

Spiking the Canon:
Rediscovering Marx as the Ruthless Critic
of All That Exists

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The 1990s have been an odd moment in time. Neither quite like the past that many saw shut forever with the breaching of the Berlin Wall in 1989, nor truly of the future beckoning to all from the next millenium beyond the coming Y2K, the 1990s are full of recriminations. This has proven especially true with regard to intellectuals, universities, and the "tenured radicals" on campus who allegedly are trying so hard to destroy the trusted true canons of knowledge as they prop up their false old idols of ideology.

At the same time, Marx in the hands of social historians, is blamed by Gertrude Himmelfarb for "demeaning and denigrating political events, institutions, activities, and ideas" and in the work of "Academic Marxists" assaulted by George Will for obscuring "the autonomy of culture."¹ Meanwhile, as a genuinely Dead, White, European Male, Marx is blamed for propounding illegitimate metanarratives from which "we no longer expect salvation"² by all of those who have little use for his allegedly DWEMian modernism. Because he is mistaken as canonical as well as taken for being contra-canonical, now seems like a promising moment to spike the canons of certainty, which misfire most of the time anyway, and rediscover Marx as a ruthless critic of all that exists. Marx neither demeaned politics nor obscured cultural autonomy. And, he did not expect salvation as much as believed people needed to create their own salvation out of circumstances that could be different.

Like Marx, I believe everything that exists could be

otherwise. And, most of what exists at this moment expresses an enduring inequality in wealth, power, and knowledge that benefits a few to the detriment of many. Most importantly, people and things, which allegedly are mixed and matched now in black boxes known as "the environment" and "the economy" magically by invisible hands in the marketplace, should become re-associated in other far more ecologically sensible and economically equitable ways. Therefore, this analysis attempts to make such hidden hands more visible so that some of these closed and darkened boxes can be opened and brightened. Once unpacked and lightened, new ensembles for the power/knowledge that (con)fuse human beings with non-human beings and things, both natural and artificial, might be refashioned in a manner that is more economically just and environmentally sound.

Because things could be otherwise, and mostly are the ways they are now due to pervasive state power, subtle techniques of marketing, and rigid technoscientific authority, we must depart, once again, from Marx. Derrida is deadright in Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International: "it will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx."³ This directive, however, is not an invitation to revisit the dark mausoleums of Marxism scattered so profusely around the planet in state socialist systems at the close of the Cold War. Visitors to those tombs will not get much guidance, because those dogma machines are built to replay old marches and melodies to a long departed working class about proletarian revolutions not suited well to the twenty-first

century. Any real bid to depart from Marx, as Derrida suggests, instead must recognize that there can be no future "without Marx, with the memory and the inheritance of Marx: in any case of a certain Marx, of his genius, of at least one of his spirits. For this will be our hypothesis or rather our bias: there is more than one of them, there must be more than one of them."⁴

Fukuyama could be correct in closing his ledgers on one Marx for at his "end of history" in our New World Order.⁵ Yet, he is wrong to suggest that there is, and has been, only one Marx, namely, the Stalinist stick figure from the twentieth century' now widely discredited soviet unions, dialectical materialism, or people's democracies. The New World Order, as Derrida suspects, still contains far too many crises and contradictions to be History's endpoint. And, this recognition requires us to return to, and then depart from, another Marx: the ruthless critic of capitalism.

At the close of a century in which Marx's multiplicity has been painfully all too obvious in the doctrinal dialogues between the Party and the People in so many misbegotten people's democracies, Derrida's hypothesis has merit. Favoring another Marx, or the one whose spirit evinces the critical criticism of all that exists, also assumes this Marx cannot be found amid the smash-up of state socialism. The crash of global communism, whether one dates it from 1921, 1924, 1939, 1945, 1956, 1968, 1979, or 1991, finally releases the ruthless critic of capitalist commodification from his imprisonment in the gulags of socialist industrialization. One "state of the debt" to Marxism--of which

Derrida speaks--is acknowledging Marxism's role in the tragic misadventures of Leninism/Stalinism/Maoism, but another equally valid project for a "new international," rising behind and beyond these necessary acts of mourning, must be rediscovered in Marx's approach to transformative critique.

Returning to this Marx reunites us with a thinker who dared, as Derrida suggests, be foundationally anti-foundational: "Who has ever called for the transformation to come of his own theses? Not only in view of some progressive enrichment of knowledge, which would change nothing in the order of a system, but so as to take into account there, another account, the effects of rupture and restructuration? And so as to incorporate in advance, beyond any possible programming, the unpredictability of new knowledge, new techniques, and new political givens."⁶ By recovering the power of these perspectives, new departures from Marx would outline fresh criticisms of knowledge, technique, and power as they operate now. Most importantly, this Marx would help us to construct another vision of the rapid informationalization of global capitalism, while taking into account the widespread ecological effects of its ruptures and restructurations.

Crisis and change plainly are two of the most overworked notions in modern social analysis. On a world scale, however, the history of the last six decades--in both the advanced industrial societies of "the West" and less advanced, semi-industrialized regions of "the Rest" outside of the West--is one riven by constant crisis and continual change. During the Cold War, the centered stable lifeworld of many industrial societies

and discretely territorialized nation-states has shattered as the decentering networks of a new informational economy emerge out of transnational capital's destabilized flows and fragments. With the implosion of old industrial lifeworlds, however, few have acknowledged the nearly total inadequacy of many once tried-and-true conceptual categories, which were anchored to these now sublated industrial forms of life, relations of power, and codes of culture.⁷ In digging out from underneath these collapsed categories, Marx might help outline a strategy for finding new meaning amidst the rubble of old rhetorics in the New World Order.

I. Returning to Marx

At this point, it is imperative to "return to Marx," even though his Victorian conceptual frameworks, as an intellectual project, in so many ways remain thoroughly industrial. Most exponents of Marx's critique of industrialism--which was expounded as nationally-propounded economies tied to modern industrial production gained political hegemony over regionally-entrenched economies grounded on agriculture--still hold that Marx's "productivist" conceptual system can reveal--with a few innovative theoretical tweaks here or there--how informationalism ultimately will replace industrialism.⁸ This sort of orthodox Marxist analysis, however, seems doomed to failure.

As Derrida argues, a fresh approach must begin by believing "one may still find inspiration in the Marxist 'spirit' to criticize the presumed autonomy of the juridical and to denounce endlessly the de facto take-over of international authorities by

powerful Nation-States, by concentrations of techno-scientific capital, symbolic capital, and financial capital, of State capital and private capital."⁹ The inspiration derived from such Marxist spirits is essential, because the dynamics of informationalization, which are at the root of contemporary technoscientific, military and economic development, now maintain "an effective inequality as monstrous as that in which prevails today, to a greater extent than ever in the history of humanity."¹⁰ In fact, any celebration about "the end of history" masks a history of too many human and nonhuman lives coming to violent, wasteful ends. Many things at the close of the twentieth century are unsettled, unraveling and unsustainable. As Derrida maintains,

at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelize in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the "end of ideologies" and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect this obvious macroscopic fact, made up of innumerable singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute

figures, never have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved, or exterminated on the earth. (And provisionally, but with regret, we must leave aside here the nevertheless indissociable question of what is becoming of so-called "animal" life, the life and existence of "animals" in this history. This question has always been a serious one, but it will become massively unavoidable).¹¹

A new approach to ecological critique must be taken from Derrida's representations of deconstruction as radicalized Marxist critique. That is, "deconstruction has never had any sense or interest, in my view at least, except as a radicalization, which is to say also in the tradition of a certain Marxism, in a certain spirit of Marxism. There has been, then, this attempted radicalization of Marxism called deconstruction."¹²

Most importantly, a new radicalization of Marx must disconnect Marxian critique from the staid partisan orthodoxies to which it has been welded for over a century. This new register of critique must refashion its activities as a strategic style of reading, resting upon the contragovernmental questioning of fixed practices or the supertactical loosening of determinate interpretations. Remaking deconstruction into another disciplinary formation guaranteed to deliver surefire results, however, will only bolt Marxist critique back down to the failed routines of scientific socialism and diamat discourse.

Attempts to decipher new outlines of a futurology for

informational production from traces left by textual archeologies in orthodox Marxism may misconstrue new classes as old classes, miscode new power relations as on-going traditional modes of power, or misinterpret the new culture as one more permutation of an old culture.¹³ The most promising path of returning to Marx now is to make entirely new departures from Marx, guided by his critical commitment to deciphering the hieroglyphics of the commodity form. Within the still inchoate upheavals of informationalism, we must examine how corporate capital elaborates its productive powers on a transnational scale, while destroying much of what traditionally was regarded as the realm of "Nature" and the domain of "Society" in the process. In developing informational modes of production, which are designed, built and managed by a new global bloc of professional-technical experts, local and global capital now are trying to reconstruct their roles under new conditions of economic and political reproduction as the ultimate guarantors of humanity's "sustainable development" and "environmental security."

While the contemporary proletariat is being displaced by new installations of robotic apparatus, divided up into competing national and regional labor reserves within a transnational capital market, and diluted into indistinct categories of increasingly underskilled work, transnational businesses can expand, amplify and elaborate their markets as the world's most important revolutionary economic and political force. For the first time in the ontogeny of capital, informational modes of production can indeed commodify everything on a planned,

rational, mass scale. Not only can the raw resources of the Earth, the manufactured things of social production, and the social services of human interaction be submitted to capital's logic of reproduction, but words, codes, memories, sounds, images, and symbols all can be designed as value-adding, fungible products for rapid transit through mass markets as instruments of production, accumulation, reproduction and circulation. Even life itself, whether in the form of designer genes, engineered tomatoes, bionic joints, synthetic skin or patented mice, is turned into a commodity. A critique of the commodity in these informational forms can be undertaken only by exploring the phantom objectivity of such reifying dynamics. It also must question the ideological horizons projected by development, modernity or liberal democracy under transnational corporate capitalism as it has un gulfed the culture, politics and society of post-1945 world.¹⁴

Information technology is not per se the cause of the Informational Revolution. Such interpretations merely desocialize social change and deculturalize cultural shifts by abstracting technics out of everyday lived experience only to return them as an autonomous external force which reshapes values, institutions and beliefs relentlessly to fit its technical imperatives. Instead the technification of information embodies divisive social changes and conflicted cultural shifts that are reshaping heteronomous social forces through contingent political processes articulated through the restructuring of capital, states, and technics. The planet's ecology, in turn, is

the most crucial domain that must be reappraised. We must ask a key question: who, whom? Whose information for whom, whose revolutionization by whom? The advent of network society forces us to interrogate all of the informationalizers much more closely. How is the Informational Revolution playing out as a struggle for control, profit, and organizational authority, and in what ways are the winners and losers promoting the further domination of Nature?

A simple return to Marx only will result in more misrepresentations. For over a century, many of the most systematic, thorough-going critiques of advanced capitalist industrial society have been grounded in Marxian political economy.¹⁵ Because Marx's thoughts also were used to legitimize the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and because of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990-1991, many experts, however, now consign Marx's work to the ash heap of history.¹⁶ On the one hand, the peculiar nineteenth century European context of Marx's theoretical writings as well as the less than unsuccessful revolutionary strategies endorsed in some of his many political writings make it wise to leave his work behind. Many contemporary forms of capital, labor, value, and power render Marx's tactical interpretations of their interplay in today's terms anachronistic as the referents of what he called the bourgeoisie and proletariat, city and countryside, state and society all have acquired considerably different forms in the twentieth and twenty-first century. On the other hand, however, Marx outlines decisive readings of commodification, technology,

and class that still deliver painfully accurate insights into the capitalist mode of production. Any critique of contemporary informationalism should depart from these vital claims in Marx's work.

A. Ideological Ironies: Marx and the USSR

To return to Marx, one also must account for the Soviet Union and all the other "actually existing socialisms" of the twentieth century. State socialism's greatest success, ironically, seems to have been its provision of a weak systemic negativity that forced classical capitalism to continually reinvent itself in more progressive forms in order to win support among the working classes for its modern ways of life. Ironically, socialist alternatives, as barbaric as they were, indirectly served to humanize, democratize or personalize capitalism, making it far more productive and destructive at the same time. The rise of informational capitalism throughout the West, and not the fall of industrial socialism in the East, makes it necessary to depart from Marx in this ecological critique of informationalism.¹⁷ And, departing from Marx now implies leaving many of those practices tested as "state socialism" in the former Soviet Union behind. This break must be drawn explicitly, because Marx has been directly blamed in most Western analyses of about Soviet Communist practice for the tragic course of the October 1917 Russian revolution during the twentieth century.

Recently, however, the Western sciences used to explain Cold War conflict between East and West over the past five decades have crumbled, like the USSR, into chaos and confusion. Now that

the nations and states of what were "the Soviet Union," "the Second World," "the Warsaw Pact," or "the Communist Bloc" have experienced "violent" and/or "velvet" revolutions in their economies, governments, and societies, one often cannot account easily for what happened in 1989, 1990, or 1991. In what perhaps still are "the United States," "the First World," "the NATO Alliance," or "the Capitalist Bloc," however, many interpretations of what has happened east of the old Iron Curtain, which now ironically are labelled "post-soviet studies," remain thoroughly grounded in strongly centered Cold War categories. They still seek to judge, sentence, and condemn state socialism for its Marxist origins and Leninist practices.¹⁸

Most aspects of the theoretical discourse and disciplinary practice of Marxism-Leninism deserve our condemnation. An uncritical celebration of contemporary capitalism in the wake of its apparent triumph over the communism of old centrally planned economies, at the same time, is also unwarranted. The advent of "capitalism" and "democracy" in most regions of the former Soviet Union has not made life much better; instead, it often is proving much worse for most members of society. After the break-up of the U.S.S.R., one hears this pivotal event "disproves" the insights of Marx, "invalidates" the possibility of realizing greater material equality in a socialist society, or "affirms" the rightness of capitalism over the errors of communism. Still, there is little evidence supporting these specific claims, and what discursive terms, like socialism, equality, capitalism, democracy, or communism, might mean now is very problematic.

While the Communist Party of Soviet Union and the U.S.S.R. are gone, much remains the same under the post-communist regimes of the former Soviet Union. In many republics of the former Soviet Union, ex-communists dominate the national legislatures and executives. Yeltsin's brutal moves in Chechnya differed little from Brezhnev's in Afghanistan. Capitalism in Russia is mostly synonymous with gangsterism, and commodification is mutilating many of the precious last few recesses of human dignity in the former Soviet republics. Self-congratulations about all of this in the West are much too hasty and very overdrawn. First, this is true, because the general understanding of Marxism today is clouded by Cold War conceptions of Marx's project. Second, the attribution of the U.S.S.R.'s successes or failures to Marx's political economy is far too simplistic. And, third, the affirmation of capitalism's apparent successes totally ignores its endemic flaws, which are surfacing virulently across the former Soviet Union, even as its advocates gloat over the demise of a communist order that never seriously approximated the practice of its own purportedly Marxist ideals.¹⁹

With regard to the Cold War culminating in victory for the West and defeat for the East, this claim is very problematic inasmuch as this trial by combat actually saw very little real trial or actual combat. Whether or not the "victory of capitalism" disproves the merits of Marx's theoretical project is even less clear. In fact, most knowing subjects in what was the "capitalist West," who were or are concerned seriously with politics and society in the hitherto "socialist East," mainly

have rotated since 1945/1947 in the discursive orbits of anti-Marxist disciplinary networks. These closed cultures, in turn, are rooted within the very small worlds of academia or state intelligence agencies. The historical record is far more mixed. Marx did not provide a method for revolution-making in Russia; at best, he afforded a myth for revolutionaries there to motivate themselves and others to modernize Russia. As a comparative "latecomer" to industrialization, Tsarist and Soviet Russia did not retrace the same steps to industrial modernization initially set down by European or American industrialization strategies. As the U.S.S.R. industrialized, it experienced a strange mixture of outcomes in its economic development that are both the "same as" and "different than" those in the West. Marx's role in these historical dramas, however, actually is very ambiguous.

At best, most Western discourses about the Soviet Union circulated in the restricted disciplinary networks of "comparative politics" or "international relations." And, at worse, they intentionally spoke in the even more damaged disciplinary dialects of "Kremlinology" or "Sovietology." This point is important, because, as Foucault suggests,

No body of knowledge can be formed without a system of communications, records, accumulation and displacement which is in itself a form of power and which is linked, in its existence and functioning, to the other forms of power. Conversely, no power can be exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution or

retention of knowledge. On this level, there is not knowledge on the one side and society on the other, or science and the state, but only the fundamental forms of knowledge/power.²⁰

Any "knowledge" about the nature of Soviet systems since 1917, therefore, has often also been liberal democratic capitalist evidence of "power" acting against them. In particular, the condemnation of Marx, Marxian approaches to political economy, and Marxist political movements has remained a fundamental first principle in most Western knowledge codes accumulated in the struggle against state socialism. Inasmuch as the conceptual expressions of Western Sovietology gained acceptance in debates of government policies as an ordering of power/knowledge, they also became cognitive acts of containment, normative blows against the totalitarian, or instrumental acts of self-affirmation in the socialist other's negation.

Organized scientific studies in the West of communism, Marxism, socialism were not objective: they were instead anti-communist, anti-Marxist, and anti-socialist from the outset. To know Marxism better was to seek an inoculation against its political effects or impose an operational limit on its cultural influences. Not surprisingly, many of the theoretical constructs used to "understand" Soviet Communism are not addressed directly to Marxism in Russia. Save for leftist fellow-travelers seeking to visit a workable future, the Bolsheviks were almost ignored after the Russian civil war of 1918-1921 except by free-booting capitalist firms that wished to sell them modern industrial goods

in the brief hey-day of pragmatic modernization during the 1920s. More serious analysis of the Kremlin gained ground only during the 1930s as Stalin's dictatorship rose in Moscow at the same time as Hitler's formed in Berlin. Many categories and concepts were dragged into Kremlinological discourses, part and parcel without much modification, back and forth from studies of fascism in Nazi Germany or Mussolini's Italy as part of the frantic quest to root out the origins of "totalitarian society," even after the Axis powers fell in 1945.²¹

Kremlinology/Sovietology, as an allegedly objective mode of engaging in scientific knowing, has been soaked to the bone in the ideological agendas of anticommunism and the geopolitical programs of containing Soviet power. Similarly, the disciplines of comparative government and international relations continued for decades to spin out fantastic taxonomies to show how "state socialism" remained a mostly retrograde, immoral or dysfunctional form of rule even as its competition with "democratic capitalism" anchored the "stability" of the bipolar international state system.

As the entire Cold War global order now slips further and further into yesterday, any survey of the standing systems of Sovietological power/knowledge becomes more like Foucault's reading of Borges' account of an old Chinese encyclopedia's categorizations of the animal kingdom. That is, in the spirit of empirical analysis, "it is written that 'animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h)

included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."²² Sovietology's conventional classifications of bureaucratic centralist regimes, as they were manufactured to explain everything from the Soviet Union to Albania to Poland to the People's Republic of China, were cast in equally arcane codes for supposedly rigorous data collection as: a) those belonging to Marx, b) inhumanely evil, c) centrally planned economies, d) totalitarian, e) authoritarian, f) neo-stalinist, g) bureaucratic centralist, h) worshipping Lenin, i) state capitalism, j) new class dictatorships, k) dynamic/expansionist, l) bureaucratically deformed proletarian rule, m) red fascism, n) those that from a long way off look like meaningful pluralistic democracies. In many ways, these different taxonomic variants of political analysis from "comparative communism" are no less bizarre than Borges' old Chinese schema of defining animal species. And, now that the Cold War is over, it is clear that they rarely provided any more certain or conclusive knowledge about how Marxism actually worked in the U.S.S.R. than Borges' Chinese encyclopedia might provide now to zoologists studying animals.²³

The wonder of Sovietological studies was the remarkably serious acceptance of their categories and exponents during the Cold War. Actions taken, first, by Gorbachev and his allies in the U.S.S.R. and, next, by Yeltsin and his associates in the former Soviet Union have shattered the stabilized referents of

such power/knowledge codes. The "knowing subjects," who were formed with the extraction, accumulation, and circulation of this Cold War power/knowledge in the West, now must recognize, like Foucault reading Borges, how "our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography--breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other."²⁴ Capitalism, democracy, and freedom have been defined for so long by their opposition to communism, authoritarianism, and repression that now, with the end of the Eastern Other, the real meaning of Western Self also faces fresh doubts.

B. Marx and Critical Criticism

To extract Marx from this tremendous impasse, we need to rethink the radicalism embedded in his critical criticism of the commodity form. And, to make this move, we also need to reclaim the notion of "collectivization" from its Stalinist uses in twentieth century Marxism-Leninism. Latour uses "the word 'collective' to describe the association of humans and nonhumans"²⁵ in everything that knits together the networks of people and things making up what is regarded as modernity. These hybridized assemblies of subjects and objects, humans and nonhumans, agents and structures, or actors and artifacts compose Latour's key associations, which like Marx's hybridized vision of commodities, "are simultaneously real, like nature, narrated like discourse, and collective, like society."²⁶ Marx's historical

materialism positions the non-human things of humanly constructed social existence as the determinate force in society responsible for shaping the consciousness of men.

When Marx asserts in "The Preface" to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, "it is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness," he also struggles to open the black boxes of "the environment" and "the economy."²⁷ In describing "the modern constitution" that underpins the contemporary mode of capitalist production, organization, and information, Latour sees what has been taken to be modernization resting upon a doubled ontological distinction:

Modernity is often defined in terms of humanism, either as a way of saluting the birth of 'man,' or as a way of announcing his death. But this habit itself is modern, because it remains asymmetrical. It overlooks the simultaneous birth of "nonhumanity"--things, or objects, or beasts--and the equally strange beginning of a crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines.

Modernity arises first from the conjoined creation of those three entities, and then from the masking of the conjoined birth and separate treatments of the three communities while, underneath, hybrids continue to multiply as an effect of this separate treatment.²⁸

These multiple links, intersecting influences, and continuous negotiations between the human and nonhuman as well as the temporality of humanity and the transcendence of divinity are

what preoccupy Marx in much of his writing.

Coming back at him through Latour's reading of modernity, most of Marx can be seen as an extended critique of Latour's sense of "collectivization," inasmuch as he uses the notion of the "commodity" to describe the association of humans and nonhumans. Since Marx's examination of the commodity form under capitalism looks at how human labor is mixed with non-human things to create value, much of his analysis is a careful study who dominates whom in the processes of such "collectivization" as commodification leads to the endless "co-modification" of human and non-human beings in both Nature and Culture.

Marx's vision of communism also promised human beings another, but better, means of associating people and things in highly socialized collectives beyond the distorting dictates of market-mediated commodification. In making the transition to communism, Marx argued, all of the most destructive effects of bringing people together with things through the cash nexus could be simultaneously overcome, eliminated and then banned by communist communities, which would no longer suffer the exploitation from class conflicts expressed by the coercive government of men, because they would realize emancipation out of their joint liberatory administration of things. This utopian vision of communist living, in turn, was predicated upon creating an entirely new ecology, or the remaking of all the relationships between human society and its environment, beyond the dictates of market pricing, competitive labor, private property, and commodity production. In the final analysis, Marxism predicted

that materialistic historical forces were knitting together new, more rational, equal, liberating, and emancipatory means of associating human beings and their things in fresh social collectives whose tenor and tone would be "communist" rather than "capitalist."

For many reasons, all actually existing forms of socialism from 1917 to the present failed to reweave people and things into these emancipatory associations of humans, property, institutions, and technology from the economic, political, and social threads that were spun out of their revolutions.²⁹ Marxism-Leninism departed from Marx, rushing headlong into all the ill-considered quasi-statist, semi-feudal, crypto-capitalist, or para-modern practices that deformed twentieth century state socialism since the October Revolution. Sovietology made a science of sorts out of studying these aberrant attempts at actualizing Marx's project, but it really provided very few insights into how Marx's postrevolutionary communist collectives of people and things actually should have operated. Yet, it is precisely Marx's utopian reimagination of all associations which tie people together with the things they create that must anchor a thorough reappraisal of the economies, ecologies, and ethics of modernized living after the implosion of communism in the twentieth century.

The founding of state socialism in the former Soviet Union did not detonate a string of global explosions that might have made such changes possible. Meanwhile, Marx's internationalizing myths quickly were turned to the chauvinistic purposes of

national economic and technological modernization in the former Tsarist empire. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union struggled to do little more than first compete with, then equal, and finally surpass existing forms of bourgeois capitalism in its statist strategy of national industrialization.³⁰ In doing so, the Soviets accepted ecological irrationalities as wide-ranging and deep as those in the West, but they pushed harder and faster in their economic planning system to create even more extensive levels of environmental destruction.³¹ This misbegotten Marxist-Leninist heritage is not what one should take from Marx; instead, we must depart from other more emancipatory paths to modernity kept in stasis as unrealized potentials within the fixed and frozen mazes of existing capitalist modernity. Not necessary, but possible, not foreordained, but feasible, not inevitable, but practical; these other conditions of collectivization--or the possibilities for rebuilding the associations of people and things--can be actualized. However, another constellation of political decisions, social structures, and cultural values must congeal to assemble them as workable alternatives to the established means of market-mediated collectivization. So what can be done now is far different than what Lenin imagined must be done nearly a century ago.

II. The Critique of Commodification

To gain insights for the present from Marx, one must look far beyond the many misadventures of the dialectic in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union to Marx's original critique of political economy, which focused upon the ravages of

commodification. Most significantly, Marx focused upon the economic and social interactions that distorted each human being's relationships with Nature, other humans in society, and their own inner psychic life. Marx saw the commodity form becoming the universal basis of all social relations, and his entire political project is based upon overcoming its destructive effects. During his lifetime, however, the commodity form did not dominate completely the outer social or inner psychic life of most people. While the initial intimations of planned corporate capitalism could be detected along the commanding heights of the American, English or German economies, many pre-capitalist cultural, economic, and social relations still survived outside of most modern factories in big industrial cities, allowing Nature to be viewed by many as an autonomous and indestructible force.

For Marx, commodification occluded the exploitation of both humanity and Nature in the ordinary market relations constructed between humans and nonhumans in the everyday relationship of things. When caught in the webs of monetized exchange, the origins and existences of all socially produced artifacts become mystified. Commodities have "absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom."³² Instead, "there it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human

brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race.

So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands."³³

Marx represents commodities as volatile mysterious entities through which real human relationships between men and women as well as humanity and Nature are "co-modified" in objectified, mystified social relations. In commodities, "the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor: because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor."³⁴

Fetishizing the products of labor, as concrete things tracing the tangible tracks of abstract exchange value, occludes the fragile webs of social understanding, cultural creation, and collective action in the strategic calculations of instrumental rationalization. Through exchange value, humans modify things, and, in turn, things modify humans in the circuits of commodifying relations.

In keeping with Capital, Lukács recaptures the essence of commodification's co-modifications under more modern conditions of production: "a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity,' an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people."³⁵ Gradually, this reified phantom objectivity of

commodity creation, exchange, and accumulation unfolds all of its many different dimensions until it becomes the universal basis of all social relations under capitalist exchange. "Only then does the commodity," as Lukács asserts, "become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms in which this reification finds expression and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the 'second nature' so created."³⁶ Since Marx's death over a century ago, things have changed a great deal. Commodity exchange clearly has come to dominate the outer and inner life of the global economy and each natural society. As a result, in the 1990s, "there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the riddle of commodity-structure."³⁷

In contrast to the looser, entrepreneurial forms of capital discussed by Marx, contemporary corporate capitalism is much more organized, efficient, and scientifically grounded, and it has mobilized many different disciplinary discourses to organize exchange around the managerially planned enterprise.³⁸ The service-oriented economies of the most developed societies now predicate their future growth upon the further commodification of culture, personality, and social relations in order to realize new increments of growth. Informational capitalism strives to erase the once meaningful distinctions between the logic of work and leisure, the realm of reason and desire, or the boundaries of Nature and Society. As Horkheimer and Adorno would argue,

corporate plans aim at "no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system. This is the result not of a law of movement in technology as such but of its function in today's economy."³⁹

New modes of postindustrial behavior and belief are emerging from the complex interactions of global media markets, product cycles, and capital flows, which frame, in turn, the outlines of a new informational culture, economy, and society. The phantom objectivity of this newly shaped informational "second nature," however, has yet to be fully explored, particularly with regard to its ecological impact on the "first nature" of Earth's biosphere.⁴⁰ Marx's own discussions of ecology, the environment, or Nature are not extensive.⁴¹ At different turns, Marx articulates a respectful engagement with Nature, seconding Rousseau's romantic reading of Nature as an emergent subjectivity needed to ground or even direct human action. In other stretches, Marx affirms the modern bourgeois capitalist project of dominating Nature technologically and economically. Without this total pacification of necessity, the material wherewithal of total abundance essential for the realization of full communism cannot be realized. Others have tried to read Marx for more messages of redemptive ecological guidance, but, on the whole, it cannot be found there.⁴² Like most men of his age, Marx was captured by the Victorian era's uncritical celebration of technological development as being equivalent to the conquest of Nature. Still, Marx can yield some

useful leads for building a case against the informational revolution. His contradictory reading of technology as well as his critical appreciation of technics in the capitalist mode of production provide the most promising places to begin.

A. Technologies and Markets as Collectives

Human beings relate to themselves, each other, and Nature, according to Marx, through the social organization of their labor. Making objects, controlling powers, generating productive systems--both in Nature and outside of Nature--defines humanity: "in the treatment of the objective world, therefore, man provides himself to be genuinely a species-being. This production is his active species-life. Through it nature appears as his work and his actuality."⁴³ While such activity alienates Nature from humanity as well as each human from himself or herself, "it makes species-life the means of individual life...it is life begetting life."⁴⁴ The conditions of associating humans and nonhumans, then, in ancient, asiatic, feudal, or capitalist relations of collectivization can be used to understand how power, knowledge, and conflict co-modified people and their things in any given society.

One needs to take Marx at his word. If technical activity is what defines humanity, and if its social individuality creates the means of individual and social life, then Nature itself changes within the mode of association connecting human and nonhuman beings. Indeed, the ecology of the Earth becomes increasing an anthropogenic construct:

As plants, animals, minerals, air, light, etc., in

theory form a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art...so they also form in practice a part of human life and human activity. Man lives physically only by these products of nature; they may appear in the form of food, heat, clothing, housing, etc. The universality of man appears in practice in the universality which makes the whole of nature his inorganic body: (1) as a direct means of life, and (2) as the matter, object, and instrument of his life activity. Nature is the inorganic body of man, that is, nature insofar as it is not the human body. Man lives by nature. This means that nature is his body with which he must remain in perpetual process in order not to die.⁴⁵

To the degree that Nature is "man's inorganic body" with which humanity must remain perpetually engaged, ecology should study the direct bases of human life, which are the matter, objects and instrument of all human life activity. These conceptual foci also should renew our interest in all forms of organized technics by which human societies transform Nature into "humanity's inorganic body" as food, heat, clothing, housing, etc. The conventional antinomies of Nature/Culture, Environment/Society, human/non-human, and subject/object all implode in Marx's rendition of these links as one active organic/inorganic project. Instead, they express Latour's sense of the collectives binding together people and things. Technical

formations permit humans to constitute systems for all life to help beget their life in the elaborate urban-industrial ecologies of an increasingly anthropogenic Nature; yet, in the process, all life now naturally unfolds in terms of these artificially emergent practices. Whether it is early humans burning savannahs to organize the hunt or contemporary commuters altering the atmosphere with pollution, Nature/Society can be understood as ecology/humanity coevolving through their consciously co-modifying collective associations in technology, society and economy.

To depart from Marx does not demand elaborate Marxological justifications of everything that must be done, but it does require making modifications to Marx's frameworks. Much of the power in Marx's critique derived from his identification of allegedly inherent tendencies in nineteenth century capitalism, and the class struggles they engendered, which revealed how revolution could occur as well as why the proletariat was destined to play the leading role in all coming revolutionary upheavals. Because of their ownership and control of the means of production, the bourgeoisie built self-serving arrangements in the relations of production to relentlessly extract surplus value from the proletariat. The workers' unending immiseration coupled with the ultrarationalization of the productive forces would set the stage for a general crisis. To a large extent, then, the means and relations of production could be steered under capitalism to favor the bourgeoisie because of their simultaneous control over the organization of production on the shop floor, in

the marketplace, at the bank, or back in the laboratory. Being a capitalist as an owner, as Marx affirmed, also required the capitalist to act as a commander, which created the conditions of bourgeois private collectivization out of these direct configurations of ownership and control during the First Industrial Revolution.

B. Re-Reading the Mode of Organization

Many relations of organization, information, and control, however, have changed profoundly since Marx died in 1883. The organizational transformations of the Second Industrial Revolution, on the one hand, increasingly decomposed ownership and management into different groups of actors, degraded labor and skill, divorced equity holding and business administration, or divided technological innovation and technique application. On the other hand, they also disturbed consumer demand and producer supply, distorted public goods and private interests, and diffused capitalistic exploitation and proletarian immiseration through massive state interventions in both the economy and society. Similarly, the informational directions of the Third Industrial Revolution, which are now reshaping the time, space, and speed equations of contemporary production and consumption, must be considered, if Marx's insights are to be adapted any serious critique of the current conditions of capitalism.

As the organization and control of the productive forces have become far more complex problems, who owns them or who works for whomever owns them become decisively less important. Indeed,

the modes of organization, information, or control assume much greater significance. Likewise, the new elite class of organizers, informationalizers, or controllers, who may, or may not, share equity stakes in the productive forces, even though they are now the decisive economic, political and social elites, should get far more attention in the present than Marx's classical bourgeoisie.⁴⁶ At the same time, the many new social movements of anti-organizers, non-informationalizers, or contra-controllers, which emerge inside and outside of the workplace as anti-elitist populist movements, also must be reexamined with much greater resolve.⁴⁷ To depart from Marx, the capital/labor contradiction still stands; yet, it also is quite clear that many facets of the struggle between capital and labor now manifest themselves in flare-ups around the means of organization as local populists question distant elites, consumers challenge producers, radical environmentalists assail corporate engineers, scientists criticize managers, or end users oppose product managers.⁴⁸

The risk-driven organization of highly technological production in the informational revolution has empowered an indefinite, but quite decisive, ensemble of experts to manage, design, plan, and extend the scope of commodification on a global scale.⁴⁹ As Beck asserts, the chaotic complexities of organizing for profit-making in the increasingly disorganized marketplace of transnational capitalism are generating costs and benefits whose risks require continuous assessment and management, but "the problems emerging here cannot be mastered by increased production, redistribution or expansion of social protection--as

in the nineteenth century--but instead require either a focused and massive 'policy of counter-interpretation' or a fundamental rethinking and reprogramming of the prevailing paradigm of modernization."⁵⁰ Here, then, is where another Marx--one tied to critical criticism--must reshape our interpretations of the present. The nub of conflict shifts with ecological resistances in informationalizing societies. Professional-technical experts systematically produce risks and rewards out of their economically rational execution of organizational imperatives in the capitalist marketplace, whose ecologically irrational implications and costs must be aggressively counter-interpreted and/or counter-acted by new resistance movements of radicalized people from all ordinary walks of life. These populists become intent upon rethinking and reprogramming the prevailing patterns of capitalist modernization, which seem to assume Nature's destruction.

Conjuring a critique out of the effects of the information revolution, then, can be done. Deciding which forgotten choices, repressed possibilities, or hidden options should be teased out of the advanced technics underpinning the New World Order is an entirely different question, particularly if one is to radicalize existing approaches to cultural criticism and political resistance. One might choose, as Derrida does, to revitalize an international ethicized law by casting it as a "the worldwide economic and social field, beyond the sovereignty of States and the phantom-States."⁵¹ At the same time, one might opt to revive an intranational localized community, embedded in specific

natural ecologies and particular cultural places, to resist the appropriation of power/knowledge by "concentrations of techno-scientific capital, symbolic capital, and financial capital, of State capital and private capital."⁵²

An ecologically grounded populism could, and does, develop inherently from the contradictions of technoscientific capital. Such contradictions are intrinsic to the organization of production by managerial elites against ordinary people, producers against consumers, managers against labor, owners against users, or engineers against technicians. Inequalities in power, knowledge, status, or income spark tremendous conflicts, and these conflicts are fought out along the fronts of power/knowledge disparities as well as in the trenches of status/income inequities. The unthought inaction of organizational structures pits elites against popular agents, opposes lay consuming audiences against expert producing spokespersons, and confronts unprogrammed clients with overprogrammed service workers. Departing from Marx, then, requires that attention to the old contradictions of capital versus labor, owner versus worker, and bourgeoisie versus proletariat be refocused through optics trained now upon the means and relations of organization to expose new structural conflicts between expertise and inexpertise, servers and clients, or the organizer and the organized within informationalizing societies.

III. For Politics, Ecology, and Critique: More Marx

While it is quite presumptuous to assert some potential

unity exists amidst such actual disunity, perhaps there is, as Derrida asserts, a basis for some "new international." Linkages, alliances, or communities now could be emerging in the crises and contradictions caused by informationalization.

It is an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely public even if it is not clandestine, without contract, "out of joint," without coordination, without party, without country, without national community (International before, across, and beyond any national determination), without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class. The name of new International is given here to what calls to the friendship of an alliance without institution among those who, even if they no longer believe or never believed in the socialist-Marxist International, in the dictatorship of the proletariat, in the messiano-eschatological role of the universal union of the proletarians of all lands, continue to be inspired by at least one of the spirits of Marx or of Marxism (they now know that there is more than one) and in order to ally themselves, in a new, concrete, and real way, even if this alliance no longer takes the form of a party or of a workers' international, but rather of a kind of counter-conjuration, in the (theoretical and practical) critique of the state of international law, the concepts of State and nation, and so forth; in order to renew this critique and especially to

radicalize it.⁵³

Those who would depart from Marx, then, are everyone who could adapt Marxian approaches to understand and change the world as it reshapes itself today. The prevailing paradigms of informationalizing modernization can be rethought and reprogrammed, but they will not be unless and until the endangering dimensions of the new organizational modes of production, consumption, accumulation, and circulation face the insurrections of subjugated knowledges (counter-interpretations, rethinking, reprogramming) from many zones below, without, or beyond their control against the hegemony of their disciplinary power prevailing in fixed paradigms of modernization exerted from many zones above, within, or at the center of large human populations.

Under a capitalist mode of production, these collectivized products of Nature/Human associations appear almost exclusively in the commodity form. The totality of all human relationships with the environment "presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities,'"⁵⁴ in which the environment is constructed out of these commodified clots of alienated, externalized labor. As commodities, and as private property, Nature as humanity's inorganic body reappears co-modified in the alien quasi-subjective power of capital, the state, and markets. Consequently, capital formations, governmental authority and everyday exchange now become environmental forces, mediating the condition of all human beings' collectivization of their alienated human being, natural ecology, and social product. As

Marx suggests, alienated labor is the crucible of co-modification as commodification transforms "the species-existence of man, and also nature as his mental species-capacity, into an existence alien to him, into the means of his individual existence. It alienates his spiritual nature, his human essence, from his own body and likewise from nature outside him."⁵⁵ Labor makes the world for humanity, but this processed world simply creates a coevolutionary order in which corporate capital, state power and consumer culture co-create Nature, or now "ecologies" and "environments," as part of their own work and as their material actualization in rational economies.

Marx's political economy can help us construct an ecological critique of the informational revolution, because it again identifies the key material forces at play in any given social order. In his materialist conceptions of history, Marx accentuates the centrality of labor and technology for co-modifying Nature as the substance and symbol of humanity's inorganic body for every society, polity and economy in the everchanging collectives of people and things. Such a sense of collectivization is expressed in Capital when Marx asserts:

Technology discloses man's mode of dealing with nature, the process of production by which he sustains his life, and thereby lays bare the mode of formation of his social relations, and of the mental conceptions that flow from them.⁵⁶

This observation should guide any contemporary ecological critique, and it provides a promising point of departure from

Marx.

By re-reading organizations and technologies in a critical deconstructive fashion, we can observe how contemporary economies and societies produce their organic and inorganic bodies--out of and in Nature--as they associate their human members, nonhuman beings and things through labor and exchange. Whether the labor in this exchange sustains or undermines life in general provides essential knowledge needed for any successful ecological resistance. By having us look again at technical forces and dynamics, Marx helps us understand how social relations, cultural assumptions, moral values, and political programs are what generate human ecologies out of the co-modifications of humanity and Nature through commodification.

The current ecological crisis is one result of informational society's destructive abuse of Nature. Clearly, humanity's inorganic and organic bodies are deformed systematically by global commercial exchange. Those who benefit most directly from control over the collectivizing conditions of commodification adopt anti-environmental practices of production to bolster their powers, profits, and privileges, while deploying the co-modifications of commodity consumption to occlude how they choose among and benefit from their decisions.⁵⁷ Canonical notions of truth, beauty and justice have been among the most favored occlusions used to serve these ends. Marx's sense of culture's autonomy and non-autonomy, in turn, are critical beginnings for ruthlessly criticizing how all of the exists, while marking some plausible political possibilities for how it might all be changed

for the better.

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