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## **“In the Zone of Occult Instability”: Some Reflections on Unevenness, Discordant Temporalities, and the Logic of Historical Practice**

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*One must understand that neither men nor their activities are in time, but that time, as a concrete quality of history, is made by men on the basis of their original temporalization. Marxism caught a glimpse of true temporality when it criticized and destroyed the bourgeois notion of “progress”—which necessarily implies a homogeneous milieu and coordinates which would allow us to situate the point of departure and the point of arrival. But—without ever having said so—Marxism has renounced these studies and preferred to make use of “progress” again for its own benefit.*

--Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*

Let me start with a brief explanation of the title and then the Sartre quotation. The title comes from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, in his brilliant discussion of national culture. To enter the “zone of occult instability” was to encounter

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This essay is a revised version from a lecture delivered at the 15th Annual Edward Said Lecture in May, 2019. I especially want to recall and honor the memory of Benita Parry, who, with her colleagues in the Warwick Research Collective, invited me. I also want to thank Professor Rashmi Varma, to whom I owe a great debt for making all the necessary arrangements, which made my stay at the university genuinely pleasurable and memorable, as well as the generosity of colleagues in the research collective and others too numerous to mention. I have tried in this essay to account for as many as I could of the comments and questions raised by the audience but know that I have failed in this impossible undertaking.

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what Walter Benjamin once called a moment of danger, a world shaped by unscheduled events, uneven developments, and plural temporalities colliding with each other in the present they invariably come to occupy. Fanon was convinced that it was a zone of “fluctuation,” whereby the “development is uneven” and “the violent collision of two worlds has . . . shaken old traditions and thrown . . . perceptions out of focus” (195).

Fanon was not the first to recognize the dangers posed by discordant mixed temporalities and the entailing difficulties navigating through the entanglements of everyday life, but he, with others in the colonial world, clearly understood that Marxism spoke to the world at large. Fanon, here, was speaking of the condition of colonial life and the specific experience of living its layered temporalities of pasts in the present and the barriers to a pathway leading to a transformation into a national culture that might be something more than a folklore. It is conceivable that Fanon, like Amílcar Cabral, José Carlos Mariátegui, Takeuchi Yoshimi, and others from the world beyond Euro-America, saw in the formation of unevenness and its temporal consequences in colonized environments the figure of the wider spectacle of capitalist development everywhere it had migrated and implanted the demands of its mode of production. Unevenness supposedly marked only the circumstances of colonized life recently expressing the experience of capitalism, but like the dominating nation-states the presence of uneven development already signified capitalism’s principal law. Hence, an unevenness supposedly only marking the condition of colonized life (those societies that came late) appeared everywhere capitalism reconstituted its world through the repetitive accumulation of surplus value.

Here, it might be noticed, a temporal gap separated the advanced capitalist societies from those that had been colonized and the latecomers. Yet, this temporal distance was a fiction, amounting to a relatively quantitative difference conveniently employed to conceal the true character of capitalist unevenness everywhere, even though it was made to appear more evident in the less developed regions of the world. Fredric Jameson, in this connection, has proposed that the “expressions of the marginally uneven and the unevenly developed issuing from a recent experience of capitalism are often more intense and powerful, . . . more deeply . . . meaningful than anything the enfeebled center still finds itself able to say” (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 155). But unevenness still managed to appear in every place capital reconstituted its world and signaled the moment in which co-existing modes of production visibly combined to compose a condensation of contradictions capable of opening up the pathway of time to revolutionary transformation (*Political Unconscious* 95). For Jameson, this temporal mix of past modes of production in the

present resulted in conceptualizing the interpretative category of the mode of cultural revolution, which offered an imaginative way out of the descriptive impasse characterizing area studies which, unfortunately, was never recognized by its practitioners. After all, what were these instances of passive revolution and uneven and combined development but transforming cultural revolutions that came in the wake of political events like the Meiji Restoration in Japan, the Risorgimento in Italy, the Chinese Republican Revolution of 1911, not to forget the later Cultural Revolution, and the Kemalist Republican Revolution in Turkey, to name a few?

At about the time when Fanon proposed the conception and inserted the importance of navigating through mixed temporalities, Jean-Paul Sartre noticed that Marxism was on its way to developing an important conception of “real temporality” before it was hijacked and distorted by followers who committed it to linear “progress” (Sartre 92). Sartre, like Benjamin, who had already observed the same deviation, was clearly referring to the way Marx’s theoretical intention had been appropriated by Second and Third International Marxism that borrowed its idea of temporality from the process of capitalist economy, which was produced as a “signification of production, of monetary articulation, of the redistribution of property,” and so forth (92). In Sartre’s view this chronological “description of the universal container as a phase of social development” (92) differed vastly from what might be generated by the dialectical determination of real temporality that constitutes the true relation of humans to their past and future.

Early theorists of unevenness and combined development like V. I. Lenin and especially Leon Trotsky usually identified unevenness with colonized societies and latecomers to capitalism where its application as a strategy of catching up was most pronounced. Lenin had already observed how in the Russian countryside agricultural production was increasingly utilizing new techniques introduced by capitalism alongside received practices from the past. And while Trotsky was convinced that the “law of combined and uneven development reveals itself . . . in the historical character of Russian industry” (7), it also invited societies whose growth had lagged behind or were captive to some variant of colonialism to skip over epochs to find their own route, as Marx had advised in his letters to Vera Zasulich. In this regard, Trotsky’s theorization actually configured a global chronotope with its mixtures of space/time that shaped the form of world history. In this vein, Ernst Bloch later looked to a unity shaped “in non-linear time, and with an historical direction that is not fixed and monadic” (141). Yet what was often overlooked was the extent to which uneven and combined development was baked into all capitalist development not simply in the “backward” or colonized regions of the world. Even though rarely acknowledged in advanced societies, the operation of

appropriative subsumption, especially formal and hybrid versions, was actually a rule whose implementation yielded unevenness at the same time Marx foresaw it as the law of all capitalist development, making unevenness the principal vocation of history. This observation, in this context, is important because it called to attention how capitalism appropriated economic practices from prior modes of production close at hand and fused them with the new production processes of capitalism, bringing in the outside to serve the inside of capital's production agenda, which initiated, from the beginning, both the prospect of lodging a continuing contradictory unevenness in the heart of capitalism and at the same time the possibility of accelerating its development by combining older procedures and methods with the newer innovations (I will return to this theme below).

Walter Benjamin, breaking away from vulgate Marxism, was able to signal the astonishing astigmatic defects of an interpretative strategy based on progressivist stagism. In this regard, he observed that linearity "dissolves history into stories that provide the bourgeoisie with an incognito in time," blocking the past from having a "critical relationship with the present" (Bolz and Reijen 48). Benjamin called for an awakening to the now of what had been forgotten and offered the concept of dialectics at a standstill as the way into the present, a combined stacking of time that would accumulate into a congestion of plural mixed moments. After the war, Louis Althusser addressed the same question of what he believed to be the problem of historicism, putting into question Marx's Hegelian heritage as the exit for providing the release of historical materialism from the essentialism of the present.

Yet it need be suggested that there seems to have been a narrowing of Marxian discourse, possibly stemming from an impulse that turned its attention toward the West and the corresponding conviction that the commodity relation had been finally realized. In this revised scenario, value replaced history, and exchange eclipsed use-value. The upshot was to privilege philosophy, accompanied by the aptitude to bracket out the social and political worlds of capitalist life as it first confronted the dimming possibilities cast by fascism in the interwar years and then the subsequent polarization of the West from the Rest in the Cold War. This re-embracing of philosophical formalism converged with greater concentration on the singular importance of the value form, as suggested, proceeding directly from the spheres of circulation and consumption rather than labor. Underlying the shift was the belief that capitalism's culture had saturated all sectors of society and human activity to project the image of value's apparent triumph over labor. The result of this convergence of philosophy and the primacy of value form, it seems to me, has run the risk of overstating the importance of formal analysis at the expense of the historical; its principal consequence threatens to reduce the importance Marx

attributed to history while the return to a philosophy he had early denounced has worked to further separate an enclosed Euro-America from the wider world which his vision sought to address. The encounter of philosophy and value theory worked to overdetermine the disappearance of history.

Fanon's identification of the "zone of occult instability" thus invites us to revisit Marx's capacious logic of historical practice as one of the possible ways of gaining a "glimpse" of Sartre's "real temporality" and the kind of theorization of historical time that might have been developed before it was commandeered by linear progressivism. This historical logic was grounded in the rule of appropriative subsumption mediated by both the time in which the capitalist operation was inaugurated and the place that supplied it with what was at hand that could be taken over by capital. The act of appropriating from a past was driven by what capitalism could utilize and subordinate to its process of accumulation. But this act required the resynchronization of both the present into contemporaneity and whatever appeared heterogeneous to it as non-contemporaneous capable of being used in a new context while sharing the same time. With his observation of the subsuming process Marx actually opened the way to contemporize the past in the present and reveal a perspective that would have great consequences for historical practice. In this way subsumptive appropriation repetitively performed the work of contemporizing the past in the present through the operation harnessing practices from prior modes of production to capital's program of accumulation. Accordingly, the idea of contemporaneity acted to encompass and anchor both the non-contemporaneous and the plurality of historical times or layers comprising it by providing "a single frame of reference" (Thomas 176).

It should also be noticed in this connection that Marx expanded and developed a new historical practice by extracting multiple and co-present levels of temporalities (*zeitschichten*) that lay beneath the surface of capital's present and its oscillating undulations.<sup>1</sup> Here he located the profane now, the time of labor, marking the principal sense of capital. And this perspective expected history to accept the charge of intervening politically in the contemporary present. Political involvement promised to uncover and rescue buried and forgotten histories capable of challenging the claims of the untroubled continuity and progress projected by the narratives of the nation-state, now requiring recognition and resolution of contemporary problems signified by the presence of all the pasts in the present. It is for

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<sup>1</sup> See Koselleck xii-xiii, 3-9. The conception of layering was initially envisioned by Marx, even though Reinhart Koselleck, much later, wrote a group of essays under the title *Zeitschichten, Studien zur Historik* in 2000. For a unique demonstration of how multiple layers provide presents with forgotten historical guideposts for configuring alternate political forms, see, by all means, Tomba's *Insurgent Universality*.

this reason that both Benjamin and Gramsci later insisted on the inseparability of history and politics.

Marx, it should be recalled, from the 1860s widened his vision and forged a broader perspective with his striking observation of the formation of the global market in the nineteenth century and his acute advice in *Capital* that what he was describing was not applied only to England and Germany but to the world. At the heart of this worldly perception was Marx's own admonition that while England had represented the main or "classic" theater of capitalist operations, Germans could claim no exception or "comfort" in thinking that things were not nearly so bad because, quoting Horace, "The tale is told of you" (qtd. in Shanin 78).

By the same measure it became evident that the lived experience of uneven and combined development was not simply limited to capitalist latecomers but implicated all societies committed to its production process. For this reason, I believe, we are obliged to acknowledge capitalism's demand for a global perspective because there is no "pure development" of capital or a unitary linear trajectory of growth divided into successive stages, as once believed. By the late 1870s Marx had already rejected a "historico-philosophical theory" that imposed the fatal experience of capital's genesis in Western Europe "on all peoples," whatever their historical circumstances, and endorsed Russia's different developmental road (Shanin 136). Events occurring in differing historical contexts might reveal "striking similarity," with disparate results that must be studied separately and compared (136). The figure of unevenness thus pointed to plural societies, relationality, and a multiplicity of paths of the historical development of capitalism that made each manifestation intrinsically worldly. It also brought to importance the appearance of non-contemporaneous or non-simultaneous moments in every present. It is precisely Sartre's "dialectical determination of real temporality" of the interaction of humans to their past and future, the capacity for producing combinatories out of what appear as incommensurables that brings us to the category of appropriative subsumption and its possibilities for producing a conception of historical time for historical materialism.

What Marx had envisioned as capital's logic of appropriative subsumption was therefore its aptitude for incorporating and subordinating past histories, its non-identity and outside, the incommensurate to what now was considered contemporary and commensurate, to capitalism's own immediate production agenda. Subsumption would additionally reinvest the historical text with the figure of contingency and the unanticipated presence of conjunctural or aleatory moments. The logic would thus produce, along the way, unevenness and combinations, utilizing figures of past economic practices and older forms of exploitation, wrenched from

their original temporal environment and resettled or resituated in the new location to serve capital's production process. These appropriated practices from the past were either reconfigured to meet new demands or left to continue functioning as they had, constituting a condensation of the larger process of initially joining older labor and economic practices together with capital—Marx called this formal subsumption, which co-existed alongside the most advanced forms of capitalist production, named real subsumption. In this scenario, formal subsumption was driven by presuppositions derived from pre-capitalism, acted to contemporize the past by appropriating what was on hand from prior practices and making them work for capitalism. For this reason, Marx designated formal subsumption as the central rule of all capitalism. Advanced capitalism, developed later and co-existing alongside its formal equivalent, differed because it was based on presupposition generated by capitalism itself. Both forms would, in their own way, contribute to the unfolding of uneven development. The process of subsumption did not imply an historicist or linear, progressivist theory of stages. In the operation of formal subsumption the practices would often retain the signature of their originating temporality. This was especially true of certain kinds of exploitative labor, which, like Southern American slavery, exemplified an older mode of production yoked to the production of cotton for a capitalist world market. We are also reminded of the bonding of subsumption and colonial labor in the Japan of the 1930s, when Korean workers struggled against what they called “intermediary exploitation” in the day labor market, which was mediated by feudal social relations in the form of *yakuza* gangsters, supported by the modern police (Kawashima, ch. 3).

Even before conceptualizing the act of subsumption, Marx saw the broader outline of uneven development, first in his youthful critique of Hegel's philosophy of right and then, with Engels, in *The German Ideology*. In the former he asserted that the struggle against the contemporary political situation in Germany represented a battle that pitted the political present in Germany against modern nations, which were still troubled by reminiscences of the past; the latter inveighed against the material unevenness in Germany, where philosophy was advanced but politics and economics remained well behind France and England. In *Capital*, Marx warned that the present was still crowded with representatives of different but co-existing temporalities, whereby “modern evils” were continually “oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production” (91). Yet in the same text Marx introduced the notion of formal subsumption as the “general rule of every capitalist process of production,” which, “at the same time can be found as a particular form alongside the . . . capitalist mode of production in its developed form,” that is, “real

subsumption,” which already announces the co-present production of uneven developments. Anticipating a more detailed discussion, he wrote in *Grundrisse* that “[c]apital proper does nothing but bring together the mass of hands and instruments which it finds on hand. It agglomerates them under its command” (508). The production of unevenness and combinatories through subsumptive appropriation both enabled the development of capitalism at the same time as it delayed its completion.

Moreover, his enunciation of the rule of formal subsumption indicated that it was a form, not a stage to be succeeded and replaced by a more advanced stage; it was not a one-time event and content but, like primitive accumulation, a recurring operation repetitively producing different combinations. Precisely because formal subsumption was form instead of content, it contained the possibility of its future tradition within its own implementing process. It is interesting to propose that while formal subsumption first referred principally to economic practices, as a form it could and was expanded to other domains of the social formation, such as politics, religion, and culture. In Italy, Antonio Gramsci saw the possibility of bringing together older political practices and institutions with new demands and classes under a hegemonic arrangement that mirrored capitalism’s aptitude for subordinating the old to new capitalistic productive processes; in Japan, an emperor was reconfigured as an archaic presence to serve as a legitimating force to induce people to work for capital and die for the nation.

*Grundrisse* supplied additional reinforcement in its offer of a new historical methodology that advised starting with the “general, abstract determinants which obtain in . . . all forms of societies” (37). If the “simplest category may have existed historically before the more concrete,” it can still “achieve its full . . . development precisely in a *combined form* of society, while the more concrete category was more fully developed in a less developed society” (103; emphasis added). “To that extent the path of abstract thought, rising from the simple to the combined, would correspond to the real historical process” (102).

Here, Marx disclosed the silhouette of unevenness constantly exposed by combining incommensurables, the old with the new that marked the temporal variations they will all embody as a condition of the unevenness brought together. This procedure made it possible to identify new meanings of the retrieved past now re-situated in a different present environment Benjamin once designated as the “now of knowability.” The archetypal model of uneven and combined development appeared in Marx’s famous description of “so-called primitive accumulation,” which, as suggested, was not a “big bang” event but a continuous repetition and its production of plural and uneven temporalities. Instead of appearing as a singular



episodic dialectic of violence retrofitted to conform to the constraining limits of a linear transition narrative, moving successively from one stage to another, it provided a sprawling site of archaeological dialectics, or “time levels.” This archaeological scene constituted a contemporaneity capable of encompassing and unifying the social processes of uneven developments, the mixing of plural discordant times and combined fusions of old and new practices, past with present. The transformational process of capitalist accumulation dramatized the centrality of “differential temporal determinations,” deriving from the separation of social reproduction from production, accompanied by immense expropriations of land and the implementation of enclosures of commons that led to widespread theft, murder, vagabondage, colonial dispossession, and the resetting of gender relations in the work force resulting in the devaluation of women’s labor—all carried out in a syncopated arrhythmia of different times (Thomas 177). In Trotsky, these played out in uneven temporalities. Here is Marx’s familiar generic tableau on unevenness and plural temporalities:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. . . . [T]he commercial war of European nations, which has the globe as its battlefields. . . . The different moments of primitive accumulation can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England in more or less chronological order. These different moments are systematically combined together at the end of the seventeenth century in England. (*Capital* 1: 915)

If this panoply of swerving temporalities was driven by uneven developments brought together by combining incommensurables with contemporary capitalist practices, it must also be seen as securing the social reproduction of a present that would continue to embody the multiversum of contemporaneous non-contemporaneity or, more accurately, as Gramsci observed, its reverse, the “non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous” (Thomas 202). The concrete application of this coming together was paradigmatically exemplified in the late 1870s in Marx’s advice to Vera Zasulich, a Russian progressive in Geneva, who had asked Marx to explain how Russia would be able to overcome the residues of its past still fatally persisting in the present in order to realize a modernizing capitalist transformation that would set the stage for the subsequent transition to socialism. Marx drafted several

letters he never sent. But in these drafts, we have an extraordinary source that sharply discloses the changes in Marx's late thinking occasioned by reading ethnographies that led him to the world beyond Western Europe. In the letters he not only proposed a pathway for Russia to follow, but also conceptualized a program of historiographic practice that dramatically departed from the philosophy of history he had embraced when younger but abandoned. The principal model informing this practice was geology and the spatialization and temporalization of strata, which he likened to differing levels of historical time or historical periods.

With these letters, Marx explicitly acknowledged the compatibility of combining the archaic figure of the Russian agrarian commune (*obschina*), which still endured in his present, with contemporary capitalism. What is notable about this linkage is the emphasis Marx placed on capitalism's contemporaneity. He was convinced that capitalism could beneficially utilize the archaic commune and the combinatory could enhance a revitalization of the principle of communalism and national economic development yet avoid the baneful "vicissitudes" of capitalism. For this reason, he advised Zasluch, there was no need to be fearful of the term *archaic*. While the combination was a classic example of the operation of formal subsumption, it also pointed to its elastic capacity to appropriate at hand residues that exceeded established labor practices and modes of exploitation. Marx's reading of Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877) impressed upon him the necessity of formulating an alternative route from capitalist civilization of Western Europe to include those colonial and semi-colonial regions of the world already affected by the operations of the world market. In one of the earlier drafts he argued against the habit of classifying all primitive communities "on the same level" when considering the history of their decline and disappearance.<sup>2</sup> Here, he summoned the geological model and the examples of how such natural formations provide a template for "historical forms" insofar as they are subject to a developmental law of "a whole series of primary, secondary and tertiary types" (Shanin 107). In other words, they do not necessarily pass away but often reappear in a different form. In this regard, he proposed that the Russian commune of his present was the "latest term" of a long, complex history. This perception was directly linked to an earlier observation recorded in *Theories of Surplus Value* where Marx showed how earlier lending practices metamorphosed into later credit yet retained the identity of antecedent pre-capitalist presuppositions rather than capitalist.

Marx was thus persuaded by Morgan's conviction that modern societies will revive and recuperate the "superior form of archaic social types." (He already had

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<sup>2</sup> See Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* 175-77, and also "Layers of Time" 75-76.

at hand the example of the Paris Commune.) What appears so striking about this move is Marx's certainty that the history of Western Europe can longer be seen to determine a "historical law" relating to the disappearance of communal property and its social relationships (Shanin 109-10). The geological model made possible an overlapping of layers of temporal forms, not a succession of stages. The layers that came later like the secondary and tertiary are superimposed on the primary layer to resemble a loose stadial-like configuration, where the latest does not cancel out and replace the earlier. The arrangement thus appears to work more flexibly as a palimpsest, whereby earlier primary layers are still visible and available to later ones. The Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui actualized this configuration into a historical image when seeking to explain the contemporaneous non-contemporaneity of indigenous folk and their relationship to the archaic Incas. What the geological model authorized is a shift in history's axis from horizontal successive linearity where past stages are replaced by newer ones, remaining forever irretrievable, to a vertical palimpsestic figure of layers superimposed on each other where past and present, here and now, there and then co-exist. With the shift from the horizontal linear passage of historical time to the vertical co-present and superimposed stockpiling of temporal forms, it might be possible to liken Marx's new paradigm for historical materialism to the event of a significant geological movement. In the vertical historical scheme, the vocation of the historical materialist demands the turn to the unevenness produced by combining working class struggles with the contemporized layers of archaic pasts as the object of historical and new possible formations that offer alternatives to capitalist modernity. If Fanon's trope of "occult instability" obliges us, as historical materialists, to recognize the "fluctuations" of combined unevenness of all history, we are equally impelled to follow Tosaka Jun's warning of the early 1930s to never rely on "borrowed time" as well as his advice to pursue the "mystery" of history's own time, which he found in the "content" of the working day of everyday life (Tosaka 4: 96).

In this way, Sartre's "glimpse" of a new temporality shifted the perspective on historical time to an opening of those efforts that sought to envisage time as the structuring agent of historical practice in the figure of contemporaneous non-contemporaneity rather than following a predictable progressive linear narrative framed by chronology that invariably serves the unit of the nation-form and, as Foucault once observed, made the Marxian form of history indistinguishable from the bourgeois. Both Lenin and Trotsky, and even the early Bloch's views of combined and uneven development, remained fastened to a linear and progressive narrative punctuated by stages and their replacement. In this respect, it seems to me that this version of historical materialism cleaves closely to bourgeois narratives,

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as Foucault has reminded us. What changed was its content but not necessarily its form. What such a shift risks is the presence of anachrony, which, according to Jacques Rancière, defies the usual association of “being out of time” but rather offers a useful way to synchronize the past as a solution to a present perceived to be the cause of a troubling crisis. Since anachrony is an object, he explained, an idea or practice that seems to have come from the past and lodged itself in a present, it is considered an anachronism, that is, untimely, because it disregards the belief as defined by a particular time of the present that it is not with the present. In this definition, one must be contemporary to his or her time, co-present with it, and belong to it, if one’s time is to resemble eternity, what Rancière calls a “pure present” (34).<sup>3</sup>

The belief that there exists only a singular time, which is internalized within a larger chronology that moves on a progressive linear track to come to a completed state, when before and after are converted into cause and effect—Rancière named this identity of a specific time and belief the “knotting of time,” which assures time’s redemption (35). For historians committed to historical time as chronological linearity, every moment or period has its proper time. It is important to note that Rancière considers anachrony neither bound nor related to the horizontal order of things characterizing chronological linearity, but is rather a vertical division of this order in the “hierarchy of beings” (23). The movement of time runs from below to above.

Implied in this temporal reconfiguration are two possibilities: the first appears in Marx’s letters to Zasulich, when he proposed the shift in the perspective of historical practice to a vertical axis composed of layers or levels of time stacked on top of one another resembling the strata of geologic formations. Here, the vertical axis constitutes a palimpsest in which the earlier layers are still available in trace to those later imposed on top of them. In the palimpsest, layers below are never entirely blotted out by what has been deposited above them, and it was precisely in such relationship that Marx recognized in the contemporary Russian commune its predecessors from a remote time. The advantage of a historical practice based on the vertical axis of the palimpsest over linear horizontality is that the form of layers of the past, like the strata of rock formations, is never effaced, while with the latter the past is assumed to have passed away because of the inexorably progressive trajectory moving history forward toward a goal: the past is gone, forgotten and irretrievable. The power of the palimpsest appears in its capacity to allow for retrievability and reversibility because it is not driven by a fixed narrative ambition.

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<sup>3</sup> See also the special issue of *Diacritics*, Vol. 48, No. 2 (2020), *Anachronism and Its Histories*.

Another possibility appeared in Marx's suggestion that the communal form, whose traces remain visible in the contemporary Russian countryside of the 1870s, could be retrieved and revitalized by joining capitalism to form a combination that would enhance national economic development without incurring the "vicissitudes" of capital. Clearly, this move of combing an institution fashioned in a pre-capitalist past with contemporary capitalism, which sanctioned the appropriation, mixed elements from two different modes of production.

Yet, the example actually manages to break the spell of the historian's "sin of sins," which is anachrony, by contemporizing a residue, like the archaic, from a past long forgotten in which it had originated. To dispose of the claims of anachronism, Rancière called forth the presence of a "multiplicity of lines of temporality present in any 'one' time" (46), precisely the plural times that inhabit his great work *La Nuit Proletaires*, times that are invariably produced by capitalism's "law" of uneven development and its vocation dedicated to contemporizing all pasts that are found useful, not only the archaic. The importance of Rancière's re-evaluation of anachrony's power appears in its capacity to make history, to leave time and have no identity with time, as such, which allows it to choose a time from the vast pool of plural times that persist in every present.

The challenge Marx supplies from his formulation on subsumption to his account of adapting the geological model requires us to imagine a change to form, the contingent outside capital will encounter everywhere it has landed to inevitably combine pasts and present and what that will demand. This perspective insists that just as there is not one capitalism but many, there is not one singular history but many loosely joined under a world market. Because there can never be a return to pre-capitalist historical time, whose vague silhouette may still be visible in some societies, the task is, instead, to work through the various combinations of present/pasts as the condition of charting a course for the future. The experience of plural temporalities, uneven and combined developmental forms that inhabit social life, the "different rhythms," entanglements, collisions, breaks, and interruptions inflicting abrupt and unscheduled discontinuities must not be seen as subjective expressions of consciousness. Rather, they should be grasped as the index of the different levels of a social formation, an "effect of its materiality" (Morfino and Thomas 18).

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