical history. But the idea of History 2 beckons us to more *affective* narratives of human belonging where life forms, although porous to one another, do not seem exchangeable through a third term of equivalence such as abstract labor. Translation/transition to capitalism in the mode of History 1 involves the play of three terms, the third term expressing the measure of equivalence that makes generalized exchange possible. But to explore such translation/transition on the register of History 2 is to think about translation as a transaction between two categories without any third category intervening. Translation here is more like barter than a process of generalized exchange. We need to think in terms of both modes of translation simultaneously, for together they constitute the condition of possibility for the globalization of capital across diverse, porous, and conflicting histories of human belonging. But globalization of capital is not the same as capital’s universalization. Globalization does not mean that History 1, the universal and necessary logic of capital so essential to Marx’s critique, has been realized. What interrupts and defers capital’s self-realization are the various History 2s that always modify History 1 and thus act as our grounds for claiming historical difference.