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## 1

## IN THE MATTER OF MARXISM

*Bill Maurer*

The real unity of the world consists in its materiality, and this is proved not only by a few juggled phrases, but by a long and wearisome development of philosophy and natural science.

(Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 1877)

You make me feel mighty real.

(Sylvester, 1978)

### WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH MARXISM?

It is difficult to think about materiality, or to think materially about the social, without thinking about Marxism. The Cold War led many scholars in the West to use 'materialism' as a code word for Marxism for much of the twentieth century. More recently, in certain quarters of social scientific thought, materiality stands in for the empirical or the real, as against abstract theory or discourse. Materiality is also invoked as causal and determinative, as moving things and ideas toward other states of being. Invoked in this sense, materiality, with a nod or more to Marxism, is sometimes offered as a corrective to the idea that concepts or ideas are autonomous and causal, or as an attack against presumed extravagances of 'postmodernism' or other forms of 'idealism'.

This review of Marxism and the problem of materiality is concerned with the supposed limits of critical reflection for dealing with actually existing materialities embodied in living, human agents as well as the sedimented histories and concrete objects that occupy the world. Historically, Marxist-oriented scholars

have insisted on an account of actually existing 'men' in their real, material conditions of existence. Reactions against abstraction in theory more recently often explicitly or implicitly invoke the Marxist heritage as both a theoretical formation and an agenda for oppositional political practice. As Marx wrote in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' Or, as a colleague once put it to me, 'Derrida never helped save a Guatemalan peasant.'

This chapter uses a narrow delineation of the field of Marxist-inspired debate and critique, emphasizing those anthropologists (and, to a lesser extent, archaeologists) who explicitly invoke Marxism in its various guises and who seek in Marxist theories a method and a theory for thinking materially about the social. The chapter pays particular attention to the instances when such authors attempt to think critically about what difference it makes to stress materiality and to think 'materially'. Such an exercise, however, while admittedly also bounded by the partiality imposed by the imperatives of the essay format, cannot escape replicating the antinomies of Marxist thought itself.

Perhaps the greatest of these is the tension between the dialectical method and historical materialism that inflected subsequent arguments about the nature and analytical standing of materiality. This tension derives from Marx's assertion of the practical and objective basis of humans' subjective consciousness, his inversion of Hegel's dialectic, and the reductionist tendencies that Marx shared with many nineteenth-century social and natural philosophers as diverse as Auguste Comte and Charles Darwin. In the nineteenth century various

materialisms sprung up in reaction to, or were enlisted against, G.W.F. Hegel's idealist theory of history. For Hegel, the Absolute, the universal spirit, moved people to perceive the contradictions in the governing ideas of the age; through the dialectic between each idea and its opposite, men achieve new understandings and move human history ultimately to culminate in a Christian state. For Marx, material forces and relations of production moved people to realize the contradictions of their material existence, culminating in revolutionary transformation. Inverting Hegel – placing matter over thought in a determinative albeit dialectical position – opened the door to a solidification, as it were, of materiality itself as irreducibly real regardless of any human effort to conceptualize it; as autonomous; and as determinative, in the last instance, of everything else. Dialectics gave way to reductionist causality even as that causal argument gave Marx a means of seeing human ideas and human societies unfolding in history without relying on the Christian metaphysics implicit in Hegel's universal spirit.

Although writers on Marx have sometimes argued that his writings betray a dialectical phase ('the early Marx') and a historical materialist phase ('the late Marx', or, sometimes, 'the works written with Engels'), within *Capital* itself one finds evidence of the tension between dialectical and historical materialism. In distinguishing the labor of humans from that of animals, Marx emphasized humans' capacity for projective consciousness, humans' ability to plan a material world in advance of their own shaping of it:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.

(1978: 174)

This passage nicely demonstrates the dialectic between human consciousness and practical activity that Marx borrowed from Hegel. It is not simply that people imagine things separately from the things themselves, but that their practical activity in turn shapes their consciousness. The worst architect projects his will into material constructions that then not only reflect that will but operate back upon it to shift it in another direction. Elsewhere in *Capital*, however, one reads that '[t]he ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the

human mind' (1978: 27). Here, the architect's imagination is simply a reflection of his material reality, his material conditions of existence. There is no dialectical movement. So, where the dialectic between consciousness and practice distinguishes the worker from the bee, still the worker's ideational or subjective reality ultimately 'reflects' the material world in the last instance.

Marx laid the groundwork for both his dialectical method and his materialist theory of history in responding to Ludwig Feuerbach's rejection of Hegelian idealism. For Feuerbach, Hegel's theory of history as the unfolding of the absolute idea neglected sensuous and empirically perceptible reality in all its multifarious particularity, by positing that that reality was the expression of spirit, much as in Christianity Jesus is the material incarnation of divinity. Thus, according to Feuerbach, '[t]he Hegelian philosophy is the last magnificent attempt to restore Christianity, which was lost and wrecked, through philosophy' (Feuerbach 1966: 34).

Marx is often said to have married Feuerbach's materialism to Hegel's dialectic. Indeed, the *Theses on Feuerbach* bear out this claim. 'Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective activity*' (Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*). For Marx, in contrast, 'The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question.' Marx here criticized Feuerbach's materialism for its refusal to see human thought as a material process, a practical, dialectical engagement with the sensuous world.

The dialectic is difficult to sustain, however, given the imperatives of the new 'science' of Marxism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the social and humanistic fields that would try to adopt it. In a review essay on Marx and anthropology, William Roseberry (1997) spent considerable time worrying over the distinctions and relations among 'what men say or imagine, how they are narrated, and men in the flesh' (p. 29), taking his cue from the famous passage of *The German Ideology*:

[W]e do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-processes we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.

(Marx and Engels 1970: 47)

In order to resolve the ultimate epistemological status of these 'real men' *vis-à-vis* the conceptual schemes within which they operate (what they say, conceive, or what is said or imagined about them), Roseberry suggested a 'modest' reading of the text that would see these elements as 'constitut[ing] an indissoluble unity' (Roseberry 1997: 30), echoing the Engels of the *Anti-Dühring* as quoted in the first epigraph to this chapter. Roseberry also gestured toward the critical reflexivity that apprehension of this unity entails, since the analyst also occupies a position in an analogous unity, which of necessity emphasizes 'certain "real individuals" and not others, or certain "purely empirical" relationships and not others' (p. 30). Thinking about the indissoluble unity of real 'men' and their (and our) conceptual schemes gets to the heart of one of the problems of Marxist critique: the extent to which, as a strong reading of Marx would argue, Marxism is of necessity internal to its object, the capitalist society of Marx's day (Postone 1993). This, in turn, gets to the heart of the problem of the application of Marxist theory in anthropological analyses of materiality in other social formations. This is the problem faced by most of the writers whose work is reviewed in this chapter as they attempted to fit Marxist concepts to the empirical relationships of actually existing people – 'real men' (and women) – and the material world of non- or pre-capitalist contexts.

We are faced, then, with two distinct problems. The first is the unresolved tension between Marx's use of the dialectic and his materialist reductionism. The second is the applicability of Marxist concepts outside of the world for which they were imagined – or outside of the world that compelled the mind of Marx to reflect the material conditions and contradictions of capitalism in his dialectical and historical materialisms. I argue in this chapter that these two problems wended their way through anthropological and other social scientific accounts of materiality in such a way as to bring a series of otherwise independent oppositions into alignment. The first is the opposition between the ideal and the material, where the former is taken to reference the subjective world 'inside' consciousness and the latter the objective world 'outside' consciousness. The second is the opposition between theoretical discourse or abstraction and what we might call 'plain speech'. Where the former reflects on found materialities to seek potentially hidden or latent content, the latter claims to reflect them 'directly' in language, and purports to reduce or even eliminate the gap between

mind and thing. The final opposition is that between realism and empiricism. This may not at first be self-evident, but I use these terms in the particular sense developed by philosophers of science. Realism strives for knowledge independent of any theory or any sensory act, and discounts the perceptible as the only or the privileged route to the truth. Empiricism discounts anything not perceptible to the senses or beyond the range of the human sensorium. Realism posits an observer-independent world, and its Platonic presuppositions – that universal forms or laws exist autonomously from human history or consciousness – permit a kind of theoretical abstraction disallowed by strict empiricism, which depends on the immediately perceptible. (One could thus equate realism with positivism, the doctrine of universal, generalizable laws separate from any subjective human understanding or encounter with the world.)

The aligning of the ideal, the theoretical, and the real, on the one hand, and the material, plain speech and empiricism, on the other, was a contingent articulation of a kind of social scientific 'common sense'. It did not occur seamlessly or without contradiction (or confusion). In looking chronologically at materialist theories of society in anthropology and archaeology, this chapter charts the shifts among these concepts and their generative potential for thinking materially about the social in spite of their inherent instability. The quest for a science that would explain causal relations among material and social variables looms large in my story. Such a quest for causality occupied Marx, as well, and helps explain his deep interest in the work of natural and social evolutionists like Charles Darwin and Lewis Henry Morgan.

How did Marxism's convergence with other materialisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries encourage the denunciation of abstraction in favor of plain speech, that is, in favor of a critical metalanguage that denies its status as such by purporting to reveal the deeper reality, the 'real men', and their histories behind the veils of ideological abstraction of which 'theory' is a component?

If I overdraw the terms, it is because anthropological debates over materiality and history have done so, as well. Consider, for example, two responses to the work of Jean and John Comaroff. In their work on the historical anthropology of southern Africa, the Comaroffs have attempted to correlate shifts in consciousness with shifts in material culture, daily practices, and routines. For example, they show how mission school architecture encouraged certain

kinds of movement that in turn shaped people's self-understandings. Critics have taken them to task on the causal assumptions of their argument and on the level of speculation necessary for them to make such arguments. Sally Falk Moore, for example, worries that their 'imaginative sociologies' run too far ahead of actual 'cases' – empirically observable instances – to support any claims of 'causality' (Moore 1999: 304). Donald Donham argues that the Comaroffs employ 'a *post hoc* rhetoric' of cultural difference to the detriment of the analysis of 'actual events' and Tswana agents' own narratives (Donham 2001: 144). The Comaroffs reply, to both critics, that they seek a methodology that is 'empirical without being narrowly empiricist' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999: 307). By this, they mean to capture sensuous material realities without imputing to them the kind of autonomy or causal determination that some materialisms presuppose. They write that they sought, in *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991, 1997) to:

underscore the need to transcend a procrustean opposition: to separate ourselves, on the one hand, from postmodern theoreticism and, on the other, from those more conventional colonial historians who have sought to avoid theory via the empiricist strategy of finding order in events by putting events in order.

(Comaroff and Comaroff 2001: 159)

It seems that the unity of which both Marx and Engels wrote has difficulty maintaining its integrity, that it is continually unbundling itself into the neat dichotomies of the material and the ideal, the empirical and the real, the directly apprehensible and the theoretical. Marxist-inspired theories tend to equate each pole of these oppositions with one another despite the friction this might cause for causal or dialectical forms of argumentation. Hence, it has become routine in anthropology and elsewhere to stress, when dealing with materiality, that one is neither valorizing nor rejecting outright the empirical; that one is appreciative of the discursive constitution of the material even as one is attentive to the 'significance intrinsic to material life' (Farquhar 2002: 8); that one is steering between the rocks of high theory and the shoals of naive empiricism.

Whence the conflation between the empirical and the material, and all those categories that can stand in for those concepts, such as history, the body, people's 'actual lives', objects, geographies, nature, and so forth? As Roseberry and others have noted, there is a tension in Marxism between the historical and

the formal analysis of capitalism. The former tends to rely on empirically observable evidence for the postulation of a *telos* to world historical development; the latter tends to model underlying causal relationships at the expense of the empirically observable. So, for example, those Marxisms (like structural Marxism, discussed below) that attempted to discover the motor driving a particular social formation did not have to rely on empirical evidence but could still claim realism; those that were steered by empirical data could reject the abstractions of structural Marxism as part of the ideological obfuscation of capitalism. Indeed, the history of Marxist anthropology in the twentieth century has seen this opposition play itself out, between the evolutionary and cultural materialist approaches that made a strong claim to empirical verifiability and to the status of science, on the one hand, and the various approaches tracing a lineage to Louis Althusser that worried less about verifiability than logical consistency and another sort of claim to the status of science, on the other. Post-Althusserians (and I would include here followers of Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault) face the charge of abstraction from the inheritors of the more reductionist cultural materialist approaches (even if those heirs do not always recognize themselves as such; although few may cite Marvin Harris in the early 2000s, there is a sense in which his cultural materialism, discussed below, has been naturalized as common currency for many anthropologists, especially for lay audiences, or before undergraduates). And the latter, realist Marxisms, can surprise when they pair up with empiricist Marxisms in arguments over whether anthropology is a 'science' and the supposed bourgeois romanticism and aestheticism of 'postmodern' discourse.

A specter is haunting anthropologies of materiality; the specter of empiricism. It should be clear by now that mine is an interested review that has an exorcism in mind. It is borne of analytical frustration with the tools available for thinking materially about social formations, a frustration that also has to do with the way 'data', 'the facts', and 'materiality' are first conflated and then asked to speak for themselves in readily-accessible causal languages that as a matter of course reject the need for any 'theory'; the way that evolutionary and cultural materialist Marxism has been deployed as just such a language; and the way that structural Marxisms sometimes play along by eliding their realism with empiricism. Approaching the problem of materiality through the specter of empiricism



haunting anthropology places anthropological knowledge production at the center of the discussion, as it calls into questions the material on which anthropology makes its analytical claims as well as the very opposition between the material and the theoretical.

In what follows, I review four moments in the history of anthropological and archaeological engagement with Marxism on the question of materiality. The story begins with Engels and the consolidation of historical materialism in the various theories that posited distinct social forms occupying specific evolutionary stages. After a brief detour through the Manchester school, which had more affinities with the dialectical method than contemporaneous evolutionisms (especially those on the other side of the Atlantic), I consider the French structural Marxists. The structural Marxists eschewed some of the more reductionist aspects of evolutionary theory and worried less about evolutionary stages than the causal relationships among structural components of a society: the economic base, including the material conditions and relations of subsistence; the ideological superstructure, including all the stuff of 'culture' as it has been defined by other anthropologists; and the structures mediating the two, especially kinship. Next, I explore Marxisms of the 1970s and 1980s that reformulated mid-century evolutionisms in terms of world histories and world systems. Such Marxisms increased anthropologists' attention to commodities' circulation and the spatial formations such circulations engendered. Finally, I consider work done in the 1990s and the early 2000s that attempts to tackle globalization and transnationalism and that is working in the tracks of critiques of Marxist and other grand narratives. Some of this work relies on heirs of Althusser, such as Bourdieu and Foucault. Some of it is beginning to unpack the oppositions between abstract and concrete, real and empirical, theory and practice by drawing attention to how the poles of these oppositions continually merge into one another in the coproduction of subjects and objects.

What's the matter in Marxism? Can there be a Marxist anthropology of materiality that obviates the antinomies between the concrete and the abstract, empiricism and realism, world and word? Can there be a Marxist approach to materiality that recuperates the dialectic without falling into idealism and without replicating the teleology and temporality of historical materialism? I return to this question in the conclusion.

## ENGELS, EVOLUTION AND ENERGY

Engels can be credited with the elevation of historical materialism to the status of science after Marx's death. Using the ethnological data that were beginning to filter into Europe from explorers, missionaries, and others around the world, Engels posited discrete stages in the evolution of social formations. 'Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence' (Marx and Engels 1970: 42). In acting on nature to procure their subsistence, people at the same time change their own natures, and so make history (see O'Laughlin 1975: 346). The dialectical relationship between human consciousness and nature is such that consciousness as such must always be understood materially, as praxis, not just contemplation. As I have indicated above, Marx made this clear in his attack on Feuerbach's materialism. Contemplation, then, thought itself, 'therefore part of the material world and governed by the same law of dialectical movement that characterizes nature' (O'Laughlin 1975: 343).

The standard account of Marx's materialism is that changing relationships with nature determine the shifts in consciousness that define the stages of social evolution. Yet the theoretical impulse toward evolutionism itself then places those changing relations with nature in a position of ontological priority despite Marx's unity of thought and matter. Hence Engels's deterministic account of human evolutionary change in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884/1972). In it, Engels appropriated Lewis Henry Morgan's (1877/1963) *Ancient Society* because it so readily suggested a correlation between different forms of the organization of subsistence and different forms of the organization of family. The suture between Engels and Morgan is near perfect, more so than in Marx's own writings; indeed, the first word of Engels's book is 'Morgan', and the name appears in the first sentence of each of the first three chapters. Where, in *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels were able to posit 'various stages of development in the division of labor' (Marx and Engels 1970: 43), now, with Morgan's data, Engels could more precisely chart those various stages, and provide an evolutionary account for the appearance of private property. And Morgan's text was perfectly amenable to

this task. As Morgan wrote, and Engels quoted, 'the great epochs of human progress have been identified, more or less directly, with the enlargement of the sources of subsistence' (Morgan 1963: 19). More or less directly, then, Engels outlines the history of this enlargement: from 'man' as a 'tree-dweller' living on 'fruits, nuts and roots', to 'the utilization of fish for food ... and ... the use of fire', to 'the invention of the bow and arrow', to 'the introduction of pottery', to 'the domestication of animals', to 'the smelting of iron ore' (Engels 1972: 87–92); we have here a history of social formation in terms of material appropriations from nature using new technologies developed in tandem with nature and with the dialectical evolution of human consciousness.

The emphasis on food can be found in Bronislaw Malinowski's materialism (see Kuper 1996: 29), as, for Malinowski, all of society and culture ultimately boiled down to satisfying one's basic human needs (having sex and filling one's belly, according to Malinowski). The emphasis on material culture can be found in Franz Boas's corpus; despite his reluctance toward Marxism, Boas found the material record of signal importance in demonstrating that Native Americans had histories marked by change and development and in providing the new science of anthropology an untapped field to collect, record, and document. This emphasis on material culture was an archaeologist's dream. In the early twentieth century, V. Gordon Childe (1936) could posit a theory of universal evolution in terms of archaeological data that neatly fit into the framework of historical materialism. 'Progressive changes' in social evolutionary time 'came from the base' (Trigger 1981/1984: 72). Using archaeological data on subsistence, tools, trade, and house construction, Childe could test Marxist theory and refine it (by supplementing evolutionary theory with diffusionist theories from other quarters in anthropology, for example). The result was a research strategy that took particular kinds of data – amenable both to archaeological discovery and collection and to incorporation in the Marxist evolutionary framework – and deduced from them specific social arrangements.

Childe's research strategy brought the problem of causality into relief, as it made an explicit scientific program of material determination. The professionalization of the discipline and its practitioners' quest to have it accorded the status of a 'science' permitted the complete obviation of Marx's dialectics in favor of strictly reductive material determination. Leslie White, for example, reintroduced

nineteenth-century evolutionary concepts and a focus on technology to mid-century American anthropology. Placing the emphasis on the acquisition of subsistence, White argued that human culture evolves as the amount of energy harnessed from nature in the form of plants, animals, and other material objects increases. The science of culture should seek data that might verify this formula. Hence, the emphasis on technological aspects of culture – the tools used to procure energy from the environment. As for cultural conceptions, myths, ideas: 'there is a type of philosophy proper to every type of technology' (White 1949: 366). Julian Steward's (1955) counterpoint to White was that universal evolution could not explain either variation or parallel emergence of similar traits in widely geographically separated societies. For Steward's multilinear evolution, then, human relationships with their specific environments produce specific cultures. The kinds of data necessary for the analysis were similar to those required by White, but also included environmental variables. Marshall Sahlins and Elman Service (1960) brought the two theories together in their delineation of 'general' and 'specific' evolution, the former the grand story of the evolution of Culture, the latter the smaller stories of the evolution of cultures. Various cultural ecological approaches (e.g., Rappaport 1968, Vayda 1969) extended and refined the framework, sometimes displacing its evolutionary pretensions altogether, and sometimes vociferously discounting any concern that the directions of causation might be multiple, as with Marvin Harris's (1979) cultural materialism. Imported into archaeology via the 'New Archaeology' of the 1960s and 1970s, such perspectives, as Bruce Trigger (himself an exponent of Childe) writes, helped maximize 'the explanatory potential of archaeological data' (Trigger 1978: x).

Regardless, then, and despite the lengthy debates among them, in each of these Marxist-inflected materialisms there was a clear distinction between data gathering and theory building, one that replicated the causality presumed in Engels's materialist historiography from tools and food to families and philosophies. These mid-century evolutionisms were exercises in hypothesis building and hypothesis testing with the positivist aim of building generalizable laws. Still, despite the deductive orientation – or precisely because of its positivist inclinations – it was taken as a matter of course that one could simply see, collect, and measure the data, since the data were material facts that did not require any theory for their

apprehension. The materialist theory of the social was not a theory of materiality. Instead, it was an effort to ground anthropology and archaeology in certain empirical facts amenable to the scientific method; and to proceed deductively even as one leaped inductively from material objects or measurable forces like energy to grand theories of the evolution of society.

### DEEP AND DEEPER STRUCTURES

If Marx's totality got unbundled in cultural materialist evolutionisms of the mid-twentieth century, it was reified in the contemporaneous Manchester school. Although it left questions of ultimate determination aside, Max Gluckman's (1955) theory of functional conflict bore more than a passing resemblance to the dialectical method. Peter Worsley's (1956) Marxist reanalysis of the Tallensi studied by Meyer Fortes (1945) placed signal importance on rights to arable land, a scarce commodity that Worsley revealed to be the basis of elder men's authority. Attention to the material conditions of production allowed Worsley to illuminate the lineage system. In its implicit apprehension of a socio-material totality, Worsley's re-evaluation of the Tallensi resembled and prefigured the structural Marxists of the 1960s and 1970s. If mid-century Marxisms in anglophone anthropology remained resolutely if sometimes vulgarly materialist (as Friedman (1974) claimed of Harris, because of the latter's insistence on a direct causal relationship between the determining base and the epiphenomenal superstructure), those developed in France strove for a realism that sometimes left the empirical to one side. The influence of Louis Althusser cannot be overstated. Turning to Marx's writings on ideology as opposed to his statements on evolution, and by way of the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, Althusser (1971, 1977) moved the discussion of ideology beyond its role in covering over the really real (i.e., subject to universal laws, if not empirically observable) economic base, and as dialectically constitutive of subjects, productive forces and relations of production themselves. Like Lacan, Althusser argued that ideology was less like a dream (a 'purely imaginary, i.e. null, result of the "day's residues", 1977: 108) and more like a language that structured access to an always-just-out-of-reach reality. Ideology is also always performative: Althusser referred back to Pascal on how belief for the Christian

does not pre-exist the act of prayer but is rather its effect (p. 114).

Take, for example, Maurice Godelier, on the Inca:

religious ideology is not merely the superficial, phantasmic reflection of social relations. It is an element internal to the social relations of production; it functions as one of the internal components of the politico-economic relation of exploitation between the peasantry and an aristocracy holding State power. This belief in the Inca's supernatural abilities ... was not merely a legitimizing ideology, after the fact, for the relations of production; it was part of the internal armature of these relations of production.

(Godelier 1977: 10)

Godelier, and the other so-called structural Marxists, folded superstructure into the base and laid the groundwork for a critique of ideology in 'primitive' and ancient societies not simply reducible to the unmasking of a ground or base of empirically observable relations and forces of production. Widely influential in sociocultural anthropology and imported into some quarters of archaeology (Friedman and Rowlands 1977; Miller and Tilley 1984), the structural Marxists represent a different relation to Marx's corpus than that of, say, Leslie White and others whose reception was more directly via Engels. Something deeper than surface appearance is sought, but not necessarily in the spirit of unmasking. For our imbrication in our own social formation ever removes the really real – here, the supposedly autonomous material world separate from our empirical perception of it – from our grasp. 'All science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided' (Marx, quoted in Spriggs 1984: 3). Indeed, this structuralist element places naive empiricism to one side, but at the expense, perhaps, of reinvigorating the material/ideal dichotomy, an aspect of Althusserian Marxism that vexed the archaeologists (see Rowlands 1984: 109).

Another aspect of Althusser that proved problematic to archaeology was its ascription of the institutions of the state, and the accretions of state power in material objects, to a society's powerful members – the so-called dominant ideology thesis – permitting 'only the powerful to make statements with artifacts' (Beaudry et al. 1991: 156). Although it led to a new focus on elites and material culture, ideological analysis in archaeology tended to assume rather than explain how certain categories of objects came to signify prestige (see Robb 1998: 333–4). Here,



artifacts were taken as 'symbolic' unless they were clearly functional, and 'ideological power' came to be seen as 'an elite tactic' analogous to other more straightforward forms of elite power (*ibid.*). Thus, Elizabeth Brumfiel (1995) criticized Mary Helms's (1993) interpretation of skilled crafts and long-distance trade items as linked to political leadership for being insufficiently attentive to the situated negotiations and relationships of prestige and power. Still, Brumfiel notes the importance of Helms's insight that style horizons can be used to demonstrate the connection between skilled crafts and the development of symbolic systems that diffuse over space and time. The question is whether to see style horizons as simply evidence for the geographic and temporal extension of power, or, possibly, the symbolic inversion of power relationships and the formation of new kinds of resistance (see, e.g., Brumfiel 1992, 1996). Thus, despite some limitations, the structural Marxist orientation provided new ideas for the analysis of material culture, more notably in archaeology than sociocultural anthropology, I think, drawing from the humanist Marxist toolkit of concepts such as hegemony, dominance and ideology (Rowlands and Kristiansen 1998).

In sociocultural anthropology, structural Marxism had an impact in rethinking the structural and material position of kinship in the forces and relations of production. Works by Claude Meillassoux (1972) and Pierre Philippe Rey (1971) explored how non-productive elder elites extract surplus labor in lineage systems. Meillassoux argued that senior men seek control over the means of reproduction – women. Women here were reduced to their bare, or, one should say fertile, materiality, and not treated as social subjects (see Harris and Young 1981); indeed, one could argue that Meillassoux treated land in those societies where land is the subject of labor (as opposed to its instrument) as having more of the qualities of subjecthood than women. Ian Hodder (1984) was able to read Meillassoux into the archaeological record by comparing Neolithic central and western European megaliths with central European longhouses. Hodder argued that the tombs represented a symbolic and material transformation of the longhouses that took place as the productive base of societies shifted. When labor was more determinative than land, emphasis was on the domestic and the naturalization of women's reproductive abilities; 'material culture [was] used to form a world in which women [were] to be emphasized, celebrated but controlled' (Hodder 1984: 66). As

land became more determinative, emphasis shifted to control over the ideological meaning and perpetuation of the lineage and the mediation of supernatural powers expressed by megaliths; women's importance declined and the megalithic burial takes the symbolic and ideological place of the longhouse (*ibid.*).

Meillassoux, like Rey (1971) and Terray (1972), was also interested in the relations among different modes of production coexisting in a society; Althusser's acceptance of overdetermination or multiple determination aided this analysis, although it left it open to the charge of muddying the distinction between base, superstructure, and the totality a more orthodox Marxist would insist obtains between them. The concept of overdetermination was first used by Sigmund Freud in rejecting simple material reductionisms to explain phenomena like hysteria in favor of the idea that observable symptoms might have multiple, interacting causes. For Althusser, overdetermination meant that the contradictions in a social formation were not strictly speaking always reducible to the economic base. Needless to say, some Marxists did not take to the structural Marxists' seeming rejection of the base-structure-superstructure model of society. Thus, Bridget O'Laughlin on Terray: 'There is a confusion here of concepts and concrete reality,' the latter, the base, which of necessity 'can be realized within a social totality' such that 'every mode of production describes not only a base but corresponding forms of superstructure' (O'Laughlin 1975: 358).

### WORLD HISTORY, NEO-SMITHIAN MARXISM AND THE COMMODITY

The idea that more than one mode of production might exist within a society, theorized in the work of the structural Marxists, informed analyses of colonialism that began to shape the discipline of anthropology in the 1970s and into the 1980s. Maurice Bloch's (1983) survey of Marxism and anthropology made use of the concept of the 'social formation' to describe such situations. Talal Asad's (1972) critique of Frederik Barth's (1959) ethnography of Swat Pathans attempted to excise the economic, functionalist and bourgeois assumptions of British functionalism by introducing the same concerns over land and labor highlighted by the structural Marxists, as well as introducing the problem of history as the sediment or residue of past material relations. Asad argued

that Barth had overlooked the history of British colonialism, its impact on land tenure, and its indirect enrichment of certain elite landholders because of Barth's implicit adherence to what Asad called a 'market model' of society. This Asad explained with reference to the Enlightenment thinker Thomas Hobbes, who argued that men in the state of nature competed with one another over scarce resources and that, without the firm hand of a sovereign, life was nasty, brutish, and short. While Hobbes may have accurately described the competitive market society emerging in his own day, Asad argued, he also conveniently naturalized the individualist and competitive nature of capitalism, which Barth then inadvertently imported into his account of Swat.

Indeed, with the work of Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf, students of Julian Steward, the 'concrete reality' that occupied O'Laughlin took on a decidedly historical cast, and history, historical process, or historical transformation provided a necessary supplement to materiality. Rather than simply looking for material culture, the economic base, or what have you, and using them in causal arguments about the formation of societies, Mintz and Wolf paid attention to historical processes that brought new material formations into existence and made old ones obsolete. Wolf's (1982) 'kin-ordered' and 'tributary' modes of production emphasized the flow of material goods within lineages and tribute-based political economic orders, respectively, and enabled a retelling of the histories of traditional anthropological subjects in terms of a grand narrative of the development of extractive colonialism, industrial capitalism, and the making of peasants and proletarians that did not suffer from the Eurocentrism of world-systems theory. Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1985) traced the intertwined emergence of peasant, proletarian, and bourgeois through the history of a particular commodity, sugar, richly describing it in all its material and symbolic dimensions as it moved in the circuits of trade and the culinary table. Mintz is interested in the materiality of sugar itself, demonstrating how sweetness as a sensory experience shifts its modality such that it becomes associated with *sugar* to the exclusion of other sweet-tasting substances. As a history of the sense of taste, and ultimately of 'taste' itself as a mark of 'civilization,' Mintz's study links an emerging commodity not only to histories of slave labor and nascent forms of industrialized production but also to a generalized culture of taste that associated sweetness with sugar and sugar with essential markers of

Britishness like tea drinking. Tea also remade time; the new daily ritual was itself the material instantiation of new regimes of work discipline and abstract, universal time.

Sahlins (1976) would berate the Marxists for elevating 'practical reason' to the status of the transcendent real and being ultimately bourgeois utilitarians. Sahlins argued that ideas are autonomous of any prior causes that could be found in a separate 'material' domain and that ideas themselves have material consequences. In a different vein, Taussig (1989) attacked the work of Mintz and Wolf for making of history a fetish, and creating for anthropology 'a mode of representation which denies the act of representing' (1989: 11). In Mintz and Wolf's histories, Taussig wrote, quoting Barthes, 'everything happens ... as if the discourse or the linguistic existence was merely a pure and simple "copy" of another existence, situated in an extra-structural field, the "real"' (*ibid.*). Mintz and Wolf, for their part, read Taussig's critique as preoccupied with 'subjectivity and reflexivity' (1989: 25), rejected the implicit charge that they are 'positivist, naturalizing devils' (*ibid.*), and attacked Taussig's 'nihilism' (p. 29). Defending their work as providing histories of how 'particular things became commodities' (*ibid.*), however, they opened themselves up to the further charge, levied against Wallersteinian world-systems analysis, of what Robert Brenner (1977) had called 'neo-Smithian Marxism'. Brenner argued that the work of Wallerstein and his acolytes was Marxist in name only, as it elevated the circulation and exchange, rather than the production, of commodities as explanatory of social, political and cultural formations.

Such criticisms would also dog new attention to commodities as things and commodification as a process. The idea that things had a 'social history' or 'cultural biographies' smacked of commodity fetishism even as it was offered by Arjun Appadurai (1986) and others as a means of softening the gift/commodity distinction and refusing the progressivist teleology implied in many discussions of the commodity form up to that point. The conceptual separation of gift economies from commodity economies in anthropological theory took attention away from those moments in non-capitalist societies when a thing's exchangeability became its most 'socially relevant feature' (Appadurai 1986: 13). Looking at things this way introduced a temporal dimension to the study of material objects, their 'life course', as it were, the ways they can move into and out of relations of exchange and formations of value (see Hoskins, Chapter 5).

The commodity is thus 'not one kind of thing rather than another, but one phase in the life of some things' (p. 17). The commodity form is thus, for Appadurai, only contingently materialized in objects. This realization allowed Appadurai and others analytically to separate commodification from reification, and to open up the possibility of reification – the making-material of a thing – without commodification.

Renewed attention to the commodity form as a contingent stage in the life of a thing, together with attempts to escape Marx's use value/exchange value dichotomy, helped invigorate the field of material culture studies. With a dose of Bourdieu's or Giddens's theories of practice, anthropologists, archaeologists (e.g., Rowlands and Kristiansen 1998) and others were initiating a discussion about the coproduction of subjects and objects in specific and mobile social formations (see Miller 1998, 2001). In archaeology, for example, some older interpretations of Paleolithic European cave art assumed the paintings to be human attempts to represent their relationship with nature, symbolically to mediate it. More recent interpretations reject the firm delineation between symbolic and material/technological systems this implies. As Margaret Conkey summarizes, in this approach 'material culture is produced ... not just to use or not even just to "mean." Rather, technology is viewed *as* ideology, production *as* meaning' (Conkey 1987: 424). Similarly, Christopher Tilley writes, 'Material culture may be physically embedded but it is at the same time culturally emergent ... [T]here can be no simple or formal demarcation between what is internal to, or is in, and that which is external to, or outside, the object' (Tilley 1993: 5). Work on the coproduction of subjects and objects through material symbolic practices bridges the intellectual and institutional divides between anthropology, archaeology, material culture studies, design, architecture, fashion theory, and geography, and contributes to discussions about global and transnational material/social fields.

### SPECTERS OF MARX

It is just such discussions about globalization and transnationalism that have brought the commodity form and its materialization in objects and in persons to the forefront of contemporary anthropologies of capitalism. Rejecting earlier developmentalist frameworks, figures like James Ferguson (1999), Lisa

Rofel (1999), Katherine Verdery (1996, 2003), Anna Tsing (2000), and Akhil Gupta (1998) challenge the modernist aesthetic and analytic of both development discourse and anthropology, and make a case for a richer understanding of the many forms of contemporary capitalisms, post-socialisms, as well as the non-capitalist social formations operating within or alongside dominant ones (Gibson-Graham 1995). Although materiality is rarely foregrounded as such in these works, attention to the built environment, the manner in which architecture and planning interface with and make material ideologies of dominance and rule (e.g., Bourdieu 1977 on the Kabyle house; Caldeira 2000; Holston 1989; Pemberton 1994), and practices of embodiment, dress, and habit (Bourdieu 1977) characterize this kind of work. It is best exemplified, perhaps, in the Comaroffs' corpus cited at the outset of this chapter.

What in an earlier moment would have been separated out as 'political economic' versus 'historical' approaches now cohabit – indeed, intermingle – to the extent that the one is not dissociable from the other. Ara Wilson's work on the 'intimacies of capitalism' through the global commodities of Avon stitches together the world of consumer goods with what she calls 'folk' economies and 'market' economies deeply in the bodies and desires of Thai women (2004: 193). Alan Klima (2002) and Rosalind Morris (2000) attend to money, materiality, magic, and mediumship in exploring other modalities of fetishism via, or sometimes askance, its theorization in Marxist thought. In this, their work resonates with a tradition of scholarship in anthropology on exchange and money (Parry and Bloch 1989), gift and commodity (Gregory 1982) property (for a recent collection, see Verdery and Humphrey 2004), and consumption (e.g., Foster 2002).

If attention to material forms, forces, or objects seems to slip away in such works, however, it is because Marxist legacies, realist pretensions, and empiricist ghosts still haunt such endeavors, because we have not, 'even now, escaped the ontological division of the world into "spirit" and "matter"' (Keane 2003: 409). Archaeologist Elizabeth Brumfiel (2003) can claim that 'it's a material world' by emphasizing artifacts and excavations but without questioning either the separation of spirit and matter that allows her to 'abstract signs from the soil' (Masri 2004) or the linguistic ideology that understands words unproblematically to refer to things in the world. The movement from object to knowledge proceeds as if the object pre-exists its enlistment – an assumption

warranting both realism and empiricism and allowing them to blur into one another – and as if its enlistment in language is a straightforward referential affair. Attempts to revivify Marxism often resituate a materialist analysis of social formations and reanimate its old reductionisms and dichotomies: the causal determination afforded the economic base or the forces of production; the dichotomy between material and ideal, practice and theory. The material/ideal impasse mirrors the structure/agency problems of an earlier era. Writings densely attentive to materiality, the pressing back of the material on the ideal or the coconstitution of objects and subjects (and objects as subjects and vice versa) nonetheless neatly replicate the magic of willful and moving commodities and the reduction of ‘real, active men’ to their labor power.

Alongside such work is an emergent attention to abstraction, ephemerality, virtuality, and the apparent dematerialization of political economic forms. Authors speculate on the increasing detachment between money and ‘real’ commodities or labor power, the virtualization of money and finance, and the fantasy work that seemingly animates contemporary capitalisms after the end of the gold standard and the Bretton Woods agreements. There is no unity on how best to approach such phenomena or what their implications might be, but there have been a number of forays into these fields (e.g., Miyazaki 2003; Tsing 2000; Maurer 2004; LiPuma and Lee 2004; Miller 1998). Miller (1998) makes explicit the relation between the apparent abstraction of the economy, the work of abstraction of capital hypothesized in Marx, and analytical abstraction as an intellectual enterprise. Those seeking a new Marxism for a new set of problems presented by dematerialized property offer grand theory less attentive to materiality and more concerned with the effectivity of political argument and action in the academy and beyond in a world where there are seemingly no alternatives to capitalism (e.g., Jameson 2002; Hardt and Negri 2000). Derrida’s (1994) extensive consideration of capitalist time and the time of Marx’s *Capital* stands as a signal contribution to the contemporary rethinking of ideological abstraction and commodity fetishism.

Marx illustrated the concept of commodity fetishism with the example of a table, and referenced the nineteenth-century craze for mystical parlor games in which objects apparently move without any human intervention:

The form of wood, for instance, is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table

continues to be that common, everyday thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than ‘table-turning’ ever was.

(Marx 1978: 71)

Lingering over Marx’s image of the turning table at the opening of *Capital*, Derrida writes:

The capital contradiction does not have to do simply with the incredible conjunction of the sensuous and the supersensible in the same Thing; it is the contradiction of *automatic autonomy*, mechanical freedom, technical life. Like every thing, from the moment it comes onto the stage of a market, the table resembles a prosthesis of itself. Autonomy and automatism, but automatism of this wooden table that spontaneously puts itself into motion, to be sure, and seems thus to animate, animalize, spiritualize, *spiritize* itself, but while remaining an artificial body, a sort of automaton, a puppet, a stiff and mechanical doll whose dance obeys the technical rigidity of a program. Two genres, two generations of movement intersect with each other in it, and that is why it figures the apparition of a spectre.

(1994: 153)

The living, moving commodity haunts the thing’s use value (p. 151) and renders it ‘not sensuous and non-sensuous, or sensuous but non-sensuous; [Marx] says: sensuous non-sensuous, sensuously super-sensible’ (*ibid.*). Derrida thus finds in Marx a different kind of unity of matter and thought than posited by Engels in the first epigraph to this chapter. Engels’s unity was ultimately the subordination of thought into matter. In Derrida’s reading of Marx, the relation between matter and thought is not dialectical – as thesis/antithesis or contradictory poles whose tension and resolution create a new conjuncture no longer legible as ‘matter’ and ‘thought’ – but spectral. A specter is a shadow from another time, whose time has gone, but yet manifests itself in *this* time. It is *out of synch* with the rest of today’s time-space, not in opposition to it, not contradicting it, just not quite fully in or out of it. ‘Two genres, two generations of movement intersect’ in the ghost, as in the commodity-table.

Despite their apparent self-evidence, then, matter and thought, thing and person, are continually infolding and intertwining, a dense web that momentarily and for particular purposes congeals subjects and objects with elements of willfulness or agential power. This



is essentially Bruno Latour's (1993) position on the ontological status of non-human agents in *We have Never been Modern*. But to continue with Derrida: 'The wood comes alive and is peopled with spirits: credulity, occultism, obscurantism, lack of maturity before Enlightenment, childish or primitive humanity': believing commodities to take on value in relation to other commodities, believing commodities to move of their own accord or to reach out to us and pique our desire, we demonstrate childish credulity in spite of our better Enlightened selves. And yet such childish, primitive credulity is integral to – indeed, constitutive of – the market itself, and 'what would Enlightenment be without the market' (1994: 152)? The paradoxes compound themselves in that the super-sensibility of the sensuous – our inability to grasp the real – also warrants the practical and intellectual techniques at our disposal to make the attempt. 'Empiricist' and 'bourgeois', one might say (and Marilyn Strathern practically does, 1992: 173), are analogues of analytical practice in capitalism and its techniques of self-reflection and autodocumentation, the sciences.

Including Marxism. As Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us, echoing Alfred Sohn-Rethel (1978) and Moishe Postone (1993), Marx's concept of abstract labor, the 'secret of the expression of value' that places all activity, human or otherwise, on one scale of quantifiable value, 'could not be deciphered ... until the concept of human equality had already acquired the permanence of a fixed popular opinion' (Marx, quoted by Chakrabarty 2000: 52). 'The generalization of contractual equality under bourgeois hegemony,' Chakrabarty summarizes, 'created the historical conditions for the birth of Marx's insights' (*ibid.*). Chakrabarty goes on to emphasize that the abstraction entailed in abstract labor was 'a concrete performance of the work of abstraction' (p. 54) – abstraction as concrete practice, the historical unity with which Marx (and Hegel) began his inquiry into history, the formulation subtending the effort to keep the Marxian totality bundled together despite its continual unravellings.

In the meantime, however, the very realization of capitalist time's specificity and the formal dynamics of contractual equality provide occasions to rethink the materiality of the capitalist landscape. Mark Leone's (1984) analysis of a formal Georgian garden in Annapolis, MD, shows how the use of perspective and scale as well as classical quotations and botanical science created both a representation of universal history and abstract, evenly segmented capitalist time, as well as an instrument for

inculcating the 'rationality' of that notion of time as well as natural order. In addition, by carefully arranging plants based on detailed knowledge of their growing behavior the garden planner was able to map knowledge of precedents – based on systematic observation and temporal demarcation – that redounded into juridical order. As Leone writes, 'just as precedent inserted into law allowed the established order to protect its own position by making that position appear historically valued, so that same social position seemed to be more fixed when it appeared to be served by optical, astronomical, and geometrical phenomena displayed in the garden's *allées* and *vistas*' (1984: 29). Here, capitalist time, abstract labor, and juridical order come together in the materiality and embodied experience of a formalized landscape.

### CONCLUSION: DOES MARXISM MATTER?

Here's the rub for studies of materiality elsewhere and in other times: if abstract labor provides 'the key to the hermeneutic grid through which capital requires us to read the world' (Chakrabarty 2000: 55) then how are we to read 'other' worlds? Marilyn Strathern provides a case in point in her analysis of Melanesian exchange and the Maussian legacy apparent in how anthropologists have understood it. By assuming that Melanesian exchange operates according to a 'barter theory of value' (so many pigs equals so much *taro*, a comparison of quantities) anthropologists continually misread the nature of the gift. 'I suspect we have been dazzled ... by the precision of the counting,' she writes, and have missed that the counting is less about establishing ratios based on aggregations of items, than about creating analogies between them (Strathern 1992: 171). Strathern refuses to take for granted the discreteness of subjects and objects, much less persons and things, and instead asks how transacting brings the persons and things into being and into embodiment or materiality. The work of Bruno Latour, and actor-network theory in general, has inspired similar work on the networks of human and non-human actors that materialize persons and things as distinct in spite of their continual blurring. Anthropologists adopting while sometimes chafing against this sort of approach are doing research on science (Raffles 2002; Hayden 2004), bureaucracy (Riles 2000; Fortun 2003), activism (Jean-Klein 2003),



money (Maurer 2005), law (Reed 2004), and anthropological reflection itself (Crook 2005). Fred Myers's research on the creation of markets for Australian Aboriginal art demonstrates that the materialities at issue are not necessarily the art works themselves so much as the dense set of curatorial events, the 'material practices through which these objects have moved' (Myers 2001: 167, punctuation omitted). Such practices include the mundane materialities of a printed 'number on a painting that link[s] it to a document on file' (p. 202).

Research agendas for Marxist-inspired studies of materiality, I am suggesting, should continually work to unground their own perceptual foundations, their own empiric, since the Marxist paradigm insists on the situatedness of perception itself (and its objectification as such, as a separable element of consciousness) in capitalist modalities of time, space, subject, object, and evaluation. So, were one to study a commodity chain today, for example, one would also want to understand the networked processes and subjects/objects that constitute the commodity *as well as* the perceptual apparatus warranting its stabilization as such. This would include the research enterprise that materializes forth the object in the material/discursive terrain of scholarship itself.

Taking the lead from new objects of ethnographic scrutiny, the kind of contemporary research agenda I am suggesting would focus as much on the form as on the content of the work. New Marxist-inspired attention to materiality brings into its purview the materiality of the presentation of research. No longer simply experimentations with textual and discursive strategies, such exercises in form make explicit the mutual imbrication of research objects, research processes and research results. Examples can be found in work like Christopher Kelty's (2001), which queries the 'freedom' and 'openness' of new virtual materialities such as open-source software. Despite its apparent separation from the market of commodities, open-source code relies on a strict set of citational practices required to be on display whenever and wherever it is appropriated. These mirror academic practices of the creation and circulation of reputation and regard manifest in databases like the Social Sciences Citation Index (see Kelty 2001). Publishing in a free-access 'virtual' journal/database makes explicit the relationship between form and content in both the object and Kelty's own representation of it in an 'open source' venue. Kelty's virtualization of open source and academic citationality reminds me of Tilley et al.'s (2000)

experiments with the interface among rocks, landscape art, and archaeology which seek to transform experiences of the materiality of place by highlighting the way rock, art, and archaeology formally replicate one another. One might see the objects here – dematerialized databases and code, on the one hand, and rock and stone, on the other – as opposite ends of a virtual-material continuum. However, like Kelty's work, Tilly et al.'s experiment ungrounds, as it were, the perceptual bases of empiricist modes of knowledge generation. 'An awareness and interpretation of the significance of different stones on the hill is ultimately a relationship between the body and the object. ... performing art is a process of engagement that allows us to see the hill, its stones and the prehistoric architecture in a new way' (Tilley et al. 2000: 60). I am suggesting a performative scholarly engagement the enactment of which constitutes its critical currency.

Lurking everywhere, of course, is still the 'fissure of the consciousness into "practical" and "theoretical"', which Slavoj Žižek (1989: 20) views as the product of the abstraction of exchange. This leads Žižek away from the classical Marxist conception of ideology as false consciousness of the real conditions of existence and toward a conception of ideology as the real conditions of existence themselves. Like Sohn-Rethel and, to a lesser extent perhaps, Chakrabarty, this also leads Žižek to a peculiar form of stage theory, in which it is not until commodity exchange is 'generalized' and 'universalized' that it 'brings about its symptom' of hiding the real within it (1989: 22–3). The ghosts of stage theory lurk in the temporal phrases of Žižek's account: pre-capitalist societies have not 'yet' witnessed the universalization of the production of commodities, but 'as soon as' the generalization takes place, labor is abstracted and the 'freedom' to exchange 'becomes its own negation' (p. 22). It is as if one could go and measure whether or not a pre-capitalist had 'yet' achieved – progress! – the general equivalent of the commodity form in abstract labor, abstract human equality, and universal exchangeability.

It seems, then, that even if we open up the material analysis of the social to the instability, the uncanniness attending the tendentious purification of hybrid subjects/objects, we cannot escape capitalist time and its attendant teleologies and empirics. And this is a problem not just with Marxism, but with the symptom that Marxism identified in its internal critique of its own social formation. It would seem to make the apprehension of 'other' worlds

impossible, even as it sets for itself the very task, as an imperative that justifies and defines itself, of locating such other non- or pre-capitalist worlds.

Does it matter? I am not sure that it does. Writing against the apocalyptic narrative of feminism's failure, and the frequently heard lament that academic feminism has abandoned 'real women's lives' to take up complex theory, Robyn Wiegman makes a case for a feminism not identical to itself, that is, a feminism that is not correlative with actually existing women's subjectivities and that therefore 'demands something other from the political than what we already know' (Wiegman 2000: 822). Such a feminism recognizes that theory 'will exceed its contemporary emplotment as the critical container of US feminism's activist subjectivity' (*ibid.*). I have been making a case for an analogous, non-identical Marxism: it 'will not be efficient; it will not have the clarity of productive order; it will not guarantee that feminist [or any other] struggle culminates in a present that is without waste to the future. This is the case because the future is itself the excess of productive time: elusive, unimaginable, and ultimately unable to be guaranteed or owned' (*ibid.*). If Marxism is capitalism's critique, it is also its definition. And if Marxism can be a moving and emergent critique, then it can abandon without apologies its empiricist and realist pretensions and instead allow itself to trundle along, to muddle through, its own potentialities as they emerge together with its objects, material, immaterial, and everything in between.

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