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# Marx's Temporal Bridges and Other Pathways

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## Abstract

In this article I reply to three critics. Responding to Cinzia Arruzza, I argue that capital encounters a large spectrum of differences of gender, religion and ethnicity, as well as differences generated by racism. Capital is able to use these differences to its own profit in order to differentiate wages and intensities of exploitation and thereby divide the working class. Responding to Peter Osborne, I contend that my temporal-layered framework elucidates how capital organises and synchronises different temporalities according to the dominant temporality of socially-necessary labour time. I combine Bloch's idea of '*multiversum*' and Benjamin's idea of history in order to show how conflicting temporalities can disclose new political possibilities of liberation. Responding to Harry Harootunian, I articulate the relationship between my reading of Marx and the Postcolonial critique.

## Keywords

temporal layers – synchronisation – bodies – Postcolonial Studies – Marx – Bloch – Benjamin

*Marx's Temporalities* began with this statement: "Historical materialism" as a theory of history or a materialist conception of history does not exist.<sup>1</sup> Through this assertion I wanted to introduce the reader to my attempt to rethink both Marx and his legacy. And not only because Marx himself did not use the term 'historical materialism'; I wanted to rethink Marx's conceptions of history and time through a re-evaluation of Marx's last works, especially those on Russia,

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1 Tomba 2012, p. vii.

which I read from the perspective of temporal strata against the paradigm of unilinear time. Neither Marx nor Marxism was a stranger to the unilinear conception of time. However, an alternative conception of time is also present in Marx's thought, thereby providing the possibility of an alternative reading, or the tracing of a different legacy. My book traces this alternative trajectory of the communist tradition and builds bridges with the Postcolonial perspective on the globalised world.

I would like to thank the three reviewers of my book for their generous comments and insightful criticisms. Their observations raise three important issues: Cinzia Arruzza stresses my analyses of the 'body' and links them with gender studies; Harry Harootunian highlights the Postcolonial side of my work and integrates it with the perspective of Asian Studies; Peter Osborne questions the theoretical presuppositions of my analysis of time and history. In order to address their questions more fruitfully, I would like to offer a brief synopsis of what I hoped to achieve in my book.

As Arruzza reminds readers, while *Marx's Temporalities* is the English title for my book, its original Italian title was 'Strati di tempo' – *Strata of Time*. Adopting the geological term 'strata', I pointed in two directions at the same time: on the one hand, I referred to the layers of time as the layers of soil that a geologist might see; on the other hand, I referred to a layered reading of Marx. The image of layers came from Marx himself, i.e., from his dialogue with the Russian Populists. Through this geological metaphor, I wanted to express the coexistence of different historical temporalities on the surface of the present. At the same time, reading Marx through this analogy meant differentiating between his (early) writings, in which the teleological philosophy of history permeates his thought, and his late texts, in which he began to be suspicious of the unilinear conception of historical time. I organised my work into three chapters that were devoted to the discussion of Marx's idea of politics and historical time and two appendices that were meant as laboratories that attempt to outline the theoretical and political outcomes of the historiographical approach of layered temporalities.

The book is therefore Janus-faced, at once theoretical and political. On the one hand, I proposed to re-read Marx and the communist hypothesis without a historicist philosophy of history. On the other hand, I suggested an interpretation of Marx's analysis beyond the bankruptcy of twentieth-century Marxism. What I have called now, using a deliberately harsh term, the *bankruptcy of Marxism* regards not only the collapse of socialist countries, but also some endogenous aspects of Marxism. Harry Harootunian appropriately identifies one of these aspects with the 'narrow parochialism that has dominated both

Marxian historiography and bourgeois historical writing'.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, he argues, 'both bourgeois and orthodox Marxian historiographies remained hostage to linear and progressive conceptions of historical time that conform to capital's inverted self-representation.'<sup>3</sup> This statement grasps the theoretical-political intention of my book. To make my point clear, I should say: the main conception of historical materialism and thus many streams of communism have been crushed theoretically before being defeated politically because they shared with the dominant classes the same conception of history and progress. This is, in my opinion, the idea that shapes Walter Benjamin's theses on history. The bankruptcy of historical materialism was first of all the bankruptcy of its conception of history and social transformation. One should keep in mind that Marx himself does not use the term 'historical materialism', but, instead, uses the expressions 'practical materialist' and 'communist materialist'. As I said, my main premise was that other communist trajectories could be unlocked by reading Marx differently. This should be the task of the 'practical materialist'.

I would like to list three main traits of the crisis of Marxism, which I will consider in my answer to the reviewers. 1) Assuming the perspective of (Eurocentric) historicism, many Marxisms have been obsessed with periodisation and indicating the general tendencies and stages of capitalist development. According to this perspective the concepts of formal and real subsumption, absolute and relative surplus-value, material and immaterial production, etc. were understood as corresponding to historical stages. According to this historicist view, three-quarters of the world could be considered backwards, pre-modern or pre-capitalist. This Eurocentric frame, which has rightly earned the criticism of Postcolonial theorists from Edward Said to Dipesh Chakrabarty, survives in many analyses that, focusing on high-tech capitalism and post-class societies, hardly see the combination and mutual integration of the diverse forms of surplus-value production within the global market. In their attempt to replace the loss of hegemony of industrial labour with the 'multitude' and 'immaterial labour', animated by the idea that any form of activity is now socially productive, these analyses read global processes through the lens of the richest part of the West. This synecdoche renders invisible the mixture of different forms of surplus-value production, the combination of the informatics revolution, i.e., the so-called 'general intellect', and Foxconn, i.e., the gigantic industries in which more than one million workers produce millions of computers and cell phones. These two levels are often split apart

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2 Harootunian 2015a, p. 61.

3 Harootunian 2015a, p. 64.

both theoretically and politically. It is now our task to recombine them. In discussion with sociologists and activists, my book was an attempt to create such a change of perspective. My attempt may have failed, but the problem remains on the table.

2) The second trait in the crisis of Marxism concerns ecology in a broader sense. Indeed, Marx himself stressed that the capitalist mode of production is a 'process of destruction' of 'the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the labourer'.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the capitalist process of production as a 'process of destruction' involves something more than Schumpeter's idea of 'creative destruction'. It refers instead to the 'hidden abodes of production' as the privileged vantage-point of the entire capitalist process. One can blame Marx for not having paid enough attention to reproduction. And this is what Cinzia Arruzza rightly observes in her review. However, his pointing-out the destructive nature of capitalism is one of the most remarkable merits of Marx. He explains its destructive character both theoretically, in the valorisation of value, and practically, in machinery and technology, which are not neutral but have an intrinsic capitalist use-value. For this reason, it is naive to think that they could be immediately utilised in a different social form. This misunderstanding gives rise to a certain Promethean emphasis that is linked to faith in the liberating potential of machines, today the internet and new technologies, and a certain indifference before nature and the environment. This view led to the separation of Marxism and ecology. It is both a political and theoretical task to bring them back together.

3) Finally, a third trait has to be added. It concerns a certain notion of praxis related to the relationship of means and ends. From the standpoint of an instrumentalist framework, the idea that socialism is the goal to be achieved allows one to justify any necessary means to realise that end. The result is a praxis through which any kind of political cynicism and brutality could be justified. Feminist criticism has rightly stressed a different kind of praxis beyond the instrumentalist one. We should still endeavour to learn from this.

Now, it seems to me that these three aspects have been reframed in the political experiments of the last few years in many parts of the world.<sup>5</sup> They constitute the horizon within which my book was written.

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4 Marx 1996, p. 508.

5 Tomba 2014.

### Bodies at Work

Arruzza's contribution emphasises the focus on the body that I develop in my book. In Part Four of *Capital*, Marx shows us how dead labour sucks away at the blood of the living; the existence of mechanical monsters whose 'demon power' explodes 'into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs'.<sup>6</sup> Entering into the hidden abode of production, Marx made clear the kind of injustice that is not visible from the perspective of circulation: the injustice of which *Capital* speaks is the injustice inflicted on the body by the domination of dead labour over living labour.

Part Two of *Capital* is, in the German edition, a uniquely long chapter, which begins by affirming that 'the circulation of commodities is the starting-point of capital',<sup>7</sup> introduces the 'economic *dramatis personae*, a buyer and a seller', and concludes by abandoning the sphere of circulation in order to enter into the places of production, where the *dramatis personae* change their physiognomy.<sup>8</sup> From the end of Part Two onward, i.e. for more than three-quarters of *Capital*, Marx's perspective is that of production. If the sphere of circulation is the 'Eden of the rights of man' and the buyer and seller of labour-power are 'equal' subjects of law, as soon as the contract is completed and they proceed towards the abodes of production, Marx shows us a change in their physiognomy: 'He, who before was the money owner, now strides in front as capitalist; the possessor of labour power follows as his labourer. The one with an air of importance, smirking, intent on business; the other, timid and holding back, like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but – a tanning'.<sup>9</sup> Marx utilises the term 'tanning [*Gerberei*]' to show how capitalist production consumes not only labour-power, but, likewise, the body, life and soul of the worker. If in circulation 'equal' legal subjects bargain, in production neither are those subjects equal nor their relations symmetrical. Attached to labour-power is a body, also put to work in the labour-process. This is the scandal: one buys labour-power, which is, however, consumed together with the body and life of the worker. This kind of consumption is anything but natural. Thus, it is not natural to work twelve to fourteen hours a day, nights included, in environments noxious for both the physical and mental health of workers. The amount of suicides at Foxconn and the case of female workers

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6 Marx 1996, pp. 384–5.

7 Marx 1996, p. 157.

8 Marx 1996, p. 186.

9 Ibid.

who lose the regularity of their menstrual cycle due to stress and fatigue are not from a Dickens novel on nineteenth-century capitalism. They are the images of today's capitalism.

In her article, Arruzza raises a question that I would like to consider carefully. It regards the 'absence of a gender perspective'<sup>10</sup> in my analysis. I agree with Arruzza when she says that the 'domination of dead labour over living labour affects men and women in different ways and with different results.'<sup>11</sup> This is an important issue and I am grateful to Arruzza for bringing it up. Indeed, I take her criticism as an important contribution towards my work.

I think that the capitalist temporality of production generally conflicts with the temporality of reproduction and violently synchronises the latter according to the pace of the former. Although the capitalist mode of production has to be grasped within the interpenetration of circulation, production and reproduction, the point of view of each of these spheres is neither equivalent nor interchangeable. One can focus on one or another aspect, but it is important not to lose sight of their interweaving. Due to the proximity between production and circulation, logistics has often become the field of new conflicts that affect the movement of commodities, the pace of work, and the transformation of towns and environment, which assume a physiognomy more and more specifically capitalist. Reproduction is subsumed in production as well. Antonio Gramsci was able to capture this intersection in Fordism, whose logic extended beyond the perimeter of the factory, with factory inspectors who monitored the apartments of workers and the prohibition of alcohol that prevented workers from spending their energy otherwise needed for new kinds of work. One might add, now, that new technologies, instead of generating liberation from working time, blur the distinction between free time and time of work. For example, new technologies make it possible to relocate work to the home, which thereby becomes a work-place. Although the rearrangement of working time and space gives the appearance of more liberty in the organisation of one's own time, the price to pay for this apparent liberty is the colonisation of free time. People spend their 'free' time checking work-related emails at night and during weekends. Without invoking technology, another example of the prolongation of working time that includes the time of reproduction can be found in personal services: workers, mostly women and migrants, are called upon to replace the old welfare state by working 24 hours a day at the service of old or ill people. They usually live in the same house of the assisted person and must be ready to aid them all day long.

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10 Arruzza 2015, p. 53.

11 Arruzza 2015, p. 54.

For this reason I would supplement Arruzza's emphasis on the gender dimension of the division of labour and the differentiation of salaries with the need to attend to the ethnic division of labour. Here, however, there is a slight distinction to be drawn between my reading of these phenomena and Arruzza's idea. She argues that capital produces and requires gender differences. By contrast, I think that capital is *indifferent* to ethnic or gender differences. This indifference, from the perspective of the logic of capital, i.e., the valorisation of value, however, does not make it progressive. On the contrary, historically, capital encounters a large spectrum of differences of gender, religion and ethnicity, as well as differences generated by racism. Capital is able to use these differences to its own profit in order to differentiate wages and intensities of exploitation and thereby divide the working class. From the perspective of the historiography of layered temporalities that I proposed in my book, those differences and hierarchies are understood to pre-exist capitalism; however, it is capital that subsumes and reconfigures them in order to put them to work. One can say that the modern gender division as well as modern 'ethnicities' or 'races' are continuously reshaped by state and capital. This is the way, I suggest, to re-read the concept of 'formal subsumption' today: not as an historical stage that precedes 'real subsumption', but, as Harry Harootunian states, as a practice that continues to co-exist with developed capitalism and occupy the status of every capitalist process.<sup>12</sup> In other words, there are practices, differences, hierarchies, and patriarchal relationships that capital 'encounters as antecedents . . . not as forms of its own life-process'.<sup>13</sup> Capital is able to use them, but in order to subsume them they 'must first be destroyed as independent forms and subordinated to industrial capital'<sup>14</sup> through the violence of the state. Regarding this point two mistakes are possible: one can read those differences as historical invariants or as pure products of capitalism. In both cases I see an opposite but symmetrical misunderstanding: on the one side these differences are naturalised by transforming them into something metahistorical; on the other side they are ontologised by being turned into forms of the capitalist life-process. I argue that already-existing differences and practices are located within a different temporality and, even when they are reshaped and reorganised by capital, they expose, as Harootunian contends, 'traces of a prior historical identity'.<sup>15</sup> Capital reconfigures these differences and takes profits from them through permanent attempts to synchronise them

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12 Harootunian 2015b, pp. 55–7.

13 Marx 2000, p. 1496.

14 Ibid.

15 Harootunian 2015a, p. 68.



with its production agenda. By doing so, it subsumes them and converts them into forms of its own life-process, but, at the same time, it cannot prevent them from appearing as nonsynchronisms that, in tension with the dominant capitalist temporality, can disclose both emancipatory and reactionary possibilities. And sometimes these two sides are interwoven.

In his chapter on the 'National Differences of Wages', Marx explains how capital takes advantage of nation-states and the differences of wages. In other words, capital uses national differences in order to differentiate wages within the world market and create an entire range of exploitations. This very important chapter should be rewritten today from the perspective of the gender and ethnic differentiation that capital puts to work. Capital did not invent nation-states, just as it did not create the differences about which we are talking. But capital, and this is my point, encourages these differences and makes them even more severe since they can be economically profitable. Capital is by nature neither patriarchal nor 'white', but it uses existing patriarchal relations and racial discrimination by putting them to work and often intensifying them.

Although capital remains indifferent to the differences, it utilises existing differences, and sometimes it promotes new ones, in order to create new differentials of surplus-value. Indeed, as I showed in my book, the production of differentials of surplus-value can occur by continuously revolutionising the means of production (through the sporadic introduction of new machinery), by encountering modes of production in which the productive power of labour is lower, or by differentiating wages according to different geographical areas, gender or ethnicity. In its diffusion, capital does not need an exterior, something other than itself, but it does, instead, need a vast range of differentials of wages, of different productive powers and intensities of labour. Where it does not find these already pre-existing, it is able to generate them as a repercussion of its arrival.

Arruzza's suggestion to include the temporality of gender in my analysis of the different temporalities synchronised by capital, I believe, raises an extremely important issue. I would like to learn more about it. Indeed, as long as capital reshapes already-existing differences, it reshapes gender differences as well. To Arruzza's question of whether the creation of 'new sexual and gendered identities through commodification' can disclose 'new potentialities for struggle and resistance',<sup>16</sup> I do not have a readymade answer. While capital is able to reconfigure all types of difference and make them work for the system, this reconfiguration also leads to the emergence of new forms of conflict linked to new identities that can express the desire to go beyond established roles.

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16 Arruzza 2015, p. 58.

I would thus reformulate Arruzza's question into an ultimately political one: how is it possible to connect the conflicts linked to new gendered and sexual identities with the *desire* not only to go beyond established roles, but also to go beyond the form of society that obliges a part of humankind to consume itself in the many-hours-a-day prison of wage labour.

### (Marx's) Temporalities

By emphasising the centrality of the body, I do not mean in any way to separate the mind from the body of the worker. Rather, these two dimensions interpenetrate and today's capitalism shows us the extent to which the sphere of spirit has been colonised by capital. Not only in the domain of consumption, as already investigated by the first Frankfurt School, but also in the domain of production. The first industrial revolution embodied the knowledge of the craftsman in the machine, changing both that knowledge and the modern type of worker; the current digital revolution has objectified entire cognitive processes in machine-memory, transforming knowledge into packages of information and interfacing the mind of the worker with collectively pre-synthesised and objectified cognitive processes. After all, *from the point of view of capital*, there is no limit that should have prevented capital from subsuming intellectual labour in the same way that capital subsumed manual labour. *From the perspective of workers*, however, that process, which is a vector of capitalist modernity, could have been oriented differently.

My book is written in order to shed light on these unachieved possibilities. The alternative pathways that I outline concern Marx himself and the tradition of the 'warm stream' of Marxism.<sup>17</sup> Evaluating Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich and his conversation with the Russian Populists,<sup>18</sup> I attempted to unearth different legacies that can interact with our present. It is well-known that the founding father of Russian Marxism Plekhanov hid that letter in a drawer. In my discussion of original accumulation and Russia, I wanted to open that drawer and point to the possibility of a different 'tradition of the oppressed'.

While I appreciate Osborne's attempt to bring to the fore the underlying Blochian 'layers' of my book, which gives me the occasion to clarify why I think Bloch is still important, I am surprised that Osborne's comments focus almost exclusively on Bloch rather than Marx, who is the main concern of my book. Unfortunately, Osborne's commentary barely touches on my

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17 Bloch 1986, p. 209.

18 Shanin (ed.) 1983.

alternative reading on Marx and my criticism of orthodox Marxism but, rather, criticises me for embracing ‘Bloch’s broadly Leninist temporal-political project (hegemony)’.<sup>19</sup> I never used the term ‘hegemony’, nor did I propose any new or old (Leninist) hegemonic temporality. What I said is instead that capital organises and synchronises different temporalities according to the dominant temporality of *socially-necessary labour time*. My allusion to Bloch mostly refers to his idea of the ‘*multiversum*’ and ‘Riemannian time’<sup>20</sup> that I combine with Walter Benjamin’s idea of history.

Osborne writes that my book ‘points beyond the more straightforward combinations of philological and categorial analysis characteristic of the recent revival of Marx-studies in *Historical Materialism*, to suggest a thoroughly “temporalised” Marx, directly relevant to the politics of global capitalism’<sup>21</sup> and crisis, but, he objects, ‘there is no theoretical construction, or even reconstruction, *sensu stricto* here.’<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, Osborne ignores my analysis of the combination of the two forms of production of surplus-value, i.e., relative and absolute, which constitutes the theoretical core of my book. This analysis allows me to demonstrate: 1) how relative surplus-value production requires absolute surplus-value production and, therefore; 2) how high-tech production is not only compatible with brutal forms of exploitation, but is based upon them; 3) how the idea that capitalism can completely replace human labour with machines is just a capitalist dream, which Marx considered in the *Grundrisse* and abandoned in the ’60s when he studied the competition of capitals; 4) how the *dominant* temporality of the capitalist mode of production – *socially-necessary labour time* – interacts and conflicts with a plurality of temporalities and counter-temporalities; and finally, 5) how capitalist globalisation puts politics to work in order to defeat workers’ resistances and to produce new wage-differentials in geographical areas where it can gain new sums of absolute surplus-value. In my book, I argue that this theoretical achievement permitted Marx to consider capitalism as a more complex system in which different forms of exploitation coexist and interpenetrate, giving up on the Eurocentric binary formula of ‘backwards’ and ‘forwards’. This argument allows me to put Marx in dialogue with Postcolonial Studies and to reconsider global capitalism from the perspective of multiple temporalities that capital seeks to synchronise. Further, I consider this *multiversum* of temporalities as forming the perspective of the oppressed and

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19 Osborne 2015, p. 43.

20 Bloch 1970.

21 Osborne 2015, p. 40.

22 Osborne 2015, p. 41.

thus as a field of possibilities for liberation. In this field of plural temporalities nothing is backwards, there are instead missed and different opportunities of modernisation.

Pluralising temporalities does not mean that they do not interact with each other, or even that such interactions should be avoided in order to preserve the alleged autonomy of each specific identity. Furthermore, the fact that capital violently synchronises them does not mean that one has to find a different hegemonic criterion of synchronisation. But it does not mean giving up universals in the name of relativism, either. The question of a new universality, an emancipatory common (of the oppressed) in the plurality of temporalities, is the real question. It is not possible to develop an answer to this question without relating it to the legacies of anti-colonial, proletarian and women's movements that traverse modernity from its very beginnings all the way to the 'warm stream' of Marxism. I consider Bloch's and Benjamin's philosophy, among others, to be in one of these warm streams. Bloch's attempt to think universality within the *multiversum* of temporalities and earthly cultures, which he understood as 'experiments, ventures and variously significant testimonies to the ultimate *humanum*',<sup>23</sup> entails an effort to pluralise temporalities without losing sight of universality. It is important to recall Bloch's statement here: the 'unilinear model must be found obsolete if justice is to be done to the considerable amount of non-European material'.<sup>24</sup>

Osborne also tends to overlook the historical and political context in which Bloch wrote 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics' (1932). Here, Bloch discussed the reasons for the defeat of German Social Democracy and the Communist Party vis-à-vis National Socialism. Farmers, youth and the middle class expressed a deep sense of dissatisfaction with the present in the form of reactionary romanticism. According to Bloch, there were anachronisms and apparently irrational impulses that contained the desire for something different. Because they were ignored by the left, they could be collected and organised by the Nazis. Bloch's work investigates both the difficulty of reactivating the idea of the future encapsulated in the archaic and the friction between asynchronous temporal layers. His essay shows us how anachronisms work, interact and swerve to the political right if they are stigmatised as romantic and irrational longing. Today, in Europe, these forces are expressed in the desire to go back to the national currencies against the Euro, in the emotional appeal of the New Age that fascinates the youth, and even in the fear of a present that seems to be without future. When Bloch uses the term

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23 Bloch 1970, p. 144.

24 Bloch 1970, p. 143.

‘proletarian hegemony’, which annoyed Osborne, he is speaking the language of the Communist Party in order to underline the political task of re-orienting those temporalities before the right-wing does. It is not a Leninist project, which, on the contrary, aimed to synchronise Russia’s multiple temporalities and introduce capitalist accumulation on the ashes of the *Obshchina*. The temporal *multiversum* that informs my work aims to capture the futures sedimented in the archaic and, in friction with other temporalities, to open new pathways of modernisation. As Harootunian reminds us, one ‘must be cautious not to take this “frictional” pairing of archaic and contemporary (capitalism) too far since it can also lead to fascism, as interwar Germany, Italy and Japan so clearly showed.’<sup>25</sup> Harootunian’s point is correct and this danger should never be underestimated.

### The ‘Explosive Charge of the Past in the Present’

We know, with Benjamin, that ‘capitalism will not die a natural death,’<sup>26</sup> and that it will not even generate its own gravediggers. However, our global condition allows us to think about the missed opportunities of emancipation in the West and their encounter with many non-European experiments. So did Marx in his last writings on Russia in dialogue with the Populists of the *Otechestvennyye Zapiski*; so did Ernst Bloch when he differentiated the concept of progress by opening it up to the polyphony of historical temporalities; and so did Walter Benjamin when he reactivated the explosive charge of the past in the present. My book is part of this tradition.

Now, Harry Harootunian’s comments prompt me to confront two important issues: on the one hand, the unilinear conception of time common to many traditions of Marxism and, partially, to Marx himself; on the other hand, the possibility of reactivating, via Walter Benjamin, a different tradition capable of creating the ‘explosive encounter of past in the present’ in which past possibilities of liberation are re-opened by present attempts at liberation. This is what happened when the Paris Commune in 1871 recovered the emancipatory charge of 1792–3, and similarly, when the Russian Revolution exploded the idea of ‘nation’ by granting Soviet citizenship to every proletarian from all over the world. These two events are linked. The Russians were ‘citing’ the unfinished work of the universal republic that emerged with the French Revolution and that reached the Paris Commune. Even more, the Paris Commune and the

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25 Harootunian 2015a, p. 73.

26 Benjamin 2002, p. 667.

Soviet revolution communicated with the experiments of Thomas Müntzer and Gerrard Winstanley. These temporal bridges between different political experiments show us the way to overcome what T.S. Eliot called provincialism of space and time.

Harry Harootunian poses an important question concerning the relationship between my reading of Marx and the Postcolonial critique. Harootunian reproaches me for having overstated the importance of the Postcolonial critique, 'especially as [it has] been articulated by Dipesh Chakrabarty'.<sup>27</sup> I still think that the Postcolonial critique is extremely valuable since it has forced us to reconsider the Western categories of progress and civilisation that innervate both the colonial discourse and much revolutionary rhetoric. However, I agree with Harootunian's criticism of Postcolonial Studies when he states that the 'impulse, producing the proposition of an "alternative modernity" rooted in cultural non-identity, invariably overstated the cultural domination of the "West" by homogenising it; similarly, the appeal to a native imaginary as an equivalent alternative required comparable homogenisation, resulting in a recuperation of the older East-West binary in a new register.'<sup>28</sup> In fact, Postcolonial scholars' replacement of a history from below with a history from the margins<sup>29</sup> has led to three controversial consequences.

First of all, the idea of an 'alternative modernity' is obtained *ex negativo*, i.e., by creating the image of a monolithic European civilisation, and projecting upon European history the unilinear conception of historical time that one should question together with the perspective of historicism. Secondly, as Harootunian notes, this image likely reproduces in a new register the East-West binary scheme. The third consequence concerns the fact that the Europe which Chakrabarty invokes is 'hyperreal'. It seems that the modernity which Chakrabarty attacks is a certain dominant self-representation of Western modernity, which has been exported by colonialism. One should say that Marx himself in the '50s was representative of this Eurocentric self-deception: he justified English colonialism in India by saying that colonialism would have a 'double mission [...]: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia'.<sup>30</sup> At that time Marx considered positively the 'propagandistic (civilising) tendency'<sup>31</sup> of capital and believed in the thoroughness with which

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27 Harootunian 2015a, p. 71.

28 Ibid.

29 Kaiwar 2014, p. 153.

30 Marx 1979a, pp. 217–18.

31 Marx 1986, p. 466.

British industrial capital would destroy non-capitalist societies in the process of its worldwide expansion.<sup>32</sup> The study of Indian and Russian histories in the late '60s and '70s along with the understanding of the competition of capitals in the world market led Marx to revise this view. For instance, in 1881, he expressed a completely different perspective, according to which British colonialism and the destruction of the common property of land were now seen as regressive phenomena: 'as for the East Indies, for example, everyone except Sir Henry Maine and others of his ilk realises that the suppression of communal landownership out there was nothing but an act of English vandalism, pushing the native people not forwards but backward'.<sup>33</sup>

For all these reasons, Chakrabarty's image of a monolithic Europe, while partly correct insofar as it corresponds to the self-representation of many radical and conservative European intellectuals, is also unilateral and would benefit from a more complex, 'layered' understanding. In response to Harootunian, I can state my view that the 'hyperreal' representation of Europe has worked well in order to provincialise the modern-Western categories of space, time and history. It has allowed us to question the stagist paradigm still present in many forms of Western critical thinking that continues to reason in terms of tendencies and residues. In my opinion, Chakrabarty was right to stress that peasant actions in India, and not only there, are often organised 'along the axes of kinship, religion, and caste, and involv[e] gods, spirits, and supernatural agents as actors alongside humans'.<sup>34</sup> This kind of action seems to European eyes symptomatic of a 'backward' consciousness and 'pre-political' people and, as the historian Hobsbawm stated, express something 'archaic'.<sup>35</sup> My question is how we should consider this 'archaic' while abandoning the unilinear conception of time and beginning to think in terms of layers of time. I agree with Harootunian, who states that a different mode of temporalisation permits us to reconsider 'the relationship between the pre-capitalist formations of archaic communities and their utility in the present'.<sup>36</sup> Marx himself did this in relation to the Russian commune, advising his Russian interlocutors not to be afraid of the word 'archaic'.

At this point the question that Harootunian seems to pose me concerns the possibility of thinking plural temporalities without falling back into a relativistic conception unable to redefine any common dimension among these different temporalities on the one side, and without the fascist romanticisation of the

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32 Anderson 2010; Mohri 1970.

33 Marx 1989, p. 365.

34 Chakrabarty 2007, pp. 11–12.

35 Hobsbawm 1978, pp. 2–3.

36 Harootunian 2015a, p. 70.

past against modernity, on the other side. In other words, the problem is how different temporalities should be related to the question of universalism. I have begun to discuss this very important issue in my response to Osborne already.

Of course, this question cannot be circumvented by affirming the Enlightenment universals of reason. Nor can the question be avoided by duplicating universalism: the universality of capital, on the one side, and the universality of the labourers with their need for physical well-being, on the other.<sup>37</sup> Needs, from a historical-materialist perspective, change according to the historical-social context. Marx himself wrote in the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*: 'hunger is hunger; but the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth.'<sup>38</sup> Not only do needs change historically and geographically, but human responses to needs change as well, changing the ways in which human beings get together and contend with each other to find those answers. I think neither that the universal is a concept that can be based on Enlightenment reason, nor that human needs can provide the basis of universality. I think instead that the idea of universalism should be subjected to criticism. I agree with Chatterjee's point here: namely, that the 'critics of universalism argue that the outcomes are unknown, indeterminate, and hence unpredictable'.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, there are different pathways of modernisation, and Western reason, based on the binary code rational/irrational, is only one of the possible configurations of reason. In order to keep open the 'unpredictable outcomes' of which Chatterjee is talking, one has to criticise Western political categories together with the classic configuration of modern Western reason, which, during early (European) modernity, was still not rooted in the rational/irrational binary code. Newton was an alchemist, Copernicus was an astrologer interested in the philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus, Kepler studied the astral influences on human life, and Galileo, the father of modern science, made horoscopes. Science was relevant for human beings as long it was related to their life and soul. The so-called 'irrational' was not yet expunged from science and their intertwining contained other possibilities for modern reason and its universalism. Modern science was built through a long process of purging the uncanny side of Renaissance science. This is the process that Franz Borkenau described in terms of transition from a qualitative to a quantitative image of the world: the mechanical *Weltbild*.<sup>40</sup> This process, which gave birth to the dominant conception of science and its rationality, owes much to minor

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37 Chibber 2013.

38 Marx 1979b, p. 279.

39 Chatterjee 2013, p. 75.

40 Borkenau 1934.



figures such as Antonio Favaro, who edited the collected works of Galileo by excluding his forty horoscopes. Modern rationality is the result of a process that has reduced reason to calculus, nature to natural resources, and has become a kind of new 'superstition'.<sup>41</sup>

Postcolonial critique, to which my book is indebted, gives us the opportunity to pluralise not only history, but also specifically-European history. And this is what we, as inhabitants of the West, must do in order to build bridges between alternative pathways of different traditions. In other words, the response to the image of a monolithic Europe should be a counter-image, that of the different trajectories that have and have not yet been taken. The emancipatory trajectories and experiments of the oppressed classes show us that there is not just one but several Enlightenments and different possibilities of reason. All these pathways build bridges: not only temporal ones that connect us with an 'archaic' full of unrealised potentials, but also spatial bridges that connect us with other social and political experiments around the world. Universality, in a global society and after Postcolonial critique, should be rethought through the fluid categories of space and time. *Marx's Temporalities* claims to be such an attempt, disclosing theoretical and practical emancipatory pathways within an alternative legacy of Marx, a legacy that can take us beyond the crisis of the dominant Marxisms of the twentieth century and, even more importantly, beyond the crisis of our historical present.

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<sup>41</sup> Bilgrami 2014, p. 156.

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