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# How Many Histories of Labor? Towards a Theory of Postcolonial Capitalism

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‘Cognitive capitalism’ and ‘cognitive labor’ have been crucial concepts in recent critical discussions on contemporary capitalism. Through these concepts the attempt was made to grasp the strategic relevance of knowledge for capital’s accumulation from the point of view of the composition of labor involved in the production of knowledge itself. Such important issues as precarity, networks, and the transformations of the welfare state were at stake in these debates since their inception. One of the most widespread criticisms of the concepts of ‘cognitive capitalism’ and ‘cognitive labor’ has revolved around theories of the ‘international division of labor’. The point is often made that capitalism and labor may well have become ‘cognitive’ in the West, but is still industrial (or even characterized by ‘earlier’ forms of extraction and so-called ‘primitive accumulation’) in ‘most of the world’.

This essay can be read as a contribution to that discussion. The concept of ‘postcolonial capitalism’ proposed in the following pages is to be understood as a supplement to current discussions on cognitive capitalism, which suggest some important modification of this concept itself. Starting from the criticism of theories of ‘stages’ of capitalist development, recently proposed by several postcolonial

critics, it maintains that one of the crucial features of contemporary global transitions of capitalism lies in a kind of geographical disruption, in a continuous mixing up of scales of accumulation, dispossession and exploitation. That means that spatial great divides such as center and periphery, the Global North and the Global South, First and Third World, are increasingly challenged and destabilized. This has important consequences from the point of view of current debates on cognitive capitalism and labor. On the one hand, the concept of postcolonial capitalism opens up a space within which the role of knowledge economies and production can be critically analyzed well beyond the boundaries of the 'West' – as a distinctive feature of contemporary capitalism in its global scope. On the other hand, it points to the new salience of forms of extraction and so-called 'primitive accumulation' in former metropolitan centers of colonial modernity as well. More generally, the concept of postcolonial capitalism emphasizes the relevance of diverse scales, places and histories within the structure of global capitalism, which leads to the necessity of qualifying theories of cognitive capitalism and labor that too often appear as indifferent to this spatial and temporal heterogeneity.

In the following pages I will try to contribute to this ongoing discussion with an attempt to test and tentatively re-elaborate the Marxian concepts of living labor, labor power, and abstract labor. I will do this through an engagement with 'global labor history' and postcolonial criticism, particularly with Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe* (2000). This is not only because the second chapter of this book ('The Two Histories of Capital') is a provocative reading of the Marxian concept of abstract labor. *Provincializing Europe* further allows the framing of the discussion on labor and capital within a much wider horizon, where the very

understanding of 'modernity' as well as the geopolitics of knowledge production are at stake.

## 1. The multiplication of modernity

Among many other things, *Provincializing Europe* can indeed be read as a powerful intervention into the debates on 'modernity', which since the late 1970s (that is, and not by chance, since the inception of the debate on 'post-modernity') have acquired new meanings and nuances. Both the temporal and the spatial coordinates of modernity have been challenged and displaced, particularly by postcolonial criticism, in the last three decades. And it seems to me that the new gaze on modernity produced by postcolonial studies is one of the basic contributions they have made to our critical understanding of history and of the present. I would like to briefly expand here on what I would call the geographical imagination that nurtured and trained this new gaze.

I use the term 'geographical imagination' keeping in mind the young Indian narrator of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, who criticizes his cousin for taking space, place, and geography too much for granted. 'A place does not merely exist', he says, 'it has to be invented in one's imagination'.[1] Needless to say, Ghosh himself has given wonderful examples of this geographical imagination: modernity as it is reflected in the mirror of the 'sea of poppies' sailed by the slave ship, *Ibis,* looks quite different from the one discussed in the pages of Jürgen Habermas' or Marshall Berman's books! Against the background of the trade in opium and coolies in the years preceding the opium wars, modernity is depicted by Ghosh as arising from a spectacular intertwining and mixing up of races, peoples and languages in the waters of oceans and rivers, which become the stage of a process of continuous

spatial rescaling of modern history. The multiplicity of languages spoken by the crew and by the passengers of *Ibis*, ranging from Lascar to Zubben, from Hindi to Bhojpuri, inscribes itself into the very English of the author, challenging the norm of modern homogeneous national languages and installing *translation*, well beyond the linguistic domain, at the center of 'global' modernity. [2]

The 'global' dimension of modernity since its inception is nowadays widely acknowledged and studied within a variety of historical approaches, from world systems theory to postcolonial and world histories. The drawing of geometrical boundaries on the European map, the new political geography emerging with the rise of the modern state was from the beginning inseparable from colonial and imperial cartographies that encompassed the whole world, as Étienne Balibar has particularly stressed.[3] This double organization of political space, Carlo Galli adds in a remarkable book on 'political spaces', has actually always been 'a battlefield, a theater of conflict': 'Subjective energies rise out of modern political space', Galli writes, 'causing its geometries to change and, more important, mobilizing those geometries so that they open up to specifically universal dimensions. These dimensions are not, at first, vehicles for spatial order. To the contrary, they have the capacity to destroy any closed political space'.[4]

While the modern assemblage of national, colonial and imperial cartographies has been contested by a variety of subjective movements and social struggles in Europe, it has also been challenged by multifarious forms of resistance and negotiation on the colonial and imperial frontier, notwithstanding its 'necropolitical' modes of extraction, genocide and highly racialized and gendered exploitation. In their last book, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri give an impressive description of the tensions

deriving from this constitutive dimension of contestation and resistance within the very structure of modernity, which appears in their analysis as internally fractured by the forces of 'antimodernity' and constitutively open to the possibility of 'altermodernity'.[5]

The most important contribution of postcolonial studies to the understanding of modernity is usually considered to lie in the multiplication of modernities, in the discovery of alternative paths and experiences of modernization.[6] While I share the importance of this point, I am interested here in deepening the meaning of these multiple modernities, of the very transposition of the singular 'modernity' into the plural 'modernities'. Following the seminal book by Sibylle Fischer on Haiti and the cultures of slavery in the age of revolution, a first important point in this regard is that pluralizing modernity helps us to understand modernity itself, not in Habermasian terms as an 'unfinished project', but rather – as I was already stressing – as a contested field. Slave revolts and revolutions in the Caribbean in the 1790s, Fischer writes, were also 'a struggle over what it means to be modern, who can claim it, and on what grounds'. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly here, we have to keep in mind that 'heterogeneity is a congenital condition of modernity, and that the alleged purity of European modernity is an *a posteriori* theorization or perhaps even part of a strategy to establish European primacy'.[7]

It is this alleged purity, this purported homogeneity of European modernity, which makes up the 'imaginary figure' of Europe that, as Chakrabarty writes at the beginning of *Provincializing Europe*, remains deeply embedded in '*clichéd and shorthand forms* in some everyday habits of thought'.[8] These habits of thought continue to shape political and theoretical discourses in the age of globalization. Europe as an 'imaginary figure' sums up a complex configuration of knowledge and power that materially characterizes

modernity and its discourses as powerful forms of *interpellation*, to use the language of Louis Althusser. Sanjay Seth has for instance shown in his path-breaking book on the Western education of colonial India that what is at stake in these diverse forms of interpellation is nothing less than subject constitution.[9] Needless to say, education is a strategic field for the investigation of the material effects of modernity as interpellation, especially since it is constitutively linked to the formation of *citizenship* – and to the definition and legitimization of its hierarchies and internal as well as external borders. This leads to the simultaneous existence of the metropolitan citizen and the colonial subject within the legal framework of European empires between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. (A point briefly but very effectively analyzed in *Provincializing Europe* through a reference to John Stuart Mill's *Considerations on Representative Government* that confined 'Indians, Africans and other "rude" nations to an imaginary waiting room of history', *PE*, p. 8).

**2.** *Neue Sachlichkeit*

In order to be able to function as interpellation, modernity, its concepts and discourses, have to be framed according to an *abstract* code, according to the logic of what the German historian Reinhart Koselleck has termed 'singular collectives'. The analysis developed by Koselleck, combining suggestions derived from Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin and drawing a perfect parallel with Chakrabarty's critique of 'historicism', points to a process of subsumption of the multiplicity of temporalities constitutive of historical experience under the homogeneous and linear time of progress. This in turn increasingly becomes the temporal skeleton of the main political and historical concepts of modernity.[10]

The awareness of the 'artificiality' of this image of progress was pretty widespread in the years of what Koselleck considered to be the *Sattelzeit*, the time of the threshold to modernity around the French Revolution during which this decisive process of temporalization of political concepts took place. In his 'meta-critique' of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Johann Gottfried Herder wrote in 1799: 'actually, every changing thing has in itself the measure of its own time. [...] There are not two things in the world that have the same temporal measure. [...] We can therefore say, with a daring and nevertheless exact expression, that an infinite multiplicity of times coexist in the universe at the same time (*es giebt also [man kann es eigentlich und kühn sagen] im Universum zu einer Zeit unzählbar viele Zeiten)*. The time that we imagine as measure of everything is only a proportion of our ideas (*ein Verhältnismaas unserer Gedanken*), [...] in a way just a vision (*Wahnbild*)'.[11]

Deeply influenced by Spinoza, and deeply influencing in turn the development of romanticism especially through his writings on language, poetry and national spirit, Herder cannot be considered as a representative of what we may understand with Koselleck as mainstream modernity. Nevertheless it would be wrong to think, as many simplistic critiques do, that mainstream modernity itself, let's say in the line that goes from Hobbes to Hegel, was not aware of this multiplicity of times (that means, of experiences, forms of life and belonging, 'habitations of the world'). The opposite is true: the movement of constitution of modern concepts as 'singular collectives' is inherently shaped by a violent tension, by a process of appropriation and synchronization of this multiplicity of times within the 'homogeneous and empty' time of state and capital. And once again: what is at stake in this tension is the very *production of subjectivity*.

I introduced the terms state and capital because the movement of subsumption of heterogeneous temporalities and living experiences under a homogeneous and linear code nicely captures essential features of both concepts and structures. State and capital constitute the overarching reference framework of modern political and historical concepts; they constitute themselves as main powers capable of shaping the very field of social and cultural experience. They both require a specific relation to subjectivity in order to exist and reproduce themselves. Put shortly, we can say that citizenship and labor are the names of subjectivity under the domination of state and capital. There is of course a structural nexus between citizenship and labor, which has been, for instance, historically investigated in the U.S. American case by such scholars as David Montgomery and Evelyn Nakano Glenn.[12] Labor status ('free labor' as it was imagined and constructed by the legal doctrine of freedom of contract) was tied since the early days of the Republic to citizenship status, to the recognition as a full adult citizen. Despite all the differences in the details, in the timing of the process and in the violence of the clashes that accompanied it, the same can be said for Western Europe.

While citizenship emerged as an abstract legal and political framework out of a process of disruption of multiple 'concrete' belongings, 'free' wage labor was imagined as severing all but the monetary bond between employer and employee. A new objectivity emerged – a *neue Sachlichkeit*, to borrow a term from Marx and Weber, who both employed it in their analysis of capitalism, and thus anticipated a quite important art movement of the 1920s. And this new objectivity, as Chakrabarty reminds us in *Provincializing Europe* when quoting and discussing Marx, was a spectral, 'phantom-like' objectivity (*PE*, p. 53). It was supposed to be

mirrored in specific subjective positions, the ones of the citizen and the worker.

To make a long (and complex) history short (and easy), the dyad citizen-worker assumed dominance worldwide after World War II, whether in the Stakhanov moment of the USSR, the heyday of US industrial towns such as Flint, Michigan, or the disciplined working subject of the Nehru plans. Writing in 1950, T.H. Marshall provided a kind of formal conceptualization of this dyadic schema from the point of view of the development of citizenship, drawing the balance of what has been effectively described by Antonio Negri as a long-standing process of constitutionalization of labor. The recognition – and at the same time the mystification – of the power of labor (of the organized industrial working class) became in the 'West' the basis of new 'social rights' and of a new 'material constitution', which Étienne Balibar defines as the constitution of the 'social-national state'.[13]

Kalyan Sanyal has shown in his recent important book on postcolonial capitalism how the new configuration of knowledge and power that sustained this constitution interpellated once again the non-Western world through the discursive formation of *development*.[14] Its material effectiveness lay precisely in presenting the generalization of wage labor as a condition for the full deployment of national citizenship (and therefore for the full achievement of sovereignty, which had fundamentally been at stake in anti-colonial struggles for independence). While the material conditions of both the 'social-national state' and of the developmental state have been challenged and disrupted by 'neo-liberal' policies and rhetoric in the last three decades, one has only to look at the important experiences of recent 'popular' governments in Latin America to see how profoundly this link

between citizenship and wage labor continues to shape political imagination, especially in the Left.[15]

Let us now go back to the violent tension that characterizes the relation between such abstract concepts, standards and norms like modern citizenship and 'free' wage labor to the multiplicity of times that are constitutive of 'life'. I consider the second chapter of *Provincializing Europe* one of the keenest and most original analyses of this relation. This means that I consider the theoretical framework developed here by Chakrabarty valid beyond the realm of capital and labor (in the sense that it can be used to critically investigate modernity in general). Summarizing his argument in the chapter and discussing it in detail lies beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that the relation between what Chakrabarty calls 'History 1' ('a past posited by capital itself as its precondition' *PE*, p. 63) and 'History 2' (the set of histories and pasts that are non posited by capital itself but can nevertheless become 'antecedents' and constitutive elements of the capitalist relationship) must *not* be interpreted as a dialectical relationship, which would mean taking History 2 as 'a dialectical Other of the necessary logic of History 1' (*PE*, p. 66). The concept of subsumption (one could even say 'capture') seems to be more adequate to describe what is at stake in the relationship, which provides a theoretical key to the basic problem Chakrabarty deals with here: that is, 'the fact that global capitalism [but we could add: as well as global modernity] exhibits some common characteristics, even though every instance of capitalist development [every instance of 'modernization'] has a unique history' (*PE*, p. 47).

My reading of Chakrabarty's solution to the problems arising from this fact is quite easy. To put it rather schematically: 'History 1' accounts for the 'common characteristics' of capitalism, while the

*encounter* (with the clashes, violence and catastrophes produced by this encounter) between 'History 1' and 'History 2' accounts for the singularity of each history of capitalist development. This has important consequences for our reading of the 'spatial coordinates' of modernity, since its history can only be reconstructed from the multiplicity of points of view (of locations) that correspond to the multiplicity of 'encounters' between 'History 1' and 'History 2'.

At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the fact that these encounters did not take place only 'once upon a time', in what could be described (I am thinking here of Marx's discussion of the 'so-called primitive accumulation' in *Capital*, volume I) as the 'prehistory' of capitalism and modernity: they rather repeat themselves every day and everywhere in the world (and one should add that 'History 2' itself is continuously reproduced on a totally new basis due to the multiplicity of times that crisscross the present).[16] And this problematizes, I think, the very possibility of taking 'alternative modernities' as constituted once for all, with distinctive and stable features making up their 'cultural' specificity. The continuous repetition of the encounter between 'History 1' and 'History 2' opens up a theoretical space in which the contestation of modernity, the 'struggle over what it means to be modern, who can claim it, and on what grounds', in Fischer's terms, needs to be critically investigated and politically interrogated. It is precisely from within this theoretical space that I ask the question posed in the title of this essay: *how many histories of labor?*

### 3. Capitalism and the social production of difference

Accepting the challenge of "provincializing Europe" also has important consequences for European studies. Once we destabilize

European primacy in the history of modernity, a new gaze can be turned on to European history itself, discovering for instance how contested, limited and contradictory the deployment of the abstract standards of citizenship and 'free' wage labor also was there. The existence of what is still widely held to be the 'normal labor relation', that means, the social hegemony of relatively stable wage labor within the entirety of dependent labor, actually shaped in Western Europe only the decades of so-called 'Fordism', with important differences and dramatic imbalances in the histories of countries and regions.

From this point of view, wage labor as the 'normal labor relation' seems to have a quite short history. And it is a clear candidate to be considered a paradigmatic example of the '*clichéd and shorthand forms*' that make up the 'imaginary figure' of Europe critically referred to by Chakrabarty at the beginning of *Provincializing Europe*. In his seminal works on the 'invention of free labor' and the development of capitalism in the Anglo-American world, Robert J. Steinfeld has pointed to the multifarious ways in which 'non pecuniary' (penal, administrative, social, moral) pressures to compel work have characterized the development of employment relations in England until the end of the Nineteenth century. 'Free' wage labor, Steinfeld demonstrates, was not a product of free contracts in free markets, but rather of 'the restrictions placed on freedom of contract by the social and economic legislation adopted during the final quarter of the century under the pressure of dramatic workers' struggles. He further invites us to abandon any 'historicist' reading of labor history, reversing our perspective and using for instance indentured servitude and slavery to rethink the history of the employment relations in the United States (where the limits to freedom of contract were of course of a different nature with regard to England).[17]

Once again we are confronted here, from the point of view of the history of labor and capitalism in the United States, with the problematic of the persistence of 'primitive accumulation'. Marxist historians have too often confined to the beginning of capitalist history in the United States such 'anomalous' processes as the seizing of native lands and the employment of indentured or enslaved labor, without considering the continuous reproduction of their traces within the shape of citizenship and the composition of labor. The 'wages of whiteness', to borrow the phrase introduced by Du Bois in 1935 and developed by David Roediger into the centerpiece of a striking interpretation of the relation between race and class in the making of the U.S. American working class, cut and cross the abstract figure of 'free' wage labor in that country until today, playing a crucial role in producing the singularity of capitalist development in the United States.[18] The 'color line' has particularly fractured the labor market, regulating and radically limiting the mobility of non-white individuals in a way that seems to overtly contradict one of the most famous Marxian statements on 'labor in general', on 'the abstract universality of wealth-creating activity':

> 'Such a state of affairs', Marx wrote in the 1857 *Introduction* to the *Grundrisse*, 'is at its most developed in the most modern form of existence of bourgeois society – in the United States. Here, then, for the first time, the point of departure of modern economics, namely the abstraction of the category "labor", "labor as such", labor pure and simple, becomes true in practice'.[19]

Much more historically realistic (and we will have to theoretically take stock of this historical realism) is the account of Lisa Lowe, which draws on a huge amount of research done in the last decades. 'In the history of the United States', she contends in her

*Immigrant Acts*, 'capital has maximized its profits not by rendering labor "abstract" but precisely through the social production of "difference" [...] marked by race, nation, geographical origin, and gender'.[20] Needless to say, such a statement is not valid only for the United States (although its validity for the United States is particularly important if we keep in mind the quotation of Marx given above): the history of Latin America provides us, for example, with a rich variety of instantiations of the diverse ways in which the 'social production of difference' played a key role in the subsumption of labor under capital. This was also mirrored by the multifarious and often savage forms of resistance and struggles of living labor against this subsumption. As we have learnt from Michael Taussig, *A friend of the devil is a friend of mine* was sung long before its renditions by the Grateful Dead, by African-American sugar plantation workers in Western Colombia and indigenous tin mine workers in Bolivia in their attempt to come to terms with processes of 'primitive accumulation' and proletarianization. The devil is for them the anthropomorphic embodiment of capital, but their 'difference' allows them to negotiate with this figure in ways that would be quite difficult for abstract labor[21].

It is, therefore, clear that what I call above the 'normal labor relation' does not only have quite a short history. Far from being 'normal', it is rather exceptional once we consider historical capitalism in the global scope that has characterized it since its inception. Dipesh Chakrabarty began his *Rethinking Working Class History* more than twenty years ago discussing the Marxian idea that 'freedom of contract (which brought legal and market relations together)' was to be considered the standard of capitalism. He further contended that 'the figure of the worker invoked in his [Marx's] exposition of capital was that of a person who belonged to

a society where the bourgeois notion of equality was ingrained in culture'.[22] Chakrabarty's book was a fine contribution to the deconstruction of these Marxian presuppositions through a masterful analysis of the social and cultural milieu of jute-mill workers in Bengal, as well as of the forms of their political mobilization and struggles.

While nowadays it has become quite doubtful that even in England in the second half of the nineteenth century the bourgeois notion of equality was really 'ingrained' in popular and proletarian culture, the development of so-called global labor history in the last two decades has further widened our knowledge of (and refined our sensibility for) the deep *heterogeneity* of the forms of subsumption of labor under capital that has characterized historical capitalism. Such authors as Marcel van der Linden, just to mention one important name, have effectively shown how forced labor, in its changing shapes, has been (and continues to be) constitutive of the huge array of relations and arrangements that make up history and present of capitalism in its global scope. Predicated on the assumption that 'free' wage labor is only one of the multiple ways in which capitalism transforms labor power into a commodity, a much wider and more inclusive concept of the global class of workers in historical and contemporary capitalism emerges. Subaltern workers, the phrase privileged by van der Linden, 'make up a variegated group, including chattel slaves, share-croppers, small artisans and wage earners. It is the historical dynamics of this "multitude" that I think labor historians should try to understand'. [23]

Given the importance of forced labor (and of the manifold intermediate forms between forced and 'free' labor) in the new perspectives opened up by global labor history, it is useful to remember that the image of slavery itself has been deeply revised by

scholars in the last decades, in a way elaborating on the pioneering work done in the 1930s by black radical intellectuals and activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James. Historians of slavery in the Americas have for instance long emphasized that the enslaved labor relations in the plantations were constantly negotiated and contested by the subjective practices of slaves, opening up the possibility to highlight – along with the huge differences – also some uncanny similarities with the dynamics of wage labor. 'Both were negotiated relationships', Robert Steinfeld writes, 'in which labor's ultimate sources of power were similar: the power to withdraw labor and the power to work less hard or well than was possible'.[24] Similar results were produced by critical investigations of the manifold attempts to tame the 'coolie beast' in Southeast Asia, to borrow a phrase from the title of the book of Jan Berman.[25]

Needless to say, this impressive body of historical research posits once again a radical theoretical challenge. To put it plainly: contrary to what both classical political economy and Marx argued, 'free' wage labor cannot be presented anymore as capitalist standard and norm. Combining the suggestions of Marcel van der Linden and of Yann Moulier Boutang, we should rather speak of a multiplicity of forms of 'dependent' labor, ranging from slavery to informal labor, from wage labor to formally independent labor.[26] To the multiple ways in which labor power is commodified and subsumed under capital, the institution of a multiplicity of forms and social relations of dependence and 'heteronomy' corresponds.

It is against this background, I think, that we should read Chakrabarty's interpretation of the concept of abstract labor in *Provincializing Europe*. A preliminary remark can be useful here: this concept plays manifold roles and has several meanings in Marx's critique of political economy, some of which were not fully

discussed in Chakrabarty's book. It is particularly important to note that 'abstract labor' allows, for instance, the imagination and representation of the unity among 'workers of the world', while the indifference to any specific kind of labor constitutive of it opens up the space for one of the most memorable definitions of the antagonism permeating capitalist society: which is, the fact that labor is at the same time '*absolute poverty as object*' and 'the *general possibility* of wealth as subject and as activity'.[27] This becomes possible for Marx only insofar as labor subjectively has "the same totality and abstraction in itself" that characterizes capital. And it is from this point of view that he is able to imagine human activity *beyond* labor and to envision a 'realm of freedom' beyond the realm of 'necessity', beyond 'labor determined by necessity and external expediency'.[28]

Nevertheless, I consider Chakrabarty's theoretical analysis of 'abstract labor' in *Provincializing Europe* a fundamental threshold for any further discussion of the issue. Dissociating it from the concept of 'concrete labor' and positing it rather against 'living labor', he opens up the possibility of grasping the diverse modalities of capital's take on and capture of a labor that – as *living* – is inherently marked by multiplicity. This multiplicity is nevertheless not to be confused with the heterogeneity of capital's modes of subsumption (of taking on and capture) of living labor. The latter rather arises from the diversity of 'encounters' (to use a Marxian category whose importance has been emphasized by Louis Althusser in his later writings) between capital and labor.[29] What is at stake in these encounters is the violent enforcement of what Chakrabarty calls the 'hermeneutic of capital', of abstract labor as the measure of value and as the central feature in determining 'how capital reads human activity' (*PE*, p. 58).

## 4. Of life and death

A couple of pages before the last quotation I referred to, Chakrabarty makes the same point in a slightly different way. 'Marx decodes abstract labor', he writes, 'as the hermeneutic grid through which capital *requires us* to read the world' (*PE*, p. 55, emphasis added). It is this moment of interpellation (to use once again the Althusserian terminology) that posits subject constitution at the very center of the scene in which capital encounters living labor. One could add that for Marx abstract labor is not only the measure through which labor as such is evaluated and exploited by capital in the productive process. 'Human labor in the abstract' is moreover the 'phantom-like' skeleton (the 'social substance') of the commodity form, the spectral objectivity that also shapes the sphere of circulation and iterates capital's interpellation through the call and seduction of commodities well beyond the working day.[30] From the point of view of subject constitution a first answer to the question asked in the title of this essay becomes now possible, at least at an 'epistemic' level. One can say that there are at least *three* histories of labor, to which different processes of subject constitution and different struggles correspond. *First*, we have the history that is shaped by capital's interpellation, which corresponds to the necessity of capital to use abstract labor as a 'hermeneutic grid' and as a measure in order to 'read' human activity and translate it into the language of value. *Secondly*, we have the history shaped by the changing mixture of multiple modalities of subsumption of labor under capital that characterizes different historical and geographical constellations of capitalism. *Thirdly*, we have the history shaped by the constitutive heterogeneity of living labor itself, which crystallizes in mobile political, social, cultural formations but remains nevertheless open

to that element of singularity that posits a radical challenge to the very possibility of historical, theoretical and political representation.

In her own way Gayatri Spivak grasped this latter point in 1985, when she wrote that 'the subaltern is necessarily the absolute limit of the place where history is narrativized into logic'.[31] This should not however frighten us, since such a challenge is not new. 'Life presents an infinite multiplicity of successively and coexistently emerging and disappearing events, both "within" and "outside" ourselves', Max Weber wrote in 1904. And even if we concentrate on a single 'object' in the attempt to fully grasp it, he added in a kind of Spinozian vein, its very singularity is vanishing, since the multiplicity of objects that constitute it ('the absolute infinitude of this multiplicity') tends to explode its unity and to frustrate our attempt to describe it once and for all. There is an element of irrational arbitrariness (Weber would say of 'faith') in the constitution itself of every 'research object'.[32] While we have to reflect in our methodological procedures and research practices the radical heterogeneity of living labor, we need thus even more to foster the search for theoretical frameworks that allow us to write labor histories theoretically aware of the multilevel temporalities that crisscross them.

On *all* the three levels that I schematically distinguished, we can trace histories of struggle and resistance (whether centrally organized or autonomous), producing interruptions and modifications in the 'development' of capitalism. This leads, as for instance John Chalcraft has argued, to the necessity of 'pluralizing capital'. I agree with him that the 'multiple regimes of production and exploitation' that make up the history and present of capitalism have to be investigated beyond any 'economistic' bias, since their construction does not rely 'only on the commodity form

but also on war making, the state, empire building, political struggle, citizenship, capital/labor relations, unionization, racism, gender, and so on'.[33] Nevertheless, this emphasis on the elements of multiplicity and plurality should not lead us to underestimate or even to efface the moment of unity that pertains to the very concept and logic of capital, what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari called its 'axiomatic':[34] that is, the necessity of translating human activity into the language of value through the 'hermeneutic grid' of abstract labor, as well as the ensemble of social relations that arise from this necessity.

Following Chakrabarty, I have used until now the concept of living labor as the counterpart of abstract labor. We know that this concept was fully developed by Marx in the *Grundrisse*, where he used it to distinguish 'labor as subjectivity' from the 'past' and 'dead' labor that is objectified in machines. Chakrabarty discusses the relations between the Marxian concept and Hegel's discussion of 'life' in his *Logic* (*PE*, pp. 60–61). The threat of 'dismemberment' against the unity of the 'living body' may well have been one of the main concerns of Marx in his use of the concept of living labor, and we can trace this concern through the memorable pages dedicated to the history of machinery and modern industry in *Capital*, volume I.[35]

Nevertheless, I tend to read the section on life in Hegel's *Science of Logic* in a way, which is slightly different from the one proposed by Chakrabarty. What I would like to highlight is Hegel's emphasis on *pain* as 'the prerogative of living natures (*das Vorrecht lebendiger Naturen*)': it is through pain, Hegel adds, that living natures discover that 'they are in themselves the *negativity* of themselves' and that 'this *their negativity* exists *for them*'.[36] This is the reason why, as Eugène Fleischmann has argued in his interpretation of *Logic*, Hegel can write in the *Encyclopaedia* that death – besides

representing the threat of the 'dismemberment' of the living body – is also its 'truth', since 'the death of merely immediate and individual vitality is the "procession" of the spirit (*das Hervorgehen des Geistes*)'.[37]

Keeping in mind this connection between Hegel's analysis of life, 'living natures' and bodies on the one hand, and his treatment of pain and death on the other, we can imagine that Marx was not particularly satisfied with the incorporation of Hegel's concept of life – with its uncanny side effects – within his conceptualization of labor. While Marx of course shared Hegel's emphasis on the finite nature of living bodies, the reference to the 'procession' of the spirit in relation to death could not but appear to him to justify the uneven distribution of 'pain' within labor and activity of subjects constructed as equal. In *Phenomenology of Mind*, death, the 'absolute master', had played a crucial role – through the mediation of 'fear' – in disrupting the unitary field of subjectivity and in splitting it into servants and masters. But in *Logic*, and even more so in *Encyclopaedia*, it rather tended to recompose the field of subjectivity within the '"procession" of the spirit'. We can therefore further suppose that this dissatisfaction was one of the reasons why, after writing the *Grundrisse*, he turned to the main discussion partner of Hegel's section on 'life' in his *Logic*, that means to Aristotle. The new concept that Marx introduces in *Capital*, volume I, the concept of *labor power* (*Arbeitskraft*), shows evident traces of his engagement with Aristotle, which was already apparent in his use of 'labor capacity' (*Arbeitsvermögen*) in the *Grundrisse*.[38]

What interests me here is the fact that the concept of labor power summarizes both the process of abstraction played out by capital in the process of commoditization *and* the multiplicity inherent in 'life'. In a way, the very tension and clash between abstract and

living labor is thus re-inscribed within the concept of labor power, which is already 'inhabited' by capital through the commodity form. But now, as Paolo Virno has particularly stressed in his analysis of the 'biopolitical' nature of labor power, the multiplicity of life is presented as *potency* distinguished from the actual labor. [39] 'We mean by labor power, or labor capacity', Marx writes, 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind'.[40] The distinction between labor power and labor is crucial to the founding of the Marxian theory of exploitation, since it opens up the gap between the contract, in which labor power is commodified and exchanged with wage, and the 'exercise' and 'consumption' of its use value in the laboring process (in the 'hidden abode of production'), where more value than the one remunerated by wage is produced.[41]

While the concept of 'labor power' has often been considered (and discredited) as 'economistic', I think that underscoring its 'biopolitical' and 'potential' dimensions could lead us to further develop and deepen the tensions, violence and lines of antagonism and conflict that arise from the inscription of life within the concept of capital. The very opposition between an 'economistic' and a 'culturalist' approach should be overcome once we discover the capture of and command over life as such, in its potential shape, at the heart of capitalism. And production of subjectivity could emerge as the main field of both historical and contemporary critical investigations of capitalism. The opposition between money and labor power is in fact for Marx, as we know, the opposition between two entirely different modalities of subjectivation: the one in which the relation of the subject with the world is mediated by the social power accumulated in the form of money and the one in

which the relation of the subject with the world depends on her or his potency. Once money and labor power are considered from this point of view, the very boundary between economics and culture appears to blur.[42]

What makes labor power particularly important in the context of our discussion of subject constitution is that it further points to the necessary process of *separation* (of abstraction) of the 'mental and physical capabilities' from their 'container' (the 'living body') that logically precedes the capitalist relation of production. This process of separation, as we know, cuts and crosses human bodies and 'souls' ('human brain, nerves, muscles and sense organs', to quote again Marx)[43] in the scene of so-called "primitive accumulation". But a non 'historicist' reading of this scene has already led us to trace its continuous repetition through the whole course of capitalist development. While the tension between life and death (with 'dead labor' accumulated in the form of capital setting the abstract norm for 'vampirising' the living) is now played out within the concept of labor power, living labor still posits itself as a necessary excess – as a constitutive outside of the capital relation itself, one could even say.

## 5. Globalizing the postcolonial predicament

Energy, unrest, motion, movement are the terms employed by Marx to describe labor as life-activity, as Nicholas De Genova has recently stressed, pointing to the particular importance of such terminological choices in an age of unprecedented mobility and migration of living labor.[44] To reduce this energy to the measure of abstract labor, to discipline this movement means to produce the whole set of political, legal, social and cultural conditions that ensure the continuous 'supply' of labor power as a commodity on

the ‘labor market’. The distinction between labor power and its ‘bearers’ (living bodies) allows us to analytically grasp the space in which the ‘social production of difference’ (Lowe) operates, for instance through such criteria as gender and race, which radically (that means structurally and originally, not secondarily) shape the relation of each singular subject to his or her labor power, the modality through which a singular subject accesses his or her ‘potency’. This is why the concept of labor power, as I try to read it in and beyond Marx, will bring us back neither to an abstract concept of labor nor to a universal image of the working class as homogeneous political subject. Both the supply of labor power and its exploitation by capital can happen through a multiplicity of paths – corresponding to the heterogeneity of modes of capture and subsumption of living labor I insisted on above. This means that we can use the concept of labor power without necessarily and exclusively referring to the wage labor contract and to the abstract and universal model of the ‘rights-bearing subject’.

It should be clear by now that I am not proposing a kind of return to Marxism or to Marxian concepts as such. Although I am convinced that the latter still contain powerful and even unexplored critical potentialities, I am well aware of the shortcomings that shape them, which have been for instance recently discussed by Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth in their editorial contributions to their important book, recently published in Germany. Drawing from the research results of global labor history and combining them with a long tradition of feminist critique, they convincingly show how Marx’s concepts of working class and labor were built upon a single segment of the world's laboring population and were therefore not able to grasp the diverse reality and subjective experiences of dependent labor under capitalism. Roth and van der Linden further add that we should be

aware of the fact that even the key distinction between labor and activity does not exist in many non European languages, making a 'trans-cultural' use of such concepts problematic – which of course does not mean impossible.[45]

The very concept of labor power, which I tried to interpret from the point of view of subject constitution in my elaboration of Chakrabarty's reading of the relation between abstract and living labor, is not at all free of the shortcomings deriving from Marx's emphasis on 'free' wage labor as the standard labor relationship under capitalism. The concept of labor power was built by Marx precisely in order to support and theoretically ground this thesis. The ghost of slavery (chattel as well as 'wage slavery') haunted Marx since the beginning of his engagement in the critique of political economy. The proletarian, Engels wrote in 1845 in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, is, 'in law and in fact, the slave of the bourgeoisie, which can decree his life or death'.[46] With the distinction between labor power and labor Marx believed to have eventually laid the foundation of a theory of the relation between capital and labor capable of grasping both the peculiarity of modern capitalism, based on 'free' labor and not on slavery, and the reality of exploitation underlying that relation. Contrary to many 'Marxist' devaluations of law as a merely 'super-structural' element, it played a constitutive role in Marx's argument. 'In order that its possessor may sell it as a commodity', Marx writes,

> 'he must have it at his disposal, he must be the free proprietor of his own labor-capacity, hence of his person. He and the owner of money meet in the market, and enter into relations with each other on a footing of equality as owners of commodities, with the sole difference that one is a buyer, the other a seller; both are therefore equal in the eyes of the law'.[47]

The ‘free’ wage labor contract, as we know, is predicated upon this encounter between ‘equal’ subjects, and is presented by Marx as a contract through which a specific commodity, labor power, is *sold* and *bought*. Nevertheless, as Thomas Kuczynski among others has argued, if we keep in mind Marx’s definition of labor power, and especially the fact that it is inseparable from its ‘container’, the living body of the proletarian, it is quite easy to understand that it is logically impossible to *sell* labor power as a commodity on the ‘labor market’. The very act of selling presupposes the alienation of a good, and this alienation happens only in the case that Marx was trying to remove from the standard dynamics of modern capitalism, which is in the case of… slavery.[48] Marx adds:

> ‘For this relation to continue, the proprietor of labor-power must always sell it for a limited period only, for if he were to sell it in a lump, once and for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity’. [49]

But *selling* a good ‘for a limited period of time only’ is really a very peculiar legal variety of contract, and we have to keep in mind that Marx was on the one hand very careful in his terminological and conceptual uses, while on the other hand the legal studies of his youth made him a trained jurist. It is very striking from this point of view that he proposed such a bizarre legal construction, which ended up inscribing the ghost of slavery within the very structure of ‘free’ wage labor.[50] Rather than selling and buying labor power it seems more accurate to speak of leasing, hiring and renting it: and this opens up the space for understanding the heterogeneous modalities of subsumption of living labor that, as emphasized above, are characteristic of historical capitalism. It further allows us to come to grips with another important fact, which is the role

played by a multitude of legal, informal, illegal 'middlemen' and agencies that intervene between workers and employers. And it is easy to see that we are talking about features that, far from only shaping 'historical' capitalism, are also constitutive of contemporary global capitalism. Once it is freed from the unilateral link with 'free' wage labor and it is considered as life in its potential shape, the concept of labor power nicely accounts for the 'capture' of value produced by social cooperation outside the process of production, which more and more characterizes financial capital; and it further allows to theoretically grasp the spread of unpaid labor in the framework of contemporary processes of precarization and flexibilization of labor.[51]

The three histories of labor that I tried to carve out in this essay, therefore, also point to lines of research and critical investigation of the
contemporary composition of living labor. As I already stressed, *Provincializing Europe* also produces a new gaze on Europe itself. The crisis of Fordism has rapidly also produced here, within the former 'metropolitan' territories, the radical heterogeneity of labor relations that was long a characteristic of the colonial world, opening up the space within which speaking of a 'postcolonial capitalism' becomes meaningful. It is particularly – although not at all exclusively – in the management, monitoring and control of migrant labor that the traces of the repetition of the 'primitive accumulation' are visible here. This not only the case in Europe. In many of his recent writings, Ranabir Samaddar has for instance described the deep heterogeneity of labor relations crisscrossing the composition of living labor in contemporary India, pointing at the same time to a different sort of globalization, what we could call a subaltern globalization, which accompanies capitalist globalization. [52] Migration and practices of mobility play a key role within this

subaltern globalization, and at the same time labor migration control regimes produce effects on the conditions of the diverse subjective figures and positions that make up contemporary living labor.

More and more global capitalism is defined by these elements of heterogeneity, by the contemporary and structurally related existence of 'new economy' and sweatshops, corporatization of capital and accumulation in 'primitive' forms, processes of financialization and forced labor. Under these conditions, Samaddar's reference to 'globalizing the postcolonial predicament' is a nice suggestion in the direction of developing a theory of 'postcolonial capitalism'. And once again, following Chakrabarty's remark, we will have to keep in mind 'the fact that global capitalism exhibits some common characteristics, even though every instance of capitalist development has a unique history'. This means that a critical theory of postcolonial capitalism must handle with care 'universal' concepts. The very adjective 'postcolonial' refers to the relevance of diverse scales, places and histories within the contemporary structure of capitalism, which is easily lost in theories of 'global' capitalism. In order to further develop this theory it will be necessary, to put it in the words employed by Chakrabarty in his introduction to *Provincializing Europe*, to 'acknowledge the "political" need to think in terms of totalities while all the time unsettling totalizing thought by putting into play nontotalizing categories" (*PE*, pp. 21–22). This is particularly important when we try to describe and anticipate the dynamics of subject formation, movements and struggles that contest capitalism, producing in a localized and situated way the conditions of its overcoming. Far from looking for old or new universal subjects we should rather investigate the tense and conflict-ridden processes of production of *common* conditions that can make way

for new habitations of the world. In the age of the Anthropocene this is maybe even more urgent than ever.[53]

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[1] Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, Delhi: Ravi Dayal, 1988, p. 21. See also Amitav Ghosh and Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'A Correspondence on *Provincializing Europe*', *Radical History Review*, 83, 2002, pp. 146–172 (with an introduction by Duane Corpis, pp. 143–145, from which I take the quotation).

[2] Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008. On translation and modernity, see Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity. On "Japan" and Cultural Nationalism*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997; as well as Sandro Mezzadra, 'Living in Transition. Toward a Heterolingual Theory of the Multitude', in Richard F. Calichman and John Namjun Kim (eds), *The Politics of Culture. Around the Work of Naoki Sakai*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 121–137. [see also in: http://eipcp.net/transversal/1107/mezzadra/en]

[3] See for instance Étienne Balibar, 'What Is a Border?', in *Politics and the Other Scene*, London: Verso, 2002, pp. 75–86.

[4] Carlo Galli, *Political Spaces and Global War*, Adam Sitze (ed), Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010, p. 54.

[5] See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009, part 2. For the reference to the 'necropolitical' sides of modernity, see Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture* 15(1), 2003, pp. 11–40.

[6] See, for instance, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar (ed), *Alternative Modernities*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2001.

[7] Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed. Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 24 and 22.

[8] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, p 4. Subsequent references to this work will be made via page numbers in the text after the abbreviation *PE*.

[9] See Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons. The Western Education of Colonial India*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2007.

[10] See in particular Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, K. Tribe (trans) New York, Columbia University Press, 2004. On the parallels between Chakrabarty and Koselleck, see Sandro Mezzadra and Federico Rahola, 'The Postcolonial Condition: A Few Notes on the Quality of Historical Time in the Global Present', *Postcolonial Text*, 2(1), 2006, http://postcolonial.org/index.php/pct/article/view/393/819.

[11] Johann Gottfried Herder, *Verstand und Erfahrung. Eine Metakritik der Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, Leipzig: J.F. Hartknoch, 1799, pp 120–121.

[12] See David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993 and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom. How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2004.

[13] See Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950; Antonio Negri, *Il lavoro nella Costituzione*, Verona: ombre corte, 2009; Balibar, *Politics and the Other Scene*, p. 66.

[14] See Kalyan Sanyal, *Rethinking Capitalist Development. Primitive Accumulation, Governmentality & Post-Colonial Capitalism*, London: Routledge, 2007.

[15] See Giuseppe Cocco and Antonio Negri, *GlobAL. Biopotere e lotte in America Latina*, Roma: Manifestolibri, 2006.

[16] See Sandro Mezzadra, 'The Topicality of Pre-history. A New Reading of Marx's Analysis of "So-called Primitive Accumulation"', forthcoming in *Rethinking Marxism*, 2011.

[17] Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor. The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870*, Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1991, p. 9; and *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 4–6 and 10.

[18] See W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860–1880*, New York: The Free Press, 1998, p. 700; and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness. Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London: Verso, 1999.

[19] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, Martin Nicolaus (trans), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973, pp. 104–105. This statement is even more striking keeping in mind what Marx wrote on the United States a few years after in *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume I, Ben Fowkes (trans), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976 (hereafter *Capital*, I), p. 414: 'labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin'. Sure, Marx was convinced that Civil War and Emancipation terminated the age in which 'slavery disfigured a part of the Republic': but independently of what one thinks of this opinion, the *Introduction* was written in 1857, when labor was definitely 'branded in a black skin'. In any case, Marx's engagement and writings on the Civil War was of course a landmark moment for the refinement of his positions regarding the United States.

[20] Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts. On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996, pp. 28–29.

[21] See Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

[22] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History. Bengal 1890 to 1940*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 3.

[23] Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World. Essays Toward a Global Labor History*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008, p. 32.

[24] Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor*, p. 8. Particularly important among recent works on slavery in the United States for the purpose of our present analysis is the book by Stephen M. Best, *The Fugitive's Property. Law and the Poetics of Possession*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004, who discusses at length the ways in which slave law and intellectual property, as 'two spheres eccentric to the law of real property and emphatic about property's extension into the fleeting and evanescent, help to redefine the very essence of property in nineteenth-century America' (p. 16). Even more important for our critical analysis of the Marxian concepts of 'labor power' and 'free' wage labor below is Best's discussion of 'the slave's two bodies' and of the distinction made by many slavery's apologists between the person of the slave, that was not to be considered property, and his or her labor, which was (see for instance pp. 8–9).

[25] Jan Berman, *Taming the Coolie Beast. Plantation Society and the Colonial Order in Southeast Asia*, Dehli and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

[26] See Yann Moulier Boutang, *De l'esclavage au salariat. Économie historique du salariat bridé*, Paris, Puf, 1998 and van der Linden, *Workers of the World* (p. 33 for the discussion of Cornelius Castoriadis' concept of 'instituted heteronomy' mentioned in the text).

[27] Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 296.

[28] Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume III, David Fernbach (trans), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991, pp. 958–959.

[29] See Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of Encounter. Later Writings 1978–87*, London: Verso, 2006.

[30] See Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 128.

[31] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha and Gayatry Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 3–32, p. 16.

[32] Max Weber, 'Objectivity of Social Science and Social Policy', available online at: http://www.ne.jp/asahi/moriyuki/abukuma/weber/method/obje/objectivity_frame.html (accessed 11 December 2010).

[33] John Chalcraft, 'Pluralizing Capital, Challenging Eurocentrism: Toward Post-Marxist Historiography', in *Radical History Review*, 91, 2005, pp. 13–39, p. 28.

[34] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi (trans), Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 436. It is useful to remind that the dominance of this axiomatic produces, according to Deleuze and Guattari, an 'isomorphy' that has to be investigated both 'intensively' (that means, within each 'social formation') and 'extensively' (that means on the world scale of modern capitalism). But, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, 'it would be wrong to confuse isomorphy with homogeneity': it rather allows, 'even incites' they write, a great deal of social, temporal, and spatial heterogeneity (p. 436). One can see here an interesting parallel

with Chakrabarty's emphasis on the 'common characteristics' exhibited by global capitalism and at the same time on the fact that 'every instance of capitalist development has a unique history'.

[35] See Marx, *Capital*, I, chapter 14.

[36] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, George Di Giovanni (trans), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 684.

[37] See Eugène Fleischmann, *La science nouvelle ou La logique de Hegel*, Paris: Plon, 1968, chapter 11. Hegel's quotation is taken from § 222 of the *Encyclopaedia*: see *The Logic of Hegel Translated from the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, William Wallace (trans), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1904, p. 362.

[38] See the detailed textual analysis of Michel Vadée, *Marx penseur du possible*, Paris: Meridiens Klinksieck, 1992, pp. 269–291.

[39] Paolo Virno, *Il ricordo del presente. Saggio sul tempo storico*, Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999, pp. 121–122. Marx writes: 'The use of labor-power is labor itself. The purchaser of laborpower consumes it by setting the seller of it to work. By working, the latter becomes in actuality what previously he only was potentially, namely labor-power in action, a worker' (Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 283).

[40] Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 270.

[41] Marx, *Capital*, I, pp. 277–280. It is possible to follow the very making of this distinction in the *Grundrisse*: the worker, Marx writes regarding the exchange between capital and labor, 'sells his commodity,
labor, which has a use value, and, as commodity, also a *price*, like all other commodities, for a specific sum of exchange values,

specific sum of money, which capital concedes to him' (Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 274). Here 'labor' is still the commodity 'sold' by the worker. But after a few pages we read: 'the use value which he [the worker] offers exists only as an ability (*Fähigkeit*), a capacity (*Vermögen*) of his bodily existence; has no existence apart from that' (p. 282).

[42] See Sandro Mezzadra, 'Bringing Capital back in: A Materialist Turn in Postcolonial Studies?', in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 2011, pp. 154–164.

[43] Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 164.

[44] Nicholas P. De Genova, 'The Deportation Regime. Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement', in Nicholas P. De Genova and Nathalie Peutz (eds), *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space and the Freedom of Movement*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 33–65, p. 40.

[45] See the editors' introduction and conclusive chapter in Marcel van der Linden and Karl Heinz Roth (eds), *Über Marx Hinaus. Arbeitsgeschichte und Arbeitsbegriff in der Konfrontation mit den globalen Arbeitsverhältnissen des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Berlin and Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2009, pp. 7–28 and 557–600.

[46] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Florence Kelley Wischnewetzky (trans), Teddington: The Echo Library, 2009, p. 68.

[47] Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 271.

[48] Thomas Kuczynski, 'Was wird auf dem Arbeitsmarkt verkauft?', in van der Linden and Roth (eds), *Über Marx Hinaus*, pp. 363–379. The first to make this critical point was to my

knowledge Franz Oppenheimer, *Die soziale Frage und der Sozialismus. Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit der Marxistischen Theorie*, Jena: Verlag von Gustav Fischer, 1912, pp. 119–122.

[49] Marx, *Capital*, I, p. 271.

[50] The analogies between slavery and wage labor were of course a key stake in discussions of labor issues in Europe and particularly in the United States in the 19th century. The phrase 'wage slavery' was very much circulating in these discussions and was also used by Marx. While David Roediger (*Wages of Whiteness*) has correctly emphasised the ambiguity of this phrase in the United States, especially before Emancipation (since it tended to imply an opposition between white 'free' labor and enslaved black labor), one should not forget that its meanings were much more complex, involving issues of property in one's own person that had been crucial to the development of liberalism since John Locke as well as the question of buying, selling and owning human property. 'In multiple ways', writes for instance Amy Dru Stanley, 'labor spokesmen used the issue to argue that there was no real difference between the commodity relations of freedom and slavery. They claimed not only that wage slaves were unable to sell labor time apart from their persons, but that the sale – to one master or another – lasted for the entire length of their lives. As the long hours of single days stretched on for weeks and years, in perpetuity, the hireling's status edged closer to the slave's' (Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Freedom. Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 93). Stanley's book is particularly important because it places marriage and home life alongside labor in the critical discussion of 'freedom of contract' in the United States after Emancipation: although discussing this point lies beyond the scope

of this essay it is important to recall here the emphasis put by feminist activists and scholars for the last two centuries on the analogies between slavery, marriage and labor contract.

[51] See Andrea Fumagalli and Sandro Mezzadra (eds), *Crisis in the Global Economy: Financial Markets, Social Struggles, and New Political Scenarios*, New York: Semiotext(e), 2010 and Andrew Ross, *Nice Work if You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2009.

[52] Ranabir Samaddar, 'Primitive Accumulation and Some Aspects of Work and Life in India in the Early Part of the Twenty-First Century', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 44(18), 2 May 2009, pp. 33–42, *The Marginal Nation. Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal*,
New Delhi and London: Sage, 1999 and *The Materiality of Politics*, 2 vols. London, New York and Delhi: Anthem Press, 2007, especially vol. I, chapter 5 ('Stable rule and unstable populations').

[53] This reference is of course to Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', in *Critical Inquiry*, 35, 2009, pp. 197–222.