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## Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History

Push thought to extremes.  
(Louis Althusser)

IT HAS RECENTLY BEEN SAID in praise of the postcolonial project of *Subaltern Studies* that it demonstrates, “perhaps for the first time since colonisation,” that “Indians are showing sustained signs of reappropriating the capacity to represent themselves [within the discipline of history].”<sup>1</sup> As a historian who is a member of the *Subaltern Studies* collective, I find the congratulation contained in this remark gratifying but premature. The purpose of this essay is to problematize the idea of “Indians” “representing themselves in history.” Let us put aside for the moment the messy problems of identity inherent in a transnational enterprise such as *Subaltern Studies*, where passports and commitments blur the distinctions of ethnicity in a manner that some would regard as characteristically post-modern. I have a more perverse proposition to argue. It is that insofar as the academic discourse of history—that is, “history” as a discourse produced at the institutional site of the university—is concerned, “Europe” remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call “Indian,” “Chinese,” “Kenyan,” and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called “the history of Europe.” In this sense, “Indian” history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this history.

Although the rest of this chapter will elaborate on this proposition, let me enter a few qualifications. “Europe” and “India” are treated here as hyperreal terms in that they refer to certain figures of imagination whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate.<sup>2</sup> As figures of the imaginary they are, of course, subject to contestation, but for the moment I shall treat them as though they were given, reified categories, opposites paired in a structure of domination and subordination. I realize that in treating them thus I leave myself open to the charge of nativism, nationalism—or worse, the sin of sins, nostalgia. Liberal-minded scholars would immediately protest that any idea of a homogeneous, uncontested “Eu-

rope" dissolves under analysis. True, but just as the phenomenon of Orientalism does not disappear simply because some of us have now attained a critical awareness of it, similarly a certain version of "Europe," reified and celebrated in the phenomenal world of everyday relationships of power as the scene of the birth of the modern, continues to dominate the discourse of history. Analysis does not make it go away.

That Europe works as a silent referent in historical knowledge becomes obvious in a very ordinary way. There are at least two everyday symptoms of the subalternity of non-Western, third-world histories. Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate. Whether it is an Edward Thompson, a Le Roy Ladurie, a George Duby, a Carlo Ginzberg, a Lawrence Stone, a Robert Darnton, or a Natalie Davis—to take but a few names at random from our contemporary world—the "greats" and the models of the historian's enterprise are always at least culturally "European." "They" produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western histories, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work. This is a gesture, however, that "we" cannot return. We cannot even afford an equality or symmetry of ignorance at this level without taking the risk of appearing "old-fashioned" or "outdated."

The problem, I may add in parentheses, is not particular to historians. An unselfconscious but nevertheless blatant example of this "inequality of ignorance" in literary studies, for example, is the following sentence on Salman Rushdie from a recent text on postmodernism: "Though Saleem Sinai [of *Midnight's Children*] narrates in English . . . his intertexts for both writing history and writing fiction are doubled: they are, on the one hand, from Indian legends, films and literature and, on the other, from the West—*The Tin Drum*, *Tristram Shandy*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and so on."<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note how this sentence teases out only those references that are from "the West." The author is under no obligation here to be able to name with any authority and specificity the Indian allusions that make Rushdie's intertextuality "doubled." This ignorance, shared and unstated, is part of the assumed compact that makes it "easy" to include Rushdie in English Department offerings on postcolonialism.

This problem of asymmetric ignorance is not simply a matter of "cultural cringe" (to let my Australian self speak) on our part or of cultural arrogance on the part of the European historian. These problems exist but can be relatively easily addressed. Nor do I mean to take anything away from the achievements of the historians I mentioned. Our footnotes bear rich testimony to the insights we have derived from their knowledge

and creativity. The dominance of "Europe" as the subject of all histories is a part of a much more profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced in the third world. This condition ordinarily expresses itself in a paradoxical manner. It is this paradox that I shall describe as the second everyday symptom of our subalternity, and it refers to the very nature of social science pronouncements.

For generations now, philosophers and thinkers who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind—that is, those living in non-Western cultures. This in itself is not paradoxical, for the more self-conscious of European philosophers have always sought theoretically to justify this stance. The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that *we* find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of "us," eminently useful in understanding our societies. What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?

There is an answer to this question in the writings of philosophers who have read into European history an entelechy of universal reason, if we regard such philosophy as the self-consciousness of social science. Only "Europe," the argument would appear to be, is *theoretically* (that is, at the level of the fundamental categories that shape historical thinking) knowable; all other histories are matters of empirical research that fleshes out a theoretical skeleton that is substantially "Europe." There is one version of this argument in Husserl's Vienna lecture of 1935, where he proposed that the fundamental difference between "oriental philosophies" (more specifically, Indian and Chinese) and "Greek-European science" (or as he added, "universally speaking: philosophy") was the capacity of the latter to produce "absolute theoretical insights," that is "*theoria* (universal science)," whereas the former retained a "practical-universal," and hence "mythical-religious," character. This "practical-universal" philosophy was directed to the world in a "naive" and "straightforward" manner, whereas the world presented itself as a "thematic" to *theoria*, making possible a praxis "whose aim is to elevate mankind through universal scientific reason."<sup>4</sup>

A similar epistemological proposition underlies Marx's use of categories such as "bourgeois" and "prebourgeois" or "capital" and "precapital." The prefix *pre* here signifies a relationship that is both chronological and theoretical. The coming of the bourgeois or capitalist society, Marx argues in the *Grundrisse* and elsewhere, gives rise for the first time to a

history that can be apprehended through a philosophical and universal category, "capital." History becomes, for the first time, *theoretically* knowable. All past histories are now to be known (theoretically, that is) from the vantage point of this category, that is, in terms of their differences from it. Things reveal their categorical essence only when they reach their fullest development, or as Marx put it in that famous aphorism of the *Grundrisse*: "Human anatomy contains the key to the anatomy of the ape."<sup>5</sup> The category "capital," as I have discussed elsewhere, contains within itself the legal subject of Enlightenment thought.<sup>6</sup> Not surprisingly, Marx said in that very Hegelian first chapter of *Capital*, volume 1, that the secret of "capital," the category, "cannot be deciphered until the notion of human equality has acquired the fixity of a popular prejudice."<sup>7</sup> To continue with Marx's words:

even the most abstract categories, despite their validity—precisely because of their abstractness—for all epochs, are nevertheless, . . . themselves . . . a product of historical relations. Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc. . . . The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species . . . can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient. . . .<sup>8</sup>

For capital or bourgeois, I submit, read "Europe" or "European."

#### HISTORICISM AS A TRANSITION NARRATIVE

Neither Marx nor Husserl spoke—at least in the words quoted above—in a historicist spirit. In parenthesis, we should recall that Marx's vision of emancipation entailed a journey beyond the rule of capital, in fact beyond the notion of juridical equality that liberalism holds so sacred. The maxim "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" runs contrary to the principle of "equal pay for equal work," and this is why Marx remains—the Berlin wall notwithstanding (or not standing!)—a relevant and fundamental critic of both capitalism and liberalism and

thus central to any postcolonial, postmodern project of writing history. Yet Marx's methodological/epistemological statements have not always successfully resisted historicist readings. There has always remained enough ambiguity in these statements to make possible the emergence of "Marxist" historical narratives. These narratives turn around the theme of historical transition. Most modern third-world histories are written within problematics posed by this transition narrative, of which the overriding (if often implicit) themes are those of development, modernization, and capitalism.

This tendency can be located in our own work in the *Subaltern Studies* project. My book on working-class history struggles with the problem.<sup>9</sup> *Modern India* by Sumit Sarkar (another colleague in the *Subaltern Studies* project), which is justifiably regarded as one of the best textbooks on Indian history written primarily for Indian universities, opens with the following sentences: "The sixty years or so that lie between the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the achievement of independence in August 1947 witnessed perhaps the greatest transition in our country's long history. A transition, however, which in many ways remains grievously incomplete, and it is with this central ambiguity that it seems most convenient to begin our survey."<sup>10</sup> What kind of a transition was it that remained "grievously incomplete"? Sarkar hints at the possibility of there having been several by naming three: "So many of the aspirations aroused in the course of the national struggle remained unfulfilled—the Gandhian dream of the peasant coming into his own in *Ram-rajya* [the rule of the legendary and ideal god-king Ram], as much as the left ideals of social revolution. And as the history of independent India and Pakistan (and Bangladesh) was repeatedly to reveal, even the problems of a complete bourgeois transformation and successful capitalist development were not fully solved by the transfer of power of 1947."<sup>11</sup> Neither the peasant's dream of a mythical and just kingdom, nor the left's ideal of a social[ist] revolution, nor a "complete bourgeois transformation"—it is within these three absences, these "grievously incomplete" scenarios, that Sarkar locates the story of modern India.

It is also with a similar reference to "absences"—the "failure" of a history to keep an appointment with its destiny (once again an instance of the "lazy native," shall we say?)—that we announced our project of *Subaltern Studies*: "It is the study of this *historic failure of the nation to come to its own*, a failure due to the *inadequacy* of the bourgeoisie as well as of the working class to lead it into a decisive victory over colonialism and a bourgeois-democratic revolution of the classic nineteenth-century



type . . . or [of the] 'new democracy' [type]—*it is the study of this failure which constitutes the central problematic of the historiography of colonial India.*"<sup>12</sup>

The tendency to read Indian history in terms of a lack, an absence, or an incompleteness that translates into "inadequacy" is obvious in these excerpts. As a trope it is ancient, going back to the beginnings of colonial rule in India. The British conquered and represented the diversity of Indian pasts through a homogenizing narrative of transition from a medieval period to modernity. The terms have changed with time. The medieval was once called "despotic" and the modern "the rule of law." "Feudal/capitalist" has been a later variant.

When it was first formulated in colonial histories of India, this transition narrative was an unashamed celebration of the imperialist's capacity for violence and conquest. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, generations of elite Indian nationalists found their subject positions as nationalists within this transition narrative that, at various times and depending on one's ideology, hung the tapestry of "Indian history" between the two poles of homologous sets of oppositions: despotic/constitutional, medieval/modern, feudal/capitalist. Within this narrative shared by imperialist and nationalist imaginations, the "Indian" was always a figure of lack. There was always, in other words, room in this story for characters who embodied, on behalf of the native, the theme of inadequacy or failure.

We do not need to be reminded that this would remain the cornerstone of imperial ideology for many years to come—subjecthood but not citizenship, as the native was never adequate to the latter—and would eventually become a strand of liberal theory itself.<sup>13</sup> This was, of course, where nationalists differed. For Rammohun Roy as for Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, two of India's most prominent nationalist intellectuals of the nineteenth century, British rule was a necessary period of tutelage that Indians had to undergo in order to prepare precisely for what the British denied but extolled as the end of all history: citizenship and the nation-state. Years later, in 1951, an "unknown" Indian who successfully sold his "obscurity" dedicated the story of his life thus:

To the memory of the  
British Empire in India  
Which conferred subjecthood on us  
But withheld citizenship;  
To which yet  
Everyone of us threw out the challenge

"Civis Britannicus Sum"

Because

All that was good and living

Within us

Was made, shaped, and quickened

By the same British Rule.<sup>14</sup>

In nationalist versions of this narrative, as Partha Chatterjee has shown, the peasants and the workers, the subaltern classes, were given the cross of "inadequacy" to bear for, according to this version, it was they who needed to be educated out of their ignorance, parochialism or, depending on your preference, false consciousness.<sup>15</sup> Even today the Anglo-Indian word "communalism" refers to those who allegedly fail to measure up to the secular ideals of citizenship.

That British rule put in place the practices, institutions, and discourse of bourgeois individualism in the Indian soil is undeniable. Early expressions of this desire to be a "legal subject"—that is, before the beginnings of nationalism—make it clear that to Indians in the 1830s and 1840s, to be a "modern individual" was become a European. *The Literary Gleaner*, a magazine in colonial Calcutta, ran the following poem in 1842, written in English by a Bengali school boy eighteen years of age. The poem was apparently inspired by the sight of ships leaving the coast of Bengal "for the glorious shores of England":

Oft like a sad bird I sigh  
To leave this land, though mine own land it be;  
Its green robed meads,—gay flowers and cloudless sky  
Though passing fair, have but few charms for me.  
For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free  
Where virtue dwells and heaven-born liberty  
Makes even the lowest happy;—where the eye  
Doth sicken not to see man bend the knee  
To sordid interest:—climes where science thrives,  
And genius doth receive her guerdon meet;  
Where man in his all his truest glory lives,  
And nature's face is exquisitely sweet:  
For those fair climes I heave the impatient sigh,  
There let me live and there let me die.<sup>16</sup>

In its echoes of Milton and seventeenth-century English radicalism, this is obviously a piece of colonial pastiche.<sup>17</sup> Michael Madhusudan Dutt, the



young Bengali author of this poem, eventually realized the impossibility of being European and returned to Bengali literature to become one of our finest poets. Later Indian nationalists abandoned such abject desire to be Europeans, since nationalist thought was premised precisely on the assumed universality of the project of becoming individuals, on the assumption that individual rights and abstract equality were universals that could find home anywhere in the world, that one could be both an “Indian” and a citizen at the same time. We shall soon explore some of the contradictions of this project.

Many of the public and private rituals of modern individualism became visible in India in the nineteenth century. One sees this, for instance, in the sudden flourishing in this period of the four basic genres that help express the modern self: the novel, the biography, the autobiography, and history.<sup>18</sup> Along with these came modern industry, technology, medicine, a quasi-bourgeois (though colonial) legal system supported by a state that nationalism was to take over and make its own. The transition narrative that I have been discussing underwrote, and was in turn underpinned by, these institutions. To think about this narrative was to think in terms of these institutions at the apex of which sat the modern state,<sup>19</sup> and to think about the modern or the nation-state was to think a history whose theoretical subject was Europe. Gandhi realized this as early as 1909. Referring to the Indian nationalists’ demands for more railways, modern medicine, and bourgeois law, he cannily remarked in his book *Hind Swaraj* that this was to “make India English” or, as he put it, to have “English rule without the Englishman.”<sup>20</sup> This Europe, as Michael Madhusudan Dutt’s youthful and naive poetry shows, was of course nothing but a piece of fiction told to the colonized by the colonizer in the very process of fabricating colonial domination.<sup>21</sup> Gandhi’s critique of this Europe is compromised on many points by his nationalism, and I do not intend to fetishize his text. But I find his gesture useful in developing the problematic of nonmetropolitan histories.

#### TO READ “LACK” OTHERWISE

I shall now return to the themes of “failure,” “lack,” and “inadequacy” that so ubiquitously characterize the speaking subject of “Indian” history. As in the practice of the insurgent peasants of colonial India, the first step in a critical effort must arise from a gesture of inversion.<sup>22</sup> Let us begin

from where the transition narrative ends and read “plenitude” and “creativity” where this narrative has made us read “lack” and “inadequacy.”

According to the fable of their constitution, Indians today are all “citizens.” The constitution embraces almost a classically liberal definition of citizenship. If the modern state and the modern individual, the citizen, are but the two inseparable sides of the same phenomenon, as William Connolly argues in *Political Theory and Modernity*, it would appear that the end of history is in sight for us in India.<sup>23</sup> This modern individual, however, whose political/public life is lived in citizenship, is also supposed to have an interiorized “private” self that pours out incessantly in diaries, letters, autobiographies, novels, and, of course, in what we say to our analysts. The bourgeois individual is not born until one discovers the pleasures of privacy. But this is a very special kind of “private self”—it is, in fact, a deferred “public” self, for this bourgeois private self, as Jurgen Habermas has reminded us, is “always already oriented to an audience [*Publikum*].”<sup>24</sup>

Indian public life may mimic on paper the bourgeois legal fiction of citizenship—the fiction is usually performed as a farce in India—but what about the bourgeois private self and its history? Anyone who has tried to write “French” social history with Indian material would know how impossibly difficult the task is.<sup>25</sup> It is not that the form of the bourgeois private self did not come with European rule. There have been, since the middle of the nineteenth century, Indian novels, diaries, letters, and autobiographies, but they seldom yield pictures of an endlessly interiorized subject. Our autobiographies are remarkably “public” (with constructions of public life that are not necessarily modern) when written by men, and tell the story of the extended family when written by women.<sup>26</sup> In any case, autobiographies in the confessional mode are notable for their absence. The single paragraph (out of 963 pages) that Nirad Chaudhuri spends on describing his experience of his wedding night in the second volume of his celebrated and prize-winning autobiography is as good an example as any other and is worth quoting at length. I should explain that this was an arranged marriage (Bengal, 1932) and Chaudhuri was anxious lest his wife should not appreciate his newly acquired but unaffordably expensive hobby of buying records of Western classical music. Our reading of Chaudhuri is handicapped in part by our lack of knowledge of the intertextuality of his prose—there may have been at work, for instance, an imbibed puritanical revulsion against revealing “too much.” Yet the passage remains a telling exercise in the construction of memory, for it is about what Chaudhuri “remembers” and “forgets” of his “first

night's experience." He screens off intimacy with expressions like "I do not remember" or "I do not know how" (not to mention the very Freudian "making a clean breast of"), and this self-constructed veil is no doubt a part of the self that speaks:

I was terribly uneasy at the prospect of meeting as wife a girl who was a complete stranger to me, and when she was brought in . . . and left standing before me I had nothing to say. I saw only a very shy smile on her face, and timidly she came and sat by my side on the edge of the bed. I do not know how after that both of us drifted to the pillows, to lie down side by side. [Chaudhuri adds in a footnote: "Of course, fully dressed. We Hindus . . . consider both extremes—fully clad and fully nude—to be modest, and everything in-between as grossly immodest. No decent man wants his wife to be an *allumeuse*."] Then the first words were exchanged. She took up one of my arms, felt it and said: "You are so thin. I shall take good care of you." I did not thank her, and I do not remember that beyond noting the words I even felt touched. The horrible suspense about European music had reawakened in my mind, and I decided to make a clean breast of it at once and look the sacrifice, if it was called for, straight in the face and begin romance on such terms as were offered to me. I asked her timidly after a while: "Have you listened to any European music?" She shook her head to say "No." Nonetheless, I took another chance and this time asked: "Have you heard the name of a man called Beethoven?" She nodded and signified "Yes." I was reassured, but not wholly satisfied. So I asked yet again: "Can you spell the name?" She said slowly: "B, E, E, T, H, O, V, E, N." I felt very encouraged . . . and [we] dozed off.<sup>27</sup>

The desire to be "modern" screams out of every sentence in the two volumes of Chaudhuri's autobiography. His legendary name now stands for the cultural history of Indo-British encounter. Yet in the 1,500-odd pages that he has written in English about his life, this is the only passage in which the narrative of Chaudhuri's participation in public life and literary circles is interrupted to make room for something approaching the intimate. How do we read this text, this self-making of an Indian male who was second to no one in his ardor for the public life of the citizen, yet who seldom, if ever, reproduced in writing the other side of the modern citizen, the interiorized private self unceasingly reaching out for an audience? Public without private? Yet another instance of the "incompleteness" of bourgeois transformation in India?

These questions are themselves prompted by the transition narrative that in turn situates the modern individual at the very end of history. I do not wish to confer on Chaudhuri's autobiography a representativeness it may not have. Women's writings, as I have already said, are different, and scholars have just begun to explore the world of autobiographies in Indian history. But if one result of European imperialism in India was to introduce the modern state and the idea of the nation with their attendant discourse of "citizenship," which, by the very idea of "the citizen's rights" (that is, "the rule of law"), splits the figure of the modern individual into public and private parts of the self (as the young Marx once pointed out in his "On the Jewish Question"), these themes have existed—in contestation, alliance, and miscegenation—with other narratives of the self and community that do not look to the state/citizen bind as the ultimate construction of sociality.<sup>28</sup> This as such will not be disputed, but my point goes further. It is that these other constructions of self and community, while documentable, will never enjoy the privilege of providing the meta-narratives or teleologies (assuming that there cannot be a narrative without at least an implicit teleology) of our histories. This is partly because these narratives often themselves bespeak an antihistorical consciousness, that is, they entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the name of history. "History" is precisely the site where the struggle goes on to appropriate, on behalf of the modern (my hyperreal Europe), these other collocations of memory.

#### HISTORY AND DIFFERENCE IN INDIAN MODERNITY

The cultural space the antihistorical invoked was by no means harmonious or nonconflictual, though nationalist thought of necessity tried to portray it as such. The antihistorical norms of the patriarchal extended family, for example, could only have had a contested existence, contested both by women's struggles and by those of the subaltern classes. But these struggles did not necessarily follow any lines that would allow us to construct emancipatory narratives by putting the "patriarchs" clearly on one side and the "liberals" on the other. The history of modern individuality in India is caught up in too many contradictions to lend itself to such a treatment.

I do not have the space here to develop the point, so I will make do with one example. It comes from the autobiography of Ramabai Ranade,

the wife of the famous nineteenth-century social reformer from the Bombay Presidency, M. G. Ranade. Ramabai Ranade's struggle for self-respect was in part against the "old" patriarchal order of the extended family and for the "new" patriarchy of companionate marriage, which her reform-minded husband saw as the most civilized form of the conjugal bond. In pursuit of this ideal, Ramabai began to share her husband's commitment to public life and would often take part (in the 1880s) in public gatherings and deliberations of male and female social reformers. As she herself says: "It was at these meetings that I learnt what a meeting was and how one should conduct oneself at one."<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, however, one of the chief sources of opposition to Ramabai's efforts were (apart from men) the other women in the family. There is, of course, no doubt that they—her mother-in-law and her husband's sisters—spoke for the old patriarchal extended family. But it is instructive to listen to their voices (as they come across through Ramabai's text), for they also spoke for their own sense of self-respect and their own forms of struggle against men: "You should not really go to these meetings [they said to Ramabai]. . . . Even if the men want you to do these things, you should ignore them. You need not say no: but after all, you need not do it. They will then give up, out of sheer boredom. . . . You are outdoing even the European women." Or this:

It is she [Ramabai] herself who loves this frivolousness of going to meetings. Dada [Mr. Ranade] is not at all so keen about it. But should she not have some sense of proportion of how much the women should actually do? If men tell you to do a hundred things, women should take up ten at the most. After all men do not understand these practical things! . . . The good woman [in the past] never turned frivolous like this. . . . That is why this large family . . . could live together in a respectable way. . . . But now it is all so different! If Dada suggests one thing, this woman is prepared to do three. How can we live with any sense of self-respect then and how can we endure all this?<sup>30</sup>

These voices, combining the contradictory themes of nationalism, patriarchal clan-based ideology, and women's struggles against men, and opposed at the same time to friendship between husbands and wives, remind us of the deep ambivalences that marked the trajectory of the modern private and bourgeois individuality in colonial India. Yet historians manage, by maneuvers reminiscent of the old "dialectical" card trick called "negation of negation," to deny a subject position to this voice of ambivalence. The evidence of what I have called "the denial of the bourgeois

private and of the historical subject" is acknowledged in their accounts but subordinated to the supposedly higher purpose of making Indian history look like yet another episode in the universal and (in their view, the ultimately victorious) march of citizenship, of the nation-state, and of themes of human emancipation spelled out in the course of the European Enlightenment and after. It is the figure of the citizen that speaks through these histories. And so long as that happens, my hyperreal Europe will continually return to dominate the stories we tell. "The modern" will then continue to be understood, as Meaghan Morris has so aptly put it in discussing her own Australian context, "as a *known history*, something which has *already happened elsewhere*, and which is to be reproduced, mechanically or otherwise, with a local content." This can only leave us with a task of reproducing what Morris calls "the project of positive unoriginality."<sup>31</sup>

Yet the "originality"—I concede that this is a bad term—of the idioms through which struggles have been conducted in the Indian subcontinent has often been in the sphere of the nonmodern. One does not have to subscribe to the ideology of clannish patriarchy, for instance, to acknowledge that the metaphor of the sanctified and patriarchal extended family was one of the most important elements in the cultural politics of Indian nationalism. In the struggle against British rule, it was frequently the use of this idiom—in songs, poetry, and other forms of nationalist mobilization—that allowed Indians to fabricate a sense of community and to retrieve for themselves a subject position from which to address the British. I will illustrate this with an example from the life of Gandhi, "the father of the nation," to highlight the political importance of this cultural move on the part of the "Indian."

My example refers to the year 1946. There had been ghastly riots between Hindus and Muslims in Calcutta over the impending partition of the country into India and Pakistan. Gandhi was in the city, fasting in protest over the behavior of his own people. And here is how an Indian intellectual recalls the experience:

Men would come back from their offices in the evening and find food prepared by the family [meaning the womenfolk] ready for them; but soon it would be revealed that the women of the home had not eaten the whole day. They [apparently] had not felt hungry. Pressed further, the wife or the mother would admit that they could not understand how they could go on [eating] when Gandhiji was dying for their own crimes. Restaurants and amusement centres did little business; some of them



were voluntarily closed by the proprietors. . . . The nerve of feeling had been restored; the pain began to be felt. . . . Gandhiji knew when to start the redemptive process.<sup>32</sup>

We do not have to take this description literally, but the nature of the community imagined in these lines is clear. It blends, in Gayatri Spivak's words, "the feeling of community that belongs to national links and political organisations" with "that other feeling of community whose structural model is the [clan or the extended] family."<sup>33</sup> Colonial Indian history is replete with instances in which Indians arrogated subjecthood to themselves precisely by mobilizing, within the context of modern institutions and sometimes on behalf of the modernizing project of nationalism, devices of collective memory that were both antihistorical and nonmodern.<sup>34</sup> This is not to deny the capacity of Indians to act as subjects endowed with what we in the universities would recognize as "a sense of history" (what Peter Burke calls "the renaissance of the past") but to insist that there were also contrary trends, that in the multifarious struggles that took place in colonial India, antihistorical constructions of the past often provided very powerful forms of collective memory.<sup>35</sup>

There is, then, this double bind through which the subject of "Indian" history articulates itself. On the one hand, it is both the subject and the object of modernity, because it stands for an assumed unity called the "Indian people" that is always split into two—a modernizing elite and a yet-to-be modernized peasantry. As a split subject, however, it speaks from within a metanarrative that celebrates the nation-state; and of this metanarrative the theoretical subject can only be a hyperreal "Europe," a Europe constructed by the tales that both imperialism and nationalism have told the colonized. The mode of self-representation that the "Indian" can adopt here is what Homi Bhabha has justly called "mimetic."<sup>36</sup> Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain "modern" subject of "European" history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure. The transition narrative will always remain "grievously incomplete."

On the other hand, maneuvers are made within the space of the mimetic—and therefore within the project called "Indian" history—to represent the "difference" and the "originality" of the "Indian," and it is in this cause that the antihistorical devices of memory and the antihistorical "histories" of the subaltern classes are appropriated. Thus peasant/worker constructions of "mythical" kingdoms and "mythical" pasts/futures find a place in texts that are designated "Indian" history precisely

through a procedure that subordinates these narratives to the rules of evidence and to the secular, linear calendar that the writing of "history" must follow. The antihistorical, antimodern subject, therefore, cannot speak as "theory" within the knowledge procedures of the university even when these knowledge procedures acknowledge and "document" its existence. Much like Spivak's "subaltern" (or the anthropologist's peasant who can only have a quoted existence in a larger statement that belongs to the anthropologist alone), this subject can only be spoken for and spoken of by the transition narrative, which will always ultimately privilege the modern (that is, "Europe").<sup>37</sup>

So long as one operates within the discourse of "history" produced at the institutional site of the university, it is not possible simply to walk out of the deep collusion between "history" and the modernizing narrative(s) of citizenship, bourgeois public and private, and the nation-state. "History" as a knowledge system is firmly embedded in institutional practices that invoke the nation-state at every step—witness the organization and politics of teaching, recruitment, promotions, and publication in history departments, politics that survive the occasional brave and heroic attempts by individual historians to liberate "history" from the metanarrative of the nation state. One only has to ask, for instance: Why is history a compulsory part of education of the modern person in all countries today, including those that did quite comfortably without it until as late as the eighteenth century? Why should children all over the world today have to come to terms with a subject called "history" when we know that this compulsion is neither natural nor ancient?<sup>38</sup>

It does not take much imagination to see that the reason for this lies in what European imperialism and third-world nationalisms have achieved together: the universalization of the nation-state as the most desirable form of political community. Nation-states have the capacity to enforce their truth games, and universities, their critical distance notwithstanding, are part of the battery of institutions complicit in this process. "Economics" and "history" are the knowledge forms that correspond to the two major institutions that the rise (and later universalization) of the bourgeois order has given to the world—the capitalist mode of production and the nation-state ("history" speaking to the figure of the citizen).<sup>39</sup> A critical historian has no choice but to negotiate this knowledge. She or he therefore needs to understand the state on its own terms, that is, in terms of its self-justificatory narratives of citizenship and modernity. Because these themes will always take us back to the universalist propositions of "modern" (European) political philosophy—even the "practical" science

of economics, which now seems “natural” to our constructions of world systems, is (theoretically) rooted in the ideas of ethics in eighteenth-century Europe<sup>40</sup>—a third-world historian is condemned to knowing “Europe” as the original home of the “modern,” whereas the “European” historian does not share a comparable predicament with regard to the pasts of the majority of humankind. Thus the everyday subalternity of non-Western histories with which I began this paper.

Yet the understanding that “we” all do “European” history with our different and often non-European archive opens up the possibility of a politics and project of alliance between the dominant metropolitan histories and the subaltern peripheral pasts. Let us call this the project of provincializing “Europe,” the Europe that modern imperialism and (third-world) nationalism have, by their collaborative venture and violence, made universal. Philosophically, this project must ground itself in a radical critique and transcendence of liberalism (that is, of the bureaucratic constructions of citizenship, the modern state, and bourgeois privacy that classical political philosophy has produced), a ground that late Marx shares with certain moments in both poststructuralist thought and feminist philosophy. In particular, I am emboldened by Carole Pateman’s courageous declaration—in her remarkable book *The Sexual Contract*—that the very conception of the modern individual belongs to patriarchal categories of thought.<sup>41</sup>

#### PROVINCIALIZING EUROPE?

The project of provincializing “Europe” refers to a history that does not yet exist; I can therefore speak of it only in a programmatic manner. To forestall misunderstanding, however, I must spell out what it is *not*, while outlining what it could be.

To begin with, it does not call for a simplistic, out-of-hand rejection of modernity, liberal values, universals, science, reason, grand narratives, totalizing explanations, and so on. Jameson has recently reminded us that the easy equation often made between “a philosophical conception of totality” and “a political practice of totalitarianism” is “baleful.”<sup>42</sup> What intervenes between the two is history—contradictory, plural, and heterogeneous struggles whose outcomes are never predictable, even retrospectively, in accordance with schemas that seek to naturalize and domesticate this heterogeneity. These struggles include coercion (both on behalf of and against modernity)—physical, institutional, and symbolic violence,

often dispensed with dreamy-eyed idealism—and this violence plays a decisive role in the establishment of meaning, in the creation of truth regimes, in deciding, as it were, whose and which “universal” wins. As intellectuals operating in academia, we are not neutral to these struggles and cannot pretend to situate ourselves outside of the knowledge procedures of our institutions.

The project of provincializing Europe therefore cannot be a project of cultural relativism. It cannot originate from the stance that the reason/science/universals that help define Europe as the modern are simply “culture-specific” and therefore only belong to the European cultures. For the point is not that Enlightenment rationalism is always unreasonable in itself, but rather a matter of documenting how—through what historical process—its “reason,” which was not always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated. If a language, as has been said, is but a dialect backed up by an army, the same could be said of the narratives of “modernity” that, almost universally today, point to a certain “Europe” as the primary habitus of the modern.

This Europe, like “the West,” is demonstrably an imaginary entity, but the demonstration as such does not lessen its appeal or power. The project of provincializing Europe has to include certain additional moves: first, the recognition that Europe’s acquisition of the adjective “modern” for itself is an integral part of the story of European imperialism within global history; and second, the understanding that this equating of a certain version of Europe with “modernity” is not the work of Europeans alone; third-world nationalisms, as modernizing ideologies par excellence, have been equal partners in the process. I do not mean to overlook the anti-imperial moments in the careers of these nationalisms; I only underscore the point that the project of provincializing Europe cannot be a nationalist, nativist, or atavistic project. In unraveling the necessary entanglement of history—a disciplined and institutionally regulated form of collective memory—with the grand narratives of rights, citizenship, the nation-state, and public and private spheres, one cannot but problematize “India” at the same time as one dismantles “Europe.”

The idea is to write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it. That the rhetoric and the claims of (bourgeois) equality, citizen’s rights, of self-determination through a sovereign nation-state have in many circumstances empowered marginal social groups in their struggles is undeniable—this recognition is indispensable to the project of *Subaltern Stud-*

ies. What is effectively played down, however, in histories that either implicitly or explicitly celebrate the advent of the modern state and the idea of citizenship is the repression and violence that are as instrumental in the victory of the modern as is the persuasive power of its rhetorical strategies. Nowhere is this irony—the undemocratic foundations of “democracy”—more visible than in the history of modern medicine, public health, and personal hygiene, the discourses of which have been central in locating the body of the modern individual at the intersection of the public and the private (as defined by, and subject to negotiations with, the state). The triumph of this discourse, however, has always been dependent on the mobilization, on its behalf, of effective means of physical coercion. I say “always” because this coercion is both originary/foundational (that is, historic) as well as pandemic and quotidian. Of foundational violence, David Arnold gives a good example in a recent essay on the history of the prison in India. The coercion of the colonial prison, Arnold shows, was integral to some of the earliest and pioneering research on the medical, dietary, and demographic statistics of India, for the prison was where Indian bodies were accessible to modernizing investigators.<sup>43</sup> Of the coercion that continues in the names of the nation and modernity, a recent example comes from the Indian campaign to eradicate smallpox in the 1970s. Two American doctors (one of them presumably of Indian origin) who participated in the process thus describe their operations in a village of the Ho tribe in the Indian state of Bihar:

In the middle of gentle Indian night, an intruder burst through the bamboo door of the simple adobe hut. He was a government vaccinator, under orders to break resistance against smallpox vaccination. Lakshmi Singh awoke screaming and scrambled to hide herself. Her husband leaped out of bed, grabbed an axe, and chased the intruder into the courtyard. Outside a squad of doctors and policemen quickly overpowered Mohan Singh. The instant he was pinned to the ground, a second vaccinator jabbed smallpox vaccine into his arm. Mohan Singh, a wiry 40-year-old leader of the Ho tribe, squirmed away from the needle, causing the vaccination site to bleed. The government team held him until they had injected enough vaccine. . . . While the two policemen rebuffed him, the rest of the team overpowered the entire family and vaccinated each in turn. Lakshmi Singh bit deep into one doctor’s hand, but to no avail.<sup>44</sup>

There is no escaping the idealism that accompanies this violence. The subtitle of the article in question unselfconsciously reproduces both the

military and the do-gooding instincts of the enterprise. It reads: “How an army of samaritans drove smallpox from the earth.”

Histories that aim to displace a hyperreal Europe from the center toward which all historical imagination currently gravitates will have to seek out relentlessly this connection between violence and idealism that lies at the heart of the process by which the narratives of citizenship and modernity come to find a natural home in “history.” I register a fundamental disagreement here with a position taken by Richard Rorty in an exchange with Jurgen Habermas. Rorty criticizes Habermas for the latter’s conviction “that the story of modern philosophy is an important part of the story of the democratic societies’ attempts at self-reassurance.”<sup>45</sup> Rorty’s statement follows the practice of many Europeanists who speak of the histories of these “democratic societies” as if these were self-contained histories complete in themselves, as if the self-fashioning of the West was something that occurred only within its self-assigned geographical boundaries. At the very least, Rorty ignores the role that the “colonial theater” (both external and internal)—where the theme of “freedom” as defined by modern political philosophy was constantly invoked in aid of the ideas of “civilization,” “progress,” and latterly “development”—played in the process of engendering this “reassurance.” The task, as I see it, will be to wrestle with ideas that legitimize the modern state and its attendant institutions, in order to return to political philosophy—in the same way as suspect coins are returned to their owners in an Indian bazaar—its categories whose global currency can no longer be taken for granted.<sup>46</sup>

And, finally—since “Europe” cannot after all be provincialized within the institutional site of the university whose knowledge protocols will always take us back to the terrain where all contours follow that of my hyperreal Europe—the project of provincializing Europe must realize within itself its own impossibility. It therefore looks to a history that embodies this politics of despair. It will have been clear by now that this is not a call for cultural relativism or for atavistic, nativist histories. Nor is this a program for a simple rejection of modernity, which would be, in many situations, politically suicidal. I ask for a history that deliberately makes visible, within the very structure of its narrative forms, its own repressive strategies and practices, the part it plays in collusion with the narratives of citizenships in assimilating to the projects of the modern state all other possibilities of human solidarity. The politics of despair will require of such history that it lay bare to its readers the reasons why such a predicament is necessarily inescapable. This is a history that will attempt the impossible: to look toward its own death by tracing that which resists



and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous. This, as I have said, is impossible within the knowledge protocols of academic history, for the globality of academia is not independent of the globality that the European modern has created. To attempt to provincialize this “Europe” is to see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of “tradition” that “modernity” creates. There are of course no (infra)structural sites where such dreams could lodge themselves. Yet they will recur so long as the themes of citizenship and the nation-state dominate our narratives of historical transition, for these dreams are what the modern represses in order to be.

A postscript (1999): This chapter reproduces in an abridged form my first attempt (in 1992) at articulating the problem of provincializing Europe. This original statement remains a point of departure for what follows. Several of the themes broached in it—the need to critique historicism and to find strategies for thinking about historical difference without abandoning one’s commitment to theory—are fleshed out in the rest of the book. But the “politics of despair” I once proposed with some passion do not any longer drive the larger argument presented here.

## 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—however 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.

### CAPITAL, ABSTRACT LABOR, AND THE SUBLATION OF DIFFERENCE

Fundamental to Marx’s discussion of capital is the idea of the commodity, and fundamental to the conception of the commodity is the question of difference. 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 *Nicomachean Ethics* on such issues as justice, equality, and proportionality, focused on the problem of exchange. Exchange, he argued, was central to the formation of a community. But a community was always made up of people who were “different and unequal.” On the ground, there were only infinite incommensurabilities. Every individual was different. 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—this 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 sublate 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.

## CHAPTER 3

## Translating Life-Worlds into Labor and History

In truth, the historian can never get away from  
the question of time in history: time sticks to  
his thinking like soil to a gardener's spade.

(Fernand Braudel)

The vulgar representation of time as a precise  
and homogeneous continuum has . . . diluted the  
Marxist concept of history.

(Giorgio Agamben)

A SECULAR SUBJECT like history faces certain problems in handling practices in which gods, spirits, or the supernatural have agency in the world. My central examples concern the history of work in South Asia. Labor, the activity of producing, is seldom a completely secular activity in India; it often entails, through rituals big and small, the invocation of divine or superhuman presence. Secular histories are usually produced by ignoring the signs of these presences. Such histories represent a meeting of two systems of thought, one in which the world is ultimately, that is, in the final analysis, disenchanted, and the other in which humans are not the only meaningful agents. For the purpose of writing history, the first system, the secular one, translates the second into itself. It is this translation—its methods and problems—that interests me here as part of a broader effort to situate the question of subaltern history within a postcolonial critique of modernity and of history itself.

This critique has to issue from within a dilemma: writing subaltern history, that is, documenting resistance to oppression and exploitation, must be part of a larger effort to make the world more socially just. To wrench subaltern studies away from the keen sense of social justice that gave rise to the project would violate the spirit that gives this project its sense of commitment and intellectual energy. Indeed, it may be said that it would violate the history of realist prose in India, for it may legitimately be argued that the administration of justice by modern institutions requires us to imagine the world through the languages of the social sciences, that is, as disenchanted.

## THE TIME OF HISTORY

History's own time is godless, continuous and, to follow Benjamin, empty and homogeneous. By this I mean that in employing modern historical consciousness (whether in academic writing or outside of it), we think of a world that, in Weber's description, is already disenchanted. Gods, spirits, and other "supernatural" forces can claim no agency in our narratives. Further, this time is empty because it acts as a bottomless sack: any number of events can be put inside it; and it is homogeneous because it is not affected by any particular events; its existence is independent of such events and in a sense it exists prior to them. Events happen in time but time is not affected by them. The time of human history—as any popular book on the evolution of this universe will show—merges with the time of prehistory, of evolutionary and geological changes that go back to the beginning of the universe. It is part of nature. This is what allowed J.B.S. Haldane once to write a book with the title *Everything Has a History*.<sup>1</sup> Hence the time of Newtonian science is no different from the time historians automatically assume to provide the ontological justification of their work. Things may move faster or slower in this time; that is simply the problem of speed. And the time may be cyclical or linear—the weeks belong to cyclical time, the English years go in hundred-year cycles, while the procession of years is a line. And historians may with justification talk about different regions of time: domestic time, work time, the time of the state, and so on. But all these times, whether cyclical or linear, fast or slow, are normally treated not as parts of a system of conventions, a cultural code of representation, but as something more objective, something belonging to "nature" itself. This nature/culture division becomes clear when we look at nineteenth-century uses of archaeology, for instance, in dating histories that provided no easy arrangements of chronology.

It is not that historians and philosophers of history are unaware of such a commonplace as the claim that modern historical consciousness, or for that matter academic history, are genres of recent origin (as indeed are the imaginations of the modern sciences). Nor have they been slow to acknowledge the changes these genres have undergone since their inception.<sup>2</sup> The naturalism of historical time, however, lies in the belief that *everything* can be historicized. So although the non-naturalness of the discipline of history is granted, the assumed universal applicability of its method entails the further assumption that it is always possible to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing, continuous flow of

historical time.<sup>3</sup> Thus, irrespective of a society's own understanding of temporality, a historian will always be able to produce a time line for the globe, in which for any given span of time, the events in areas X, Y, and Z can be named. It does not matter if any of these areas were inhabited by peoples such as the Hawaiians or the Hindus who, some would say, did not have a "sense of chronological history"—as distinct from other forms of memories and understandings of historicity—before European arrival. Contrary to whatever they themselves may have thought and however they may have organized their memories, the historian has the capacity to put them into a time we are all supposed to have shared, consciously or not. History as a code thus invokes a natural, homogeneous, secular, calendrical time without which the story of human evolution/civilization—a single human history, that is—cannot be told. In other words, the code of the secular calendar that frames historical explanations has this claim built into it: that independent of culture or consciousness, people exist in historical time. That is why it is always possible to discover "history" (say, after European contact) even if you were not aware of its existence in the past. History is supposed to exist in the same way as the earth.

I begin with the assumption that, to the contrary, this time, the basic code of history, does not belong to nature, that is, it is not completely independent of human systems of representation. It stands for a particular formation of the modern subject. This is not to say that this understanding of time is false or that it can be given up at will. But clearly the kind of correspondence that exists between our sensory worlds and the Newtonian imagination of the universe, between our experience of secular time and the time of physics, breaks down in many post-Einsteinian constructions. In the Newtonian universe, as in historical imagination, events are more or less separable from their descriptions: what is factual is seen as translatable from mathematics into prose or between different languages. Thus an elementary book on Newtonian physics can be written completely in the Bengali alphabet and numerals, using a minimum of mathematical signs. But not so with post-Einsteinian physics: language strains wildly when trying to convey in prose the mathematical imagination contained in an expression like "curved space" (for, thinking commonsensically, in what would such a space exist if not in space itself?). In this second case, one might say that the assumption of translatability does not quite hold, that really the imagination of Einsteinian physics is best learned through the language of its mathematics—for we are speaking of a universe of events in which the events cannot be separated from their

descriptions. Modern physics, one might say, took the linguistic turn early in this century. Post-Einsteinian cosmology, as the physicist Paul Davis puts it, makes even mathematical sense only so long as we do not try to take "a God's-eye-view" of the universe (that is, so long as one does not try to totalize or to view a "whole.") "I have grown used to dealing with the weird and wonderful world of relativity," writes Davis. "The ideas of space-warps, distortions in time and space and multiple universes have become everyday tools in the strange trade of the theoretical physics. . . . I believe that the reality exposed by modern physics is fundamentally alien to the human mind, and defies all power of direct visualization."<sup>4</sup>

Historians writing after the so-called linguistic turn may not any longer think that events are completely accessible by language, but the more sober among them would strive to avoid lunacy by resorting to weaker versions of this position. As put in the recent book *Telling the Truth about History*, historians, writing in the aftermath of postmodernism, would work toward an ideal of "workable truths," approximations of facts that can be agreed to by all even after it is granted that language and representations always form a (thin?) film between us and the world (in the same way as we can mostly ignore the insights of Einsteinian or quantum physics in negotiating our everyday movements in practical life). The higher ideal of translatability between different languages—thus Vietnamese history into Bengali—remains worth striving for even if language always foils the effort. This ideal—a modified Newtonianism—is, in their view, the historian's protection against the sheer madness of postmodernist and cultural-relativist talk about "untranslatability," "incommensurability," and all that.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the world of the physicist Paul Davis, then, in the discipline of history the imagination of reality is dependent on the capacities of "the human mind," its powers of visualization. The use of the definite article—"the human mind"—is critical here, for this reality aspires to achieve a status of transparency with regard to particular human languages, an ideal of objectivity entertained by Newtonian science in which translation between different languages is mediated by the higher language of science itself. Thus *pani* in Hindi and "water" in English can both be mediated by H<sub>2</sub>O. Needless to say, it is only the higher language that is capable of appreciating, if not expressing, the capacities of "the human mind." I would suggest that the idea of a godless, continuous, empty, and homogeneous time, which history shares with the other social sciences and modern political philosophy as a basic building block, belongs to this model of a higher, overarching language. It represents a structure of generality,



an aspiration toward the scientific, that is built into conversations that take the modern historical consciousness for granted.

A proposition of radical untranslatability therefore comes as a problem to the universal categories that sustain the historian's enterprise. But it is also a false problem created by the very nature of the universal itself, which aims to function as a supervening general construction mediating between all the particulars on the ground. The secular code of historical and humanist time—that is, a time bereft gods and spirits—is one such universal. Claims about agency on behalf of the religious, the supernatural, the divine, and the ghostly have to be mediated in terms of this universal. The social scientist-historian assumes that contexts explain particular gods: if we could all have the same context, then we would all have the same gods. But there is a problem. Although the sameness of our sciences can be guaranteed all the world over, the sameness of our gods and spirits could not be proved in the same objective manner (notwithstanding the protestations of the well-meaning that all religions speak of the same God). So it could be said that although the sciences signify some kind of sameness in our understanding of the world across cultures, the gods signify differences (bracketing for the moment the history of conversion, which I touch on very briefly in a later section). Writing about the presence of gods and spirits in the secular language of history or sociology would therefore be like translating into a universal language that which belongs to a field of differences.

The history of work in South Asia provides an interesting example of this problem. "Work" or "labor" are words deeply implicated in the production of universal sociologies. Labor is one of the key categories in the imagination of capitalism itself. In the same way that we think of capitalism as coming into being in all sorts of contexts, we also imagine the modern category "work" or "labor" as emerging in all kinds of histories. This is what makes possible studies in the familiar genre of "history of work in . . .". In this sense, labor or work has the same status in my posing of the problem as does H<sub>2</sub>O in the relation between "water" and *pani*. Yet the fact is that the modern word "labor," as every historian of labor in India would know, translates into a general category a whole host of words and practices with divergent and different associations. What complicates the story further is the fact that in a society such as the Indian, human activity (including what one would, sociologically speaking, regard as labor) is often associated with the presence and agency of gods or spirits in the very process of labor. *Hathiyar puja* or the "worship of tools," for example, is a common and familiar festival in many north

Indian factories. How do we—and I mean narrators of the pasts of the subaltern classes in India—handle this problem of the presence of the divine or the supernatural in the history of labor as we render this enchanted world into our disenchanted prose—a rendering required, let us say, in the interest of social justice? And how do we, in doing this, retain the subaltern (in whose activity gods or spirits present themselves) as the subjects of their histories? I shall go over this question by examining the work of three *Subaltern Studies* historians who have produced fragments of histories of work in the context of "capitalist transition" in India: Gyan Prakash, Gyan Pandey, and myself. I hope that my discussion will have something to say about the historian's enterprise in general.

#### RENDERING ACTIVITY INTO "LABOR"

Let me begin with an example from my own research in labor history. Consider the following description from the 1930s of a particular festival (still quite common in India) that entails the worshipping of machinery by workers: "In some of the jute mills near Calcutta the mechanics often sacrifice goats at this time [autumn]. A separate alter is erected by the mechanics. . . . Various tools and other emblems are placed upon it. . . . Incense is burnt. . . . Towards evening a male goat is thoroughly washed . . . and prepared for a . . . final sacrifice. . . . The animal is decapitated at one stroke . . . [and] the head is deposited in the . . . sacred Ganges."<sup>6</sup> This particular festival is celebrated in many parts of north India as a public holiday for the working class, on a day named after the engineer god Vishvakarma.<sup>7</sup> How do we read it? To the extent that this day has now become a public holiday in India, it has obviously been subjected to a process of bargaining between employers, workers, and the state. One could also argue that insofar as the ideas of recreation and leisure belong to a discourse of what makes labor efficient and productive, this "religious" holiday itself belongs to the process through which labor is managed and disciplined, and is hence a part of the history of emergence of abstract labor in commodity form. The very public nature of the holiday shows that it has been written into an emergent national, secular calendar of production. We could thus produce a secular narrative that would apply to any working-class religious holiday anywhere. Christmas or the Muslim festival Id could be seen in the same light. The difference between Vishvakarma *puja* (worship) and Christmas or Id would then be explained anthropologically, that is, by holding another master code—"cul-

ture” or “religion”—constant and universal. The differences between religions are by definition incapable of bringing the master category “culture” or “religion” into any kind of crisis. We know that these categories are problematic, that not all people have what is called “culture” or “religion” in the English senses of these words, but we have to operate as though this limitation was not of any great moment. This was exactly how I treated this episode in my own book. The eruption of Vishvakarma *puja* interrupting the rhythm of production, was no threat to my Marxism or secularism. Like many of my colleagues in labor history, I interpreted worshipping machinery—an everyday fact of life in India, from taxis to scooter-rickshaws, minibuses and lathe machines—as “insurance policy” against accidents and contingencies. That in the so-called religious imagination (as in language), redundancy—the huge and, from a strictly functionalist point of view, unnecessarily elaborate panoply of iconography and rituals—proved the poverty of a purely functionalist approach never deterred my secular narrative. The question of whether or not the workers had a conscious or doctrinal belief in gods and spirits was also wide of the mark; after all, gods are as real as ideology is—that is to say, they are embedded in practices.<sup>8</sup> More often than not, their presence is collectively invoked by rituals rather than by conscious belief.

The history of weaving in colonial Uttar Pradesh that Gyanendra Pandey examines in his book *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* offers us another example of this tension between the general secular time of history and the singular times of gods and spirits.<sup>9</sup> Pandey’s work deals with the history of a group of north Indian Muslim weavers called the Julahas, and constitutes an imaginative and radical reexamination of the stereotype of religious fanatics through which the British colonial officials saw them. The Julahas, Pandey shows, faced increasing displacement from their craft as a consequence of colonial economic policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this had much to do with the history of their cultural practices in this period. Pandey’s text, however, reveals problems of translation of specific life-worlds into universal sociological categories similar to those implicit in my work on labor. On the one hand, he has recourse to a general figure, that of the weaver-in-general during early industrialization. This figure underlies his comparativist gestures toward European history. The sentence that opens the chapter on “The Weavers” in *The Making of the English Working Class*—“The history of the weavers in the nineteenth century is haunted by the legend of better days”—and a generalizing quote from Marx act as the framing devices for Pandey’s chapter. “[B]ecause of the nature of

their occupation,” writes Pandey, “weavers *everywhere* [emphasis added] have been commonly dependent on money lenders and other middlemen and vulnerable to the play of the market forces, all the more so in the era of the advance of industrial capitalism.” He adds a few pages later, “The history of the north Indian weavers in the nineteenth century is, in E. P. Thompson’s phrase from another context, ‘haunted by the legend of better days.’”<sup>10</sup> Further on, he writes in a Thompsonian vein of the weavers’ “fight to preserve . . . their economic and social status” and of “their memories and pride” that fueled this fight.<sup>11</sup>

Pandey’s own sensitivity and his acute sense of responsibility to the evidence, on the other hand, present the question of historical difference—already hinted at in his gesture of assigning the Thompson quote to a “different context”—in such a forceful manner that the comparativist stance is rendered problematic. The “legend of better days” in Thompson’s account is entirely secular. It refers to a “golden age” made up of stories about “personal and . . . close” relations between “small masters and their men,” about “strongly organized trade societies,” relative material prosperity, and the weavers’ “deep attachment to the values of independence.”<sup>12</sup> A Wesleyan church in the village community marked, if anything, the physical and existential distance between the loom and God, and the weavers, as Thompson says, were often critical of the “parish-church pa’son’s.”<sup>13</sup> God, on the other hand, is ever present in the phenomenology of weaving in north India as Pandey explains it, and it is a god quite different from Thompson’s. Indeed, as Pandey makes clear, work and worship were two inseparable activities to the Julahas, so inseparable, in fact, that one could ask whether it makes sense to ascribe to them the identity that only in the secular and overlapping languages of the census, administration, and sociology becomes the name of their “occupation”: weaving.

As Pandey explains, his weavers called themselves *nurbaf* or “weavers of light.” Drawing on Deepak Mehta’s study of “Muslim weavers in two villages of Bara Banki district,” Pandey notes “the intimate connection between work and worship in the lives of the weavers, and the centrality of the weavers’ major religious text (or *kitab*), the *Mufid-ul-Mominin* in the practice of both.” The *Mufid-ul-Mominin*, Pandey adds, “relates how the practice of weaving came into the world at its very beginning” (by a version of the Adam, Hawwa [Eve], and Jabril [Gabriel] story), and “lists nineteen supplicatory prayers to be uttered in the different stages of weaving.”<sup>14</sup> During the initiation of novices, notes Pandey, “all the prayers associated with the loom are recited. . . . The male head-weaver, in whose

household this initiation takes place, reads out all of Adam's questions and Jabril's answers from the *kitab* during the first six days of the month when both the loom and the *karkhana* [workshop or work loom] are ritually cleaned." When the loom is passed on from father to son, again, "the entire conversation between Adam and Jabril is read out once by a holy man."<sup>15</sup> This was nothing like an enactment of some memory of times past, nor a nostalgia, as Thompson puts it, haunted by the "legend of better days." The *Mufid-ul-Mominin* is not a book that has come down to present-day Julahas from a hoary antiquity. Deepak Mehta expressed the view to Pandey that it "may well date from the post-Independence period." Pandey himself is of the opinion that "it is more than likely that the *Mufid-ul-Mominin* came to occupy this place as the "book" of the weavers fairly recently—not before the late nineteenth or the early twentieth century, in any case—for it is only from that time that the name "Momin" (the faithful) was claimed as their own by the weavers.<sup>16</sup>

So Pandey's Julahas are actually both like and unlike Thompson's weavers, and it is their difference that allows us to raise the question of how one may narrate the specificity of their life-world as it was increasingly being subordinated to the globalizing urges of capital. Was their god the same as the god of Thompson's Wesleyans? How would one translate into the other? Can we take this translation through some idea of a universal and freely exchangeable God, an icon of our humanism? I cannot answer the question because of my ignorance—I have no intimate knowledge of the Julahas' god—but Richard Eaton's study of Islamic mysticism in the Deccan in India gives us some further insights into what I might crudely call nonsecular and phenomenological histories of labor.<sup>17</sup>

Eaton quotes from seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century Sufi manuscripts songs that Muslim women in the Deccan sang while engaged in such tasks as spinning, grinding millet, and rocking children to sleep. They all reveal, as Eaton puts it, "the ontological link between God, the Prophet, the *pir* [the Sufi teacher], and [work]."<sup>18</sup> "As the *chakki* [grindstone] turns, so we find God," Eaton quotes an early eighteenth-century song: "it shows its life in turning as we do in breathing." Divinity is sometimes brought to presence through analogy, as in:

The *chakki's* handle resembles *alif*, which means Allah;  
And the axle is Muhammad . . .

and sometimes in ways that make the bodily labor of work and worship absolutely inseparable experiences, as is suggested by this song sung at the spinning wheel:

As you take the cotton, you should do *zikh-i jali* [*zikh*: mention of God].  
As you separate the cotton, you should do *zikh-i qalbi*,  
And as you spool the thread you should do *zikh-i 'aini*.  
*Zikh* should be uttered from the stomach through the chest,  
And threaded through the throat.  
The threads of breath should be counted one by one, oh sister,  
Up to twenty-four thousand.  
Do this day and night,  
And offer it to your *pir* as a gift.<sup>19</sup>

Straining further toward the imaginative richness of this phenomenology of turning the *chakki* would require us to explore the differences between the different kinds of *zikh*s mentioned in this song and to enter imaginatively the "mysticism" (once again, a generalizing name!) that envelops them. But on what grounds do we assume, ahead of any investigation, that this divine presence invoked at every turn of the *chakki* will translate neatly into a secular history of labor so that—transferring the argument back to the context of the tool-worshipping factory workers—the human beings collected in modern industries may indeed appear as the subjects of a metanarrative of Marxism, socialism, or even democracy?

Gyan Prakash's monograph on the history of "bonded" labor in Bihar in colonial India contains an imaginative discussion of *bhuts* (spirits) that are thought to have supernatural power over humans, although they do not belong to the pantheon of divinity. Prakash documents how these *bhuts* intercede in the relations of agrarian production in Gaya, particularly a special category of *bhut* called *malik devata* (spirits of dead landlords). But Prakash's monograph, at the same time, is part of a conversation in academia, as all good historical work has to be, for that is the condition of its production. This conversation is an inherent part of the process through which books and ideas express their own commodified character; they all participate in a general economy of exchange made possible through the emergence of abstract, generalizing categories. It is instructive, therefore, to see how the protocols of that conversation necessarily structure Prakash's explanatory framework and thereby obliterate from view some of the tensions of irreducible plurality I am trying to visualize in the history of labor itself. Prakash writes: "In such fantastic images, the *malik's* [landlord's] power was reconstructed. Like Tio, the devil worshipped by the miners in Bolivia, the *malik* represented subordination of the *Bhuinyas* [laborers] by landlords. But whereas Tio expressed the alienation of miners from capitalist production, as Michael Taussig



so eloquently argues, the *malik devata* of colonial Gaya echoed the power of the landlords over *kamiyas*, based on land control.<sup>20</sup>

Now, Prakash is not wrong in any simple sense; his sensitivity to the “logic of ritual practice” is, in fact, exemplary. It is just that I am reading this passage to understand the conditions for intertextuality that govern its structure and allow a conversation to emerge between Prakash’s study, located in colonial Bihar in India, and Taussig’s study of labor in the Bolivian tin mines. How do the specific and the general come together in this play of intertextuality, as we try to think our way to the art of “holding apart” that which coalesces *within* the process of this “coming together” of disparate histories?

The intertextuality of the passage from Prakash is based on the simultaneous assertion of likeness and dissimilarity between *malik devata* and Tio: witness the contradictory moves made by the two phrases, “like Tio” and “whereas Tio.” They are similar in that they have similar relationship to “power”: they both “express” and “echo” it. Their difference, however, is absorbed in a larger theoretic-universal difference between two different kinds of power, capitalist production and “land control.” Pressed to the extreme, “power” itself must emerge as a last-ditch universal-sociological category (as indeed happens in texts that look for sociology in Foucault). But this “difference” already belongs to the sphere of the general.

Normally, the condition for conversation between historians and social scientists working on disparate sites is a structure of generality within which specificities and differences are contained. Paul Veyne’s distinction between “specificity” and “singularity” is relevant here. As Veyne puts it: “History is interested in individualized events . . . but it is not interested in their individuality; it seeks to understand them—that is, to find among them a kind of generality or, more precisely, of specificity. It is the same with natural history; its curiosity is inexhaustible, all the species matter to it and none is superfluous, but it does not propose the enjoyment of their singularity in the manner of the bestiary of the Middle Ages, in which one could read descriptions of noble, beautiful, strange or cruel animals.”<sup>21</sup>

The very conception of the “specific” as it obtains in the discipline of history, in other words, belongs to the structure of a general that necessarily occludes our view of the singular. Of course, nothing exists out there as a “singular-in-itself.” Singularity is a matter of viewing. It comes into being as that which resists our attempt to see something as a particular instance of a general idea or category. Philosophically, it is a limiting

concept, since language itself mostly speaks of the general. Facing the singular might be a question of straining against language itself; it could, for example, involve the consideration of the manner in which the world, after all, remains opaque to the generalities inherent in language. Here, however, I am using a slightly weaker version of the idea. By “singular” I mean that which defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination. To indicate what the struggle to view the singular might entail in the case of writing history, let us begin from a seemingly absurd position and see what happens to our intertextual conversation if we reverse the propositions of Prakash (and Taussig) to claim first, that the “alienation of [Bolivian] miners from capitalist production” expressed the spirit of Tio, and second, that “the power of the landlord over [Bihari] *kamiyas*” “echoed” the power of the *malik devata*. The conversation stalls. Why? Because we do not know what the relationship is between *malik devata* and Tio. They do not belong to structures of generalities, nor is there any guarantee that a relationship could exist between the two without the mediation of the language of social science. Between “capitalist production” and the “power of the landlord,” however, the relationship is known—or at least we think we know it—thanks to all the grand narratives of transition from precapital to capital. The relationship is always at least implicit in our sociologies that permeate the very language of social-science writing.

## TWO MODELS OF TRANSLATION

Let me make it clear that the raging Medusa of cultural relativism is not rearing her ugly head in my discussion at this point. To allow for plurality, signified by the plurality of gods, is to think in terms of singularities. To think in terms of singularities, however—and this I must make clear since so many scholars these days are prone to see parochialism, essentialism, or cultural relativism in every claim of non-Western difference—is *not* to make a claim against the demonstrable and documentable permeability of cultures and languages. It is, in fact, to appeal to models of cross-cultural and cross-categorical translations that do not take a universal middle term for granted. The Hindi *pani* may be translated into the English “water” without having to go through the superior positivity of H<sub>2</sub>O. In this, at least in India but perhaps elsewhere as well, we have something to learn from nonmodern instances of cross-categorical translation.

I give an example here of the translation of Hindu gods into expressions of Islamic divinity that was performed in an eighteenth-century Bengali religious text called *Shunya-puran*. (The evidence belongs to the “history of conversion” to Islam in Bengal.) This text has a description, well known to students of Bengali literature, of Islamic wrath falling upon a group of oppressive Brahmins. As part of this description, it gives the following account of an exchange of identities between individual Hindu deities and their Islamic counterparts. What is of interest here is the way this translation of divinities works:

Dharma who resided in Baikuntha was grieved to see all this [Brahminic misconduct]. He came to the world as a Muhammadan . . . [and] was called Khoda. . . . Brahma incarnated himself as Muhammad, Visnu as Paigambar and Civa became Adamfa (Adam). Ganesa came as a Gazi, Kartika as a Kazi, Narada became a Sekha and Indra a Moulana. The Risis of heaven became Fakirs. . . . The goddess Chandi incarnated herself as Haya Bibi [the wife of the original man] and Padmavati became Bibi Nur [Nur = light].<sup>22</sup>

Eaton’s recent study of Islam in Bengal gives many more such instances of translation of gods. Consider the case of an Arabic-Sanskrit bilingual inscription from a thirteenth-century mosque in coastal Gujarat that Eaton cites in his discussion. The Arabic part of this inscription, dated 1264, “refers to the deity worshiped in the mosque as Allah” while, as Eaton puts it, “the Sanskrit text of the same inscription addresses the supreme god by the names Visvanatha (‘lord of the universe’), Sunyarupa (‘one whose form is of the void’), and Visvarupa (‘having various forms’).”<sup>23</sup> Further on, Eaton gives another example: “The sixteenth-century poet Haji Muhammad identified the Arabic Allah with Gosai (Skt. ‘Master’), Saiyid Murtaza identified the Prophet’s daughter Fatima with Jagat-janani (Skt. ‘Mother of the World’), and Saiyid Sultan identified the God of Adam, Abraham, and Moses with Prabhu (Skt. ‘Lord’).”<sup>24</sup>

In a similar vein, Carl W. Ernst’s study of South Asian Sufism mentions a coin issued by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna (c. 1018 c.e.) that contained “a Sanskrit translation of the Islamic profession of faith.” One side of the coin had an Arabic inscription whereas the other side said, in Sanskrit: *avyaktam ekam muhamadah avatarah nrpati mahamuda* (which Ernst translates as, “There is One unlimited [unmanifest?], Muhammad is the *avatar*, the king is Mahmud”). Ernst comments, expressing a sensibility that is no doubt modern: “The selection of the term *avatar* to translate the Arabic *rasul*, ‘messenger,’ is striking, since *avatar* is a term reserved

in Indian thought for the descent of the god Vishnu into earthly form. . . . It is hard to do more than wonder at the theological originality of equating the Prophet with the *avatar* of Vishnu.”<sup>25</sup>

The interesting point, for our purpose and in our language, is how the translations in these passages take for their model of exchange barter rather than the generalized exchange of commodities, which always needs the mediation of a universal, homogenizing middle term (such as, in Marxism, abstract labor). The translations here are based on very local, particular, one-for-one exchanges, guided in part, no doubt—at least in the case of *Shunya-puran*—by the poetic requirements of alliterations, meter, rhetorical conventions, and so on. There are surely rules in these exchanges, but the point is that even if I cannot decipher them all—and even if they are not all decipherable, that is to say, even if the processes of translation contain a degree of opacity—it can be safely asserted that these rules cannot and would not claim to have the “universal” character of the rules that sustain conversations between social scientists working on disparate sites of the world. As Gautam Bhadra has written: “One of the major features of these types of cultural interaction [between Hindus and Muslims] is to be seen at the linguistic level. Here, recourse is often had to the consonance of sounds or images to transform one god into another, a procedure that appeals more . . . to popular responses to alliteration, rhyming and other rhetorical devices—rather than to any elaborate structure of reason and argument.”<sup>26</sup>

One critical aspect of this mode of translation is that it makes no appeal to any of the implicit universals that inhere in the sociological imagination. When it is claimed, for instance, by persons belonging to devotional traditions (*bhakti*) that “the Hindu’s Ram is the same as the Muslim’s Rahim,” the contention is not that some third category expresses the attributes of Ram or Rahim better than either of these two terms and thus mediates in the relationship between the two. Yet such claim is precisely what would mark an act of translation modeled on Newtonian science. The claim there would be that not only do H<sub>2</sub>O, water, and *pani* refer to the same entity or substance but that H<sub>2</sub>O best expresses or captures the attributes, the constitutional properties, of this substance. “God” became such an item of universal equivalence in the nineteenth century, but this is not characteristic of the kind of cross-categorical translations we are dealing with here.

Consider the additional example Ernst provides of such nonmodern translation of gods. He mentions “a fifteenth century Sanskrit text written in Gujarati for guidance of Indian architects employed to build mosques.

In it, the god Visvakarma says of the mosque, 'There is no image and there they worship, through *dhyana*, . . . the formless, attributeless, all-pervading Supreme God whom they call Rahamana.'<sup>27</sup> The expression "supreme God" does not function in the manner of a scientific third term, for it has no higher claims of descriptive ability, it does not stand for a truer reality. For, after all, if the supreme One was without attributes, how could one human language claim to have captured the attributes of this divinity better than a word in another language that is also human? These instances of translation do not necessarily suggest peace and harmony between Hindus and Muslims, but they are translations in which codes are switched locally, without going through a universal set of rules. There are no overarching censoring/limiting/defining systems of thought that neutralize and relegate differences to the margins, nothing like an overarching category of "religion" that is supposed to remain unaffected by differences between the entities it seeks to name and thereby contain. The very obscurity of the translation process allows the incorporation of that which remains untranslatable.

#### HISTORICAL TIME AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

It is obvious that this nonsociological mode of translation lends itself more easily to fiction, particularly of the nonrealist or magic-realist variety practiced today, than to the secular and realist prose of sociology or history. In these fictive narratives, gods and spirits can indeed be agents. But then what of history? What of its abiding allegiance to secular, continuous, empty, homogenous time? And what of the project of Marxist-subaltern history in which this work participates? Mine is not a postmodern argument announcing the death of history and recommending fiction writing as a career for all historians. For, the question of personal talents apart, there is a good reason why the training of the mind in modern historical consciousness is justified even from the point of view of the subaltern, and this has to do with the intermeshing of the logic of secular human sciences with that of bureaucracies. One cannot argue with modern bureaucracies and other instruments of governmentality without recourse to the secular time and narratives of history and sociology. The subaltern classes need this knowledge in order to fight their battles for social justice. It would therefore be unethical not to make historical consciousness available to everybody, in particular the subaltern classes.

Yet historicism carries with it, precisely because of its association with the logic of bureaucratic decision making, an inherent modernist elitism that silently lodges itself in our everyday consciousness.<sup>28</sup> Eaton begins the last chapter of his meticulously researched book on Bengali Islam with a historicist sentence that aims to appeal to the trained aesthetic sensibility of all historians: "Like the strata of a geologic fossil record, place names covering the surface of a map silently testify to past historical processes."<sup>29</sup> However, the point at issue is not how individual historians think about historical time, for it is not the self-regarding attitude of historians that make history, the subject, important in the world outside academia. History is important as a form of consciousness in modernity (historians may want to see themselves as its arbiters and custodians, but that is a different question). Let me explain, therefore, with the help of an ordinary, casual example, how a certain sense of historical time works in the everyday speech of public life in modern societies.

Consider the following statement in a newspaper article by the cultural-studies specialist Simon During in an issue of the Melbourne daily *Age* (19 June 1993): "thinking about movies like *Of Mice and Men* and *The Last of the Mohicans* allows us to see more clearly where contemporary culture is going."<sup>30</sup> During is not the target of my comments. My remarks pertain to a certain habit of thought that the statement illustrates: the imagination of historical time that is built into this use of the word "contemporary." Clearly, the word involves the double gesture of both inclusion and exclusion, and an implicit acceptance of this gesture is the condition that enables the sentence to communicate its point. On the one hand, "contemporary" refers to all that belongs to a culture at a particular point on the (secular) calendar that the author and the intended reader of this statement inhabit. In that sense, everybody is part of the "contemporary." Yet, surely, it is not being claimed that every element in the culture is moving toward the destination that the author has identified in the films mentioned. What about, for instance, the peasants of Greece, if we could imagine them migrating to the "now" of the speaker? (I mention the Greeks because they constitute one of the largest groups of European immigrants into Australia.) They may inhabit the speaker's "now" and yet may not be going in the direction that *The Last of the Mohicans* suggests.<sup>31</sup> The implicit claim of the speaker is not that these people are not moving but that whatever futures these others may be building for themselves will soon be swamped and overwhelmed by the future the author divines on the basis of his evidence. That is the gesture of exclusion built into this use of the word "contemporary."



If this sounds like too strong a claim, try the following thought experiment. Suppose we argue that the contemporary is actually plural, so radically plural that it is not possible for any particular aspect or element to claim to represent the whole in any way (even as a possible future). Under these conditions, a statement such as During's would be impossible to make. We would instead have to say that "contemporary culture," being plural and there being equality within plurality, was going many different places at the same time (I have problems with "at the same time," but let's stay with it for the present). Then there would be no way of talking about the "cutting edge," the avant-garde, the latest that represents the future, the most modern, and so on. Without such a rhetoric and a vocabulary and the sentiments that go with them, however, many of our everyday political strategies in the scramble for material resources would be impossible to pursue. How would you get government backing, research funding, institutional approval for an idea if you could not claim on its behalf that it represents the "dynamic" part of the contemporary, which thus is pictured as always split into two, one part rushing headlong into the future, and another passing away into the past, something like the living dead in our midst?

A certain kind of historicism, the metanarrative of progress, is thus deeply embedded in our institutional lives however much we may develop, as individual intellectuals, an attitude of incredulity toward such metanarratives. (Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* actually concedes this point.)<sup>32</sup> This we need to develop critiques of institutions on their own terms, secular critiques for secular institutions of government. Marx's thoughts, still the most effective secular critique of "capital," remain indispensable to our engagement with the question of social justice in capitalist societies. But my point is that what is indispensable remains inadequate, for we still have to translate into the time of history and the universal and secular narrative of "labor" stories about being human that incorporate agency on the part of gods and spirits.

At this point I want to acknowledge and learn from the modes of translation that I have called nonmodern, the barterlike term-for-term exchanges that bypass all the implicit sociologies of our narratives of capitalism. This mode of translation is antisociology and for that reason has no obligation to be secular. The past is pure narration, no matter who has agency in it. Fiction and films, as I have said, are the best modern media for handling this mode. But this option is not open to the historian writing in search of social justice and equity. Criticism in the historical mode, even when it does not institute a human subject at the center of history,

seeks to dispel and demystify gods and spirits as so many ploys of secular relationships of power. The moment we think of the world as disenchanting, however, we set limits to the ways the past can be narrated. As a practicing historian, one has to take these limits seriously. For instance, there are cases of peasant revolts in India in which the peasants claimed to have been inspired to rebellion by the exhortations of their gods. For a historian, this statement would never do as an explanation, and one would feel obliged to translate the peasants' claim into some kind of context of understandable (that is, secular) causes animating the rebellion. I assume that such translation is both inevitable and unavoidable (for we do not write for the peasants). The question is: How do we conduct these translations in such a manner as to make visible all the problems of translating diverse and enchanted worlds into the universal and disenchanting language of sociology?

Here I have learned from Vincente Raphael's and Gayatri Spivak's discussions of the politics of translation.<sup>33</sup> We know that given the plurality of gods, the translation from godly time into the time of secular labor could proceed along a variety of paths. But whatever the nature of the path, this translation, to borrow from Spivak's and Rafael's handling of the question, must possess something of the "uncanny" about it. An ambiguity must mark the translation of the tool-worshiping jute worker's labor into the universal category "labor": it must be enough like the secular category "labor" to make sense, yet the presence and plurality of gods and spirits in it must also make it "enough unlike to shock."<sup>34</sup> There remains something of a "scandal"—of the shocking—in every translation, and it is only through a relationship of intimacy to both languages that we are aware of the degree of this scandal.

This property of translation—that we become more aware of the scandalous aspects of a translation process only if we know both of the languages intimately—has been well expressed by Michael Gelven:

If an English-speaking student . . . sets out to learn German, he first looks up in a lexicon or vocabulary list a few basic German words. At this point, however, these German words are not German at all. They are merely sounds substituted for English meanings. They are, in a very real sense, English words. This means that they take their contextual significance from the . . . totality of the English language. . . . If a novice in German language picked up a copy of Schopenhauer's book and wondered what *Vorstellung* meant in the title, he would probably look the term up in the lexicon, and find such suggestions as "placing before."

And although he might think it strange to title a book "The World as Will and Placing Before," he would nevertheless have some idea of the meaning of that remarkable work. But as this novice worked himself through the language, and became familiar with the many uses of the term *Vorstellung* and actually used it himself . . . [h]e might, to his own surprise, realize that although he knew what the term meant, he could not translate the German term back into his own language—an obvious indication that the reference of meaning was no longer English as in his first encounter with it.<sup>35</sup>

Usually, or at least in South Asian studies, the Marxist or secular scholar who is translating the divine is in the place of the student who knows well only one of the two languages he is working with. It is all the more imperative, therefore, that we read our secular universals in such a way as to keep them open to their own finitude, so that the scandalous aspects of our unavoidable translations, instead of being made inaudible, actually reverberate through what we write in subaltern studies. To recognize the existence of this "scandal" in the very formation of our sociological categories is the first step we can take toward working the universalist and global archives of capital in such a way as to "blast . . . out of the homogeneous course of history" times that produce cracks in the structure of that homogeneity.<sup>36</sup>

#### LABOR AS A HISTORY OF DIFFERENCE IN THE TRANSLATION INTO CAPITALISM

In this concluding section I will try to show, by reading Marx with the help of the Derridean notion of the trace, how one may hold one's categories open in translating and producing, out of the pasts of the subaltern classes, what is undeniably a universal history of labor in the capitalist mode of production.<sup>37</sup>

Looking back at my own work on Indian "working-class" history a few years ago, I seem to have only half thought through the problem. I documented a history whose narrative(s) produced several points of friction with the teleologies of "capital." In my study of the jute-mill workers of colonial Bengal, I tried to show how the production relations in these mills were structured from the inside, as it were, by a whole series of relations that could only be considered precapitalist. The coming of capital and commodity did not appear to lead to the politics of equal rights

that Marx saw as internal to these categories. I refer here in particular to the critical distinction Marx draws between "real" and "abstract" labor in explaining the production and the form of the commodity. These distinctions refer to a question in Marx's thought that we may now recognize as the question of the politics of difference. The question for Marx was: If human beings are individually different from one another in their capacity to labor, how does capital produce out of this field of difference an abstract, homogeneous measure of labor that makes the generalized production of commodities possible?

This is how I then read the distinction between real and abstract labor (with enormous debt to Michel Henry and I. I. Rubin):<sup>38</sup>

Marx places the question of subjectivity right at the heart of his category "capital" when he posits the conflict between "real labour" and "abstract labour" as one of its central contradictions. "Real labour" refers to the labor power of the actual individual, labor power "as it exists in the personality of the labourer"—that is, as it exists in the "immediate exclusive individuality" of the individual. Just as personalities differ, similarly the labor power of one individual is different from that of another. "Real labour" refers to the essential heterogeneity of individual capacities. "Abstract" or general labor, on the other hand, refers to the idea of uniform, homogeneous labor that capitalism imposes on this heterogeneity, the notion of a general labor that underlies "exchange value." It is what makes labor measurable and makes possible the generalized exchange of commodities. It expresses itself . . . in capitalist discipline, which has the sole objective of making every individual's concrete labor—by nature heterogeneous—"uniform and homogeneous" through supervision and technology employed in the labor process. . . . Politically, . . . the concept of "abstract labour" is an extension of the bourgeois notion of the "equal rights" of "abstract individuals," whose political life is reflected in the ideals and practice of "citizenship." The politics of "equal rights" is thus precisely the "politics" one can read into the category "capital."<sup>39</sup>

It now seems to me that Marx's category of commodity has a certain built-in openness to difference that I did not fully exploit in my exposition. My reading of the term "precapital" remained, in spite of my efforts, hopelessly historicist, and my narrative never quite escaped the (false) question, Why did the Indian working class fail to sustain a long-term sense of class consciousness? The metaproblem of "failure" arises from

the well-known Marxist tradition of positing the working class as a trans-cultural subject. It is also clear from the above quote that my reading took the ideas of the "individual" and "personality" as unproblematically given, and read the word "real" (in "real labour") to mean something primordially natural (and therefore not social).

But my larger failure lay in my inability to see that if one reads the word "real" not as something that refers to a Rousseauian "natural," that is, the naturally different endowments of different, and ahistorical, individuals but rather as something that questions the nature-culture distinction itself, other possibilities open up, among them that of writing "difference" back into Marx. For the "real" then (in this reading) must refer to different kinds of "social," which could include gods and spirits—and hence to different orders of temporality, as well. It should in principle even allow for the possibility that these temporal horizons are mutually incommensurable. The transition from "real" to "abstract" is thus also a question of transition/translation from many and possibly incommensurable temporalities to the homogeneous time of abstract labor, the transition from nonhistory to history. "Real" labor, the category, itself a universal, must nevertheless have the capacity to refer to that which cannot be enclosed by the sign "commodity" even though what remains unenclosed constantly inheres in the sign itself. In other words, by thinking of the category "commodity" as constituted by a permanent tension between "real" and "abstract" labor, Marx, as it were, builds a memory into this analytical category of that which it can never completely capture. The gap between real and abstract labor and the force ("factory discipline," in Marx's description) constantly needed to close it, are what then introduce the movement of difference into the very constitution of the commodity, and thereby eternally defer the achievement of its true/ideal character.

The sign "commodity," as Marx explains, will always carry as part of its internal structure certain universal emancipatory narratives. If one overlooked the tension Marx situated at the heart of this category, these narratives could indeed produce the standard teleologies one normally encounters in Marxist historicism: that of citizenship, the juridical subject of Enlightenment thought, the subject of political theory of rights, and so on. I have not sought to deny the practical utility of these narratives in modern political structures. The more interesting problem for the Marxist historian, it seems to me, is the problem of temporality that the category "commodity," constituted through the tension and possible noncommensurability between real and abstract labor, invites us to think. If real labor, as we have said, belongs to a world of heterogeneity whose various tempo-

ralities cannot be enclosed in the sign "history,"—Michael Taussig's work on Bolivian tin miners has shown that they are not even all "secular" (that is, bereft of gods and spirits)—then it can find a place in a historical narrative of commodity production only as a Derridean trace of that which cannot be enclosed, an element that constantly challenges from within capital's and commodity's—and by implication, history's—claims to unity and universality.<sup>40</sup>

The prefix *pre* in "precapital," it could be said similarly, is not a reference to what is simply chronologically prior on an ordinal, homogeneous scale of time. "Precapitalist" speaks of a particular relationship to capital marked by the tension of difference in the horizons of time. The "precapitalist," on the basis of this argument, can only be imagined as something that exists within the temporal horizon of capital and that at the same time disrupts the continuity of this time by suggesting another time that is not on the same, secular, homogeneous calendar (which is why what is precapital is not chronologically prior to capital, that is to say, one cannot assign it to a point on the same continuous time line). This is another time that, theoretically, could be entirely immeasurable in terms of the units of the godless, spiritless time of what we call "history," an idea already assumed in the secular concepts of "capital" and "abstract labor."

Subaltern histories, thus conceived in relationship to the question of difference, will have a split running through them. On the one hand, they are "histories" in that they are constructed within the master code of secular history and use the accepted academic codes of history writing (and thereby perforce subordinate to themselves all other forms of memory). On the other hand, they cannot ever afford to grant this master code its claim of being a mode of thought that comes to all human beings naturally, or even to be treated as something that exists in nature itself. Subaltern histories are therefore constructed within a particular kind of historicized memory, one that remembers history itself as an imperious code that accompanied the civilizing process that the European Enlightenment inaugurated in the eighteenth century as a world-historical task. It is not enough to historicize "history," the discipline, for that only uncritically keeps in place the very understanding of time that enables us to historicize in the first place. The point is to ask how this seemingly imperious, all-pervasive code might be deployed or thought about so that we have at least a glimpse of its own finitude, a glimpse of what might constitute an outside to it. To hold history, the discipline, and other forms of memory together so that they can help in the interrogation of each other, to work out the ways these immiscible forms of recalling the past are



juxtaposed in our negotiations of modern institutions, to question the narrative strategies in academic history that allow its secular temporality the appearance of successfully assimilating to itself memories that are, strictly speaking, unassimilable—these are the tasks that subaltern histories are suited to accomplish in a country such as India. For to talk about the violent jolt the imagination has to suffer to be transported from a temporality cohabited by nonhumans and humans to one from which the gods are banished is not to express an incurable nostalgia for a long-lost world. Even for the members of the Indian upper classes, in no sense can this experience of traveling across temporalities be described as merely historical.

Of course, the empirical historians who write these histories are not peasants or tribals themselves. They produce history, as distinct from other forms of memory, precisely because they have been transposed and inserted—in our case, by England's work in India—into the global narratives of citizenship and socialism. They write history, that is, only after the social existence from their own labor has entered the process of being made abstract in the world market for ideational commodities. The subaltern, then, is not the empirical peasant or tribal in any straightforward sense that a populist program of history writing may want to imagine. The figure of the subaltern is necessarily mediated by problems of representation. In terms of the analysis that I have been trying to develop here, one may say that the subaltern fractures from within the very signs that tell of the emergence of abstract labor; the subaltern is that which constantly, from within the narrative of capital, reminds us of other ways of being human than as bearers of the capacity to labor. It is what is gathered under "real labor" in Marx's critique of capital, the figure of difference that governmentality (that is, in Foucault's terms, the pursuit of the goals of modern governments) all over the world has to subjugate and civilize.<sup>41</sup>

There are implications that follow. Subaltern histories written with an eye to difference cannot constitute yet another attempt, in the long and universalistic tradition of "socialist" histories, to help erect the subaltern as the subject of modern democracies, that is, to expand the history of the modern in such a way as to make it more representative of society as a whole. This is a laudable objective on its own terms and has undoubted global relevance. But thought does not have to stop at political democracy or the concept of egalitarian distribution of wealth (though the aim of achieving these ends will legitimately fuel many immediate political struggles). Subaltern histories will engage philosophically with questions of difference that are elided in the dominant traditions of Marxism. At the

same time, however, just as real labor cannot be thought of outside of the problematic of abstract labor, subaltern history cannot be thought of outside of the global narrative of capital—including the narrative of transition to capitalism—though it is not grounded in this narrative. Stories about how this or that group in Asia, Africa, or Latin America resisted the "penetration" of capitalism do not, in this sense, constitute "subaltern" history, for these narratives are predicated on imagining a space that is external to capital—the chronologically "before" of capital—but that is at the same time a part of the historicist, unitary time frame within which both the "before" and the "after" of capitalist production can unfold. The "outside" I am thinking of is different from what is simply imagined as "before or after capital" in historicist prose. This "outside" I think of, following Derrida, as something attached to the category "capital" itself, something that straddles a border zone of temporality, that conforms to the temporal code within which capital comes into being even as it violates that code, something we are able to see only because we can think/theorize capital, but that also always reminds us that other temporalities, other forms of worlding, coexist and are possible. In this sense, subaltern histories do not refer to a resistance prior and exterior to the narrative space created by capital; they cannot therefore be defined without reference to the category "capital." Subaltern studies, as I think of it, can only situate itself theoretically at the juncture where we give up neither Marx nor "difference," for, as I have said, the resistance it speaks of is something that can happen only *within* the time horizon of capital, and yet it has to be thought of as something that disrupts the unity of that time. Unconcealing the tension between real and abstract labor ensures that capital/commodity has heterogeneities and incommensurabilities inscribed in its core.

The real labor of my mill workers, then—let us say their relationship to their own labor on the day of Vishvakarma *puja*—is obviously a part of the world in which both they and the god Vishvakarma exist in some sense (it would be silly to reduce this coexistence to a question of conscious belief or of psychology). History cannot represent, except through a process of translation and consequent loss of status and signification for the translated, the heterotemporality of that world. History as a code comes into play as this real labor is transformed into the homogeneous, disciplined world of abstract labor, of the generalized world of exchange in which every exchange will be mediated by the sign "commodity." Yet, as the story of the Vishvakarma *puja* in the Calcutta mills shows, "real" labor inheres in the commodity and its secularized biography; its pres-

ence, never direct, leaves its effect in the breach that the stories of godly or ghostly intervention make in history's system of representation. As I have already said, the breach cannot be mended by anthropological cobbling, for that only shifts the methodological problems of secular narratives on to another, cognate territory. In developing Marxist histories after the demise of Communist party Marxisms, our task is to write and think in terms of this breach as we write history (for we cannot avoid writing history). If history is to become a site where pluralities will contend, we need to develop ethics and politics of writing that will show history, this gift of modernity to many peoples, to be constitutionally marked by this breach.

Or, to put it differently, the practice of subaltern history would aim to take history, the code, to its limits in order to make its unworking visible.

## Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts

RECENT STRUGGLES and debates around the rather tentative concept of multiculturalism in Western democracies have often fueled discussions of minority histories. As the writing of history has increasingly become entangled with the so-called "politics and production of identity" after the Second World War, the question has arisen in all democracies of whether to include in the history of the nation histories of previously excluded groups. In the 1960s, this list usually contained names of subaltern social groups and classes, such as, former slaves, working classes, convicts, and women. This mode of writing history came to be known in the seventies as history from below. Under pressure from growing demands for democratizing further the discipline of history, this list was expanded in the seventies and eighties to include the so-called ethnic groups, the indigenous peoples, children and the old, and gays, lesbians, and other minorities. The expression "minority histories" has come to refer to all those pasts on whose behalf democratically minded historians have fought the exclusions and omissions of mainstream narratives of the nation. Official or officially blessed accounts of the nation's past have been challenged in many countries by the champions of minority histories. Postmodern critiques of "grand narratives" have been used to question single narratives of the nation. Minority histories, one may say, in part express the struggle for inclusion and representation that are characteristic of liberal and representative democracies.

Minority histories as such do not have to raise any fundamental questions about the discipline of history. Practicing academic historians are often more concerned with the distinction between good and bad histories than with the question of who might own a particular piece of the past. Bad histories, it is assumed sometimes, give rise to bad politics. As Eric Hobsbawm says in a recent article, "bad history is not harmless history. It is dangerous."<sup>1</sup> "Good histories," on the other hand, are supposed to enrich the subject matter of history and make it more representative of society as a whole. Begun in an oppositional mode, "minority histories" can indeed end up as additional instances of "good history." The transfor-

ness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Times and the Trials of Cultural Translation," in his *The Location of Culture*, pp. 212–235.

58. I am grateful to Homi Bhabha for this expression. The relationship between the analytic and the hermeneutic traditions receives clear discussion in Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969). One cannot, however, be dogmatic about this division.

59. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?" *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992), pp. 1–26.

60. Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life" (1874) in his *Untimely Meditations*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 57–123.

61. See the discussion in my essay, "Reconstructing Liberalism? Notes toward a Conversation between Area Studies and Diasporic Studies," *Public Culture* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1998), pp. 457–481.

62. J. H. Broomfield, "The Forgotten Majority: The Bengal Muslims and September 1918," in D. A. Low ed., *Soundings in Modern South Asian History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), pp. 196–224.

63. See H. Aram Veaser, ed., *The New Historicism Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994).

64. See Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Hanover, N. H.: University Press of New England, 1983).

65. Ian Hacking, "Two Kinds of 'New Historicism' for Philosophers," in Ralph Cohen and Michael S. Roth eds., *History and . . . Historians within the Human Sciences* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1995), p. 298.

66. Maurice Mandelbaum, *History, Man and Reason* (Baltimore, 1971), p. 42 quoted in F. R. Ankersmit, "Historicism: An Attempt at Synthesis," *History and Theory* 36 (October 1995), pp. 143–161.

67. I depend here on Ankersmit, "Historicism"; Friederich Meinecke, *Historicism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, translated by J. E. Anderson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), and "Droysen's *Historik*: Historical Writing as a Bourgeois Science" in his *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 83–103; Leopold von Ranke, "Preface: *Histories of Romance and Germanic Peoples*," and "A Fragment from the 1830s" in Fritz Stern, ed., *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), pp. 55–60; Hans Meyerhoff, ed., *The Philosophy of History in Our Own Time: An Anthology* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), see "Introduction," pp. 1–24 and the section entitled "The Heritage of Historicism"; and Paul Hamilton, *Historicism* (London

and New York: Routledge, 1996). James Chandler's discussion of historicism in *England in 1819* is enormously helpful. I choose not to discuss Karl Popper's formulations on "historicism," as his use of the term has been acknowledged to be idiosyncratic.

68. "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in his *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Fontana/Collins, 1982), p. 263. For a critique of Benjamin in terms of his failure to acknowledge why chronologies retain their significance for historians, see Siegfried Kracauer, *History: The Last Things before the Last* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1995), chapter 6 in particular.

## Chapter 1

### Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History

1. Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," *Modern Asian Studies* 20, no. 3 (1986), p. 445.

2. I am indebted to Jean Baudrillard for the term "hyperreal" but my use differs from his. See his *Simulations*, translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Batchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983).

3. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 65.

4. Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, translated by David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp. 281–285. See also Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 167–168.

5. See the discussion in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Martin Nicholas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 469–512, and in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1971), pp. 593–613.

6. See my *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), chapter 7.

7. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d.), p. 60.

8. *Grundrisse*, p. 105.

9. See *Rethinking Working-Class History*, chapter 7 in particular.

10. Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885–1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1985), p. 1.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

12. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press 1988), p. 43, emphasis added. The words quoted here are Guha's. But I think they represent a sense of historio-



graphical responsibility that is shared by all the members of the Subaltern Studies collective.

13. See L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 26–27.

14. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968 [1951]), dedication page.

15. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed, 1986).

16. *Mudhusudan rachanabali* (in Bengali), (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1965), p. 449. See also Jogindranath Basu, *Michael Madhusudan Datter Jibancharit* (in Bengali) (Calcutta: Ashok Pustakalaya, 1978), p. 86.

17. My understanding of this poem has been enriched by discussions with Marjorie Levinson and David Bennett.

18. I am not making the claim that all of these genres necessarily emerge with bourgeois individualism. See Natalie Zemon Davis, "Fame and Secrecy: Leon Modena's *Life* as an Early Modern Autobiography," *History and Theory* 27 (1988), pp. 103–118, and "Boundaries and Sense of Self in Sixteenth-Century France," in Thomas C. Heller et al., eds., *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), pp. 53–63. See also Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, translated by Katherine Leary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 163–184.

19. See Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, chapter on Nehru.

20. M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1909) in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 10 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963), p. 15.

21. See the discussion in Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Studies and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 128–141.

22. Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), chapter 2.

23. William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

24. Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), p. 49.

25. See Sumit Sarkar, "Social History: Predicament and Possibilities," in Iqbal Khan, ed., *Fresh Perspective on India and Pakistan: Essays on Economics, Politics and Culture* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1987), pp. 256–274.

26. For reasons of space, I shall leave this claim here unsubstantiated, though I hope to have an opportunity to discuss it in detail elsewhere. I should qualify the statement by mentioning that it refers in the main to autobiographies published

between 1850 and 1910. Once women join the public sphere in the twentieth century, their self-fashioning takes on different dimensions.

27. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921–1952* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), pp. 350–351.

28. See Marx, *On the Jewish Question* in his *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 215–222.

29. Ramabai Ranade, *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences*, translated by Kusumavati Deshpande (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963), p. 77.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 84–85.

31. Meaghan Morris, "Metamorphoses at Sydney Tower," *New Formations*, 11 (Summer 1990), p. 10. Emphasis in original.

32. Amiya Chakravarty quoted in Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Discourse* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 163.

33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cathy Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 277.

34. See *Subaltern Studies*, vols. 1–7 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982–1991), and Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

35. See various essays in *Subaltern Studies* and Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects*.

36. Homi K. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in Annette Michelson, et al., eds., *October: The First Decade 1976–1986* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 317–326; also Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).

37. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Also see Spivak's interview published in *Socialist Review* 20, no. 3 July–September 1990.

38. On the close connection between imperialist ideologies and the teaching of history in colonial India, see Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-Century Agenda and Its Implications* (Calcutta: K. P. Bagchi, 1988).

39. Without in any way implicating them in the entirety of this argument, I may mention that there are parallels here between my statement and what Gyan Prakash and Nicholas Dirks have argued elsewhere. See Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (April 1990), pp. 383–408; Nicholas B. Dirks, "History as a Sign of the Modern," *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1990) pp. 25–33.

40. See Amartya Kumar Sen, *Of Ethics and Economics* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987). Tessa Morris-Suzuki's *A History of Japanese Economic Thought* (London: Routledge, 1989) makes interesting reading in this regard. I am grateful to Gavan McCormack for bringing this book to my attention.

41. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 184.
42. Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in Nelson and Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, p. 354.
43. David Arnold, "The Colonial Prison: Power, Knowledge, and Penology in Nineteenth-Century India," in D. Arnold and D. Hardiman, eds., *Subaltern Studies* 8 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995). I have discussed some of these issues in a Bengali article: "Sarir, samaj o rashtra—oupanibeshik bharate mahamari o janasangskriti," *Anustup*, annual no. (1988).
44. Lawrence Brilliant with Girija Brilliant, "Death for a Killer Disease," *Quest*, May/June 1978, p. 3. I owe this reference to Paul Greenough.
45. Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity," in Richard J. Bernstein, ed., *Habermas and Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), p. 169.
46. For an interesting and revisionist reading of Hegel in this regard see the exchange between Charles Taylor and Partha Chatterjee in *Public Culture* 3, no. 1 (1990). My book *Rethinking Working-Class History* attempts a small beginning in this direction.

## Chapter 2 The Two Histories of Capital

1. This chapter is concerned with the production—and not the circulation—side of capital. I concentrate mostly on *Capital*, vol. 1, the *Grundrisse*, and sections of *Theories of Surplus Value*. Considerations from the circulation side should not contradict my basic argument.
2. See my "Marxism and Modern India," in Alan Ryan, ed., *After the End of History* (London: Collins and Brown, 1992), pp. 79–84.
3. E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," in M. W. Flinn and T. C. Smout, eds., *Essays in Social History* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), pp. 66, 61.
4. *Wall Street Journal*, 11 October 1996. Thanks to Dipankar Chakravarti for drawing my attention to this article.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Sasthi Brata, *India: Labyrinths in the Lotus Land* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), p. 21, cited in S. N. Balagandhara, "The Heathen in His Blindness": *Asia, the West and Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 21. I have discussed this trope and its use by the Indian Marxist historian D. D. Kosambi in my essay in Bengali, "Bharatbasher adhunikatar itihash o shomoy-kalpana," *Aitihashik* 6, no. 2 (September 1997), pp. 121–128.
7. For Marx's idea regarding real and formal subsumption of labor under capital, see his "Results of the Immediate Process of Production," Appendix to Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol.1 [hereafter *Capital I*], translated by Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 1,019–1,049.

8. My book *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), discusses this proposition and takes it as its foundational gesture.
9. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, translated by Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1981), Book 5, pp. 125–127.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 126; see Cornelius Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, and Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Ourselves," in his *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, translated by Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), pp. 260–339, and in particular pp. 282–311.
12. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, p. 126n35.
13. Marx, *Capital I*, p. 151.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
15. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Martin Nicholas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 105.
16. *Capital I*, p. 134.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
18. I. I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value*, translated by Milos Samardžija and Fredy Perlman (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975 [1928]), pp. 131–138; Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 144–146; Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, and Politics," pp. 307–308; Jon Elster, *An Introduction to Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 4 rejects Marx's labor theory of value as unobjective and Hegelian (see p. 68 in particular).
19. *Capital I*, p. 128. Emphasis added.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 139, 165.
21. *Grundrisse*, p. 104.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.
23. *Capital I*, p. 128. Emphasis added.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 166–167.
25. Cf. Ronald L. Meek, *Studies in the Labour Theory of Value* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), p. 168: "The 'averaging' process, Marx's argument implies, takes place in history before it takes place in the minds of economists."
26. Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, and Politics," pp. 328–329: "to propose another institution of society is a matter of a political project and political aim, which are certainly subject to discussion and argument, but cannot be 'founded' in any kind of Nature or Reason. . . . Men are born neither free nor unfree, neither equal nor unequal. *We will them to be* (we will ourselves to be) free and equal." Emphasis in original.
27. *Capital I*, p. 465.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 550.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 635.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 342–343.
31. This is reminiscent of Lukács's contention that "class consciousness" was not a category that referred to what actually went on inside the heads of individual, empirical workers. Georg Lukács, "Class Consciousness," and "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in his *History and Class Consciousness*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 51, 197. David Harvey, *The Limits of Capital* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 114, writes: "[T]he duality of worker as 'object for capital' and as 'living creative subject' has never been adequately resolved in Marxist theory." I have criticisms of Harvey's reading of Marx on this point—one could argue, for instance, that for Marx, the worker could never be a thing-like "object for capital" (see below)—but Harvey's statement has the merit of recognizing a real problem in Marxist histories of "consciousness."
32. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cathy Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 277. The opposition of class-in-itself and class-for-itself, Spivak clarifies, does not define a program of "an ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level."
33. *Capital I*, p. 468
34. *Ibid.*, p. 549. See also p. 535. Sometimes Marx's examples allow us tantalizing glimpses of how one might construct a possible history of the modern machine incorporating into itself the live, physical, and animate body. "[B]efore the invention of the present locomotive," writes Marx, "an attempt was made to construct a locomotive with two feet, which it raised from the ground alternately, like a horse. It is only after a considerable development of the science of mechanics, and an accumulation of practical experience, that the form of a machine becomes settled entirely in accordance with mechanical principles, and emancipated from the traditional form of the tool from which it has emerged." *Capital I*, p. 505n18.
35. *Grundrisse*, p. 704.
36. *Capital I*, p. 504.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 497.
38. *Capital I*, pp. 517, 526, 546, 547, 518n39.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 395.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 489–490.
41. *Grundrisse*, p. 410. Emphasis added.
42. *Capital I*, pp. 549–550.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 450. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), p. 163, comments on these military analogies in Marx. But whereas disciplinary power, for Foucault, creates "the docile body," Marx posits the living body as a source of resistance to discipline.
44. *Grundrisse*, p. 548. Emphasis added.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 296. This is why Harvey's contention that Marx's "theory shows that, from the standpoint of capital, workers are indeed objects, a mere 'factor' of production . . . for the creation of surplus value" seems mistaken to me; Harvey, *Limits*, p. 113. The worker is a reified category, but the reification includes an irreducible element of life and (human) consciousness.
46. *Grundrisse*, p. 298. Emphasis added.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 703–704.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 298, 323.
49. *Hegel's Logic*, translated by William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 280 (Article 216, additions).
50. Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 332.
51. See *Hegel's Logic*, p. 281 (Article 219, addition). I prefer Taylor's translation of this passage to that of Wallace.
52. *Grundrisse*, pp. 500–501.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 701.
54. The quotations in this paragraph are from *ibid.*, pp. 700, 705, 706.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 460, 461; see also pp. 471–472, 488–489, 505.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 459. Nothing in this sense is inherently "precapitalist." Precapitalist could only be a designation used from the perspective of capital.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 459. Emphasis in original.
58. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), p. 491. Emphasis in original. See also *Grundrisse*, p. 105.
59. *Theories of Surplus Value*, 3, p. 491.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
61. Marx, *Capital I*, Preface to the First Edition: "for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity, is the economic cell-form" (p. 90).
62. *Theories of Surplus Value*, 3, p. 468.
63. *Grundrisse*, pp. 105–106.
64. *Grundrisse*, p. 459.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 410.
66. Max Horkheimer, "The Concept of Man," in his *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, translated by Matthew J O'Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1994), p. 22.
67. Marxist arguments have often in the past looked on advertising as merely an instance of the "irrationality" and "waste" inherent in the capitalist mode of production. See Raymond Williams, "Advertising: The Magic System," in Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 320–326.
68. The excellent discussion of "use value" in Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital"*, translated by Pete Burgess (London: Pluto Press, 1977), pp. 73–95 helps us appreciate how, as a category, "use value" moves in and out of



Marx's political-economic analysis. Spivak puts it even more strongly by saying that as a category of political economy, use value can appear "only after the appearance of the exchange relation." Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida," in her *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 106. Spivak categorically states, rightly I think, that "Marx left the slippery concept of 'use value' untheorized" (p. 97). My point is that Marx's thoughts on use value do not turn toward the question of human belonging or "worlding," for Marx retains a subject-object relationship between man and nature. Nature never escapes its "thingly" character in Marx's analysis.

69. As Marx defines it in the course of discussing Adam Smith's use of the category "productive labor," "only labour which produces capital is productive labour." Unproductive labor is that "which is not exchanged with capital but directly with revenue." He further explains: "An actor, for example, or even a clown, . . . is a productive labourer if he works in the service of a capitalist." Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), pp. 156–157.

70. *Grundrisse*, p. 305. Emphasis in original.

71. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), division I, chapter 3, "The Worldhood of the World," explains these terms. The more recent translation by Joan Stambaugh (*Being and Time* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996]) replaces "ready-to-hand" with "handiness" and "present-at-hand" with the expression "objectively present" (pp. 64, 69).

72. See the classic study on this theme, Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of Malays, Filipinos, and Javanese from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Centuries and Its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism* (London: Frank Cass, 1977). The theme of laziness, however, is a permanent theme within any capitalist structure, national or global. What would repay examination is the business (and business-school) literature on "motivation" in showing how much and how incessantly business wrestles with an unsolvable question: What motivates humans to "work"?

### Chapter 3

#### Translating Life-Worlds into Labor and History

1. J.B.S. Haldane, *Everything Has a History* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1951).

2. See Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (London: Edward Arnold, 1970); E. H. Carr's classic *What Is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) is a discussion of how the genre had changed in Carr's own lifetime; R. G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; first pub. 1936) distinguishes "the modern European idea of history" from other his-

torical sensibilities or the lack thereof; Marc Bloch in his *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1984; first pub. 1954) relates the historian's method to the modern "method of doubt." Fernand Braudel, *On History*, translated by Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) describes "history" as making up "one single intellectual adventure" in partnership with sociology (p. 69); J.G.A. Pocock's *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; first pub. 1957) gives the modern historical method a specific origin in seventeenth-century juridical thought.

3. An exception is Giorgio Agamben's essay, "Time and History: Critique of the Instant and the Continuum," in his *Infancy and History: Essays on the Destruction of Experience*, translated by Liz Heron (London and New York: Verso, 1993), pp. 89–108.

4. Paul Davis and John Gribbin, *The Matter Myth: Beyond Chaos and Complexity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), pp. 103–104.

5. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacobs, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994).

6. D. H. Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India* (New York, 1934), p. 409, quoted in Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), pp. 89–90.

7. For an analysis and description of this festival in its present-day form, see Leela Fernandes, *Producing Workers: The Politics of Gender, Class and Culture in the Calcutta Jute Mills* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

8. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), pp. 30–34.

9. Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 74; E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 297.

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 102.

12. See Thompson, *Making*, pp. 302, 303, 305.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 305, 323.

14. Pandey, *Communalism*, pp. 88, 97–98. Also Deepak Mehta, "The Semiotics of Weaving: A Case Study," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 26, no. 1 (January–June 1992), pp. 77–113.

15. Pandey, *Communalism*, pp. 98–99.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

17. Richard Maxwell Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur 1300–1700: Social Role of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

18. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 163–164.

20. Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 216.

21. Paul Veyne, *Writing History: Essay on Epistemology*, translated by Mina Moore-Rinvulcri (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), p. 56.
22. This translation is by Dinesh Chandra Sen. See his *History of Bengali Language and Literature* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1911), pp. 36–37. The passage is also discussed in Sukumar Sen, *Bangala sahityer itihās* (in Bengali), vol. 1 (Calcutta: Ananda Publishers, 1991), pp. 114–116, and in Gautam Bhadra, “The Mentality of Subalternity: *Kantanama* or *Rajadharma*,” in Ranajit Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 54–91.
23. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), p. 275.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
25. Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 52.
26. Bhadra, “Mentality,” p. 65.
27. Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, pp. 32–33.
28. See the discussion in the preceding chapter.
29. Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, p. 305.
30. Simon During, “Is Literature Dead or Has It Gone to the Movies?” *Age* (Melbourne), 19 June 1993.
31. See Ranajit Guha, “The Migrant’s Time,” *Postcolonial Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 1998).
32. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 31–37.
33. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Politics of Translation,” in her *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), p. 182, and the chapter entitled “Untranslatability and the Terms of Reciprocity” in Vincente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 110–135.
34. Spivak, “Politics of Translation,” p. 182.
35. Michael Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s “Being and Time”* (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 41.
36. The phrase is Benjamin’s. See “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Fontana, 1982), p. 265.
37. Drucilla Cornell, *The Philosophy of the Limit* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 72–77, discusses the idea of the “trace.”
38. Michel Henry, *Marx: A Philosophy of Human Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), and I. I. Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1975).
39. Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History*, pp. 225–226.

40. Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

41. See Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1991), pp. 87–104.

#### Chapter 4

##### Minority Histories, Subaltern Pasts

1. Eric Hobsbawm, “Identity History Is Not Enough” in his *On History* (London: Weikensfeld and Nicholson, 1997), p. 277. Hobsbawm unfortunately overlooks the point that modern European imperialism in India and elsewhere used “good history” to justify the subjugation of peoples who, according to European thinkers, had “myths” but no sense of history.
2. Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994).
3. Cf. Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Hanover, N. H., and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), p. 145. Emphasis added.
4. Hobsbawm, “Identity History,” p. 271.
5. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (1784) in Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, translated by Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. 41–48.
6. See David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature: James Clarence Mangan and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 19–20. Also Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), chapter 3.
7. See also Gyan Prakash, “Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism,” *American Historical Review* 99 no. 5 (December 1994), pp. 1,475–1,491.
8. Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 46–47.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
11. Rudolf Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?” in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1985), p. 244.
12. Guha and Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies*, p. 78.
13. Shahid Amin, *Events, Memory, Metaphor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995).
14. Greg Dening, “A Poetic for Histories,” in his *Performances* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), pp. 35–63; David Cohen, *The Combing of*