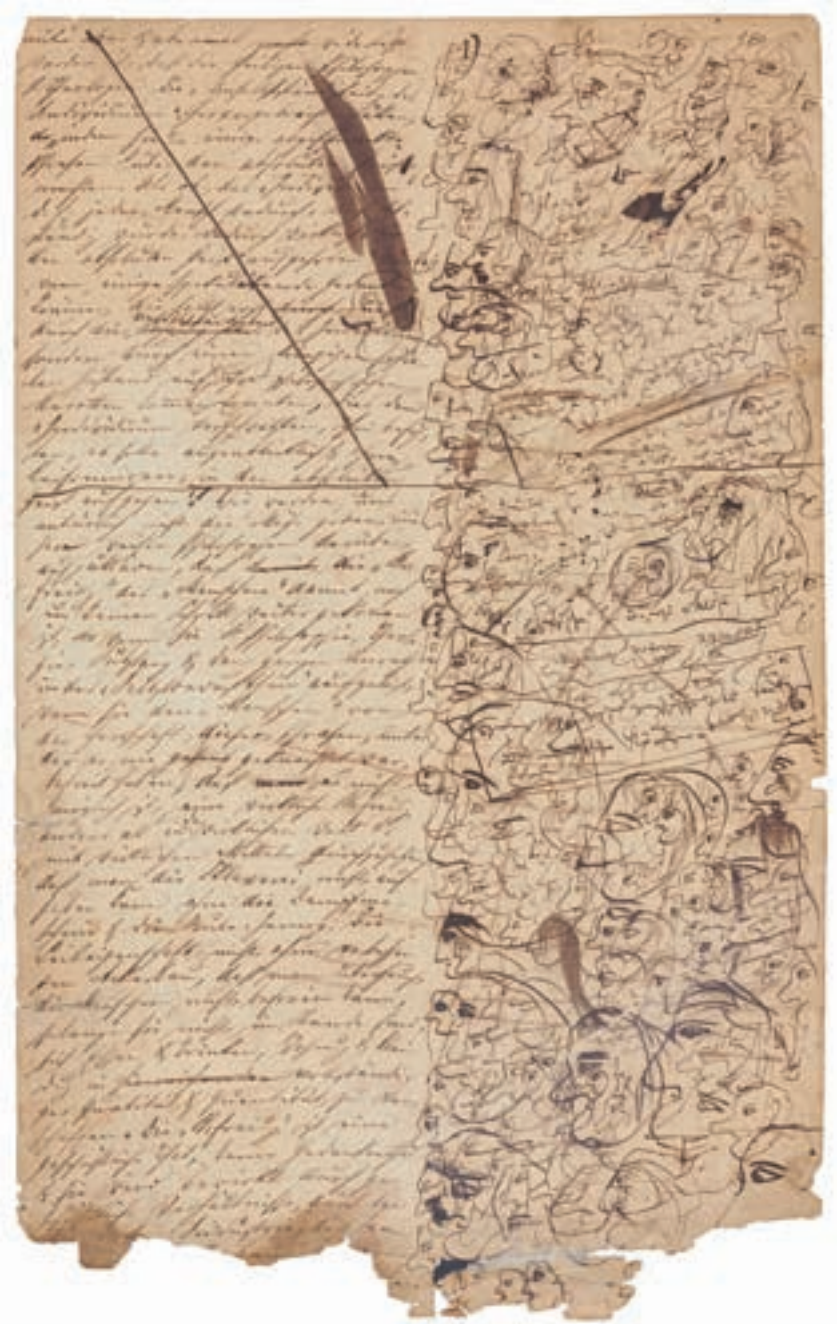

Karl Marx, manuscript page from the "Feuerbach" section of *The German Ideology*, 1845–1846

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CONTENTS

Josef Albers, *Homage to the Square / Red Series, Untitled III*, 1968

XXI. A RED COMMON-WEALTH

> Philology is nekyia, descent to the dead, ad plures ire. It joins the largest, strangest, always growing collective and gives something of the life of its own language to the collective to bring those who are underground to speech. It dies—philology dies, every philologist dies—in order to permit some of those many an afterlife, for a while, through its language. Without philology, which socializes with the dead, the living would become asocial. But the society of philology is the society of those who belong to no society; its life is lived together with death, its language an approaching silence.
>
> —Werner Hamacher, *Minima Philologica* (2015)

> This is black Marxism, black communism, where the originary reconstruction is understood as the preservation of the ontological totality, the reconstructive conservation, if you will, of wealth, of the wealth of who and what we are and will be. This is the condition of possibility of accumulation, primitive or otherwise; but it is also its disruption, deferral, originary displacement or anoriginal differing. Anoriginal stealing, anoriginal dispossession at the level of a disruption of regulative and lawful self-possession, the citizen-subject's necessary mode.
>
> —Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (2018)[1]

The writings of Scheerbart and Blanqui can be said to *storm the heavens* in the name of an imagined common-wealth that, extending itself on a planetary scale, can potentially counter the violence of global capitalism.[2] This common-wealth points to the possibility of exceeding, if not shattering, the forms of capitalism—enabling us to imagine alternatives to capital's cruel and ruthless structures of organization. If its contours are traced in the skies and the stars, it is because we have yet to realize it on earth (nonetheless, its outline can be glimpsed in revolutionary moments and especially in revolutionary texts). The forms of capitalism not only dominate the politico-economic sphere but also contribute to the violent destruction of nature, the exploitation of workers, the subjugation and displacement of minoritized populations, and the ruination of noncapitalist modes of association. The writers we have been reading introduce a crack or fissure into these forms—insisting on the ruin capitalism already bears within

it—in order to interrupt them, de-universalize them, recombine their different elements in order to destabilize them and suspend their brutality, if just for a brief moment. The constellation of texts at play here—all constellations, whether celestial or textual, are always in motion, never reducible to a particular moment in time or space—points to the militancy of diverse literacies, all of which begin in the desire to maximize and massify the cracks and fissures in capitalist relations of production. They engage and transform the language of capital by excavating and exposing its violence and, in doing so, join an ever-growing collective of texts—what we are calling "a red common-wealth"—that, in its very movement, never ceases to create new coalitions among ever-expanding acts of resistance.

This resistance takes the form of acts of reading that—diagnosing the innumerable apparatuses that support capitalism and, in particular, racial capitalism—reveal fierce and radical literary practices that gain their strength and force as they are enacted and repeated, that is, accumulated, across different temporal and spatial geographies. This different kind of accumulation is legible in all the writers we have set in motion here but can certainly be registered in Benjamin's effort to massify his sentences, to intensify their citationality in order to produce a scattered, nonlinear accumulation that exceeds capitalist calculation.[3] If we follow the logic of his practice of writing, the archives of defeat and resistance are only inherited if they are intensified and perpetually transformed, altered, made to deviate or swerve. If *to inherit* means *to read*—to read the cracks and fissures in what we inherit, the fugitive shards and fragments of historical ruination[4]—this inheritance not only transmits catastrophe but also passes its legacy forward in modes of transmission that are themselves catastrophic. In Benjamin's words, phenomena can only be "rescued," can only be conveyed, "through the exhibition of the crack within them."[5] "There is," he goes on to say, "a transmission that is catastrophe" (*AP*, 473). This transmission and its attendant breakdowns can be embraced in politically antagonistic ways. Capitalism strives to efface the cracks in all its phenomena by neglecting the force of "the revolutionary moments in the occurrence of history" in the name of a stable and identifiable inheritance that insists on continuity. It "misses"—we could say deliberately conceals—the places "where tradition breaks off," the "peaks and crags, which offer footing to one who would cross over them" (ibid., 474), so many stepping stones from which we can spring in another direction. A militant understanding of the inevitable negativity of transmission

instead sets the catastrophic character of transmission against the catastrophe that capital is and, embracing this negativity, remains faithful to what is most enigmatic in what we inherit, resists fixed determinations of what is transmitted to us. Catastrophe permits us to see—the cracks it produces give us a glance into the interiority of capital, opening it to its own disintegration—the possibility of a wealth that has been neglected, excluded, annihilated. We can only see beyond capital when we register the ruins it creates and leaves behind, when reading and writing break down in such a way that they become mediums of disaster, but a disaster that points to the possibilities that emerge from defeat and loss. History can never be measured as a series of finished acts but must be politically activated as a wellspring of future possibilities. The cracks in capital are a means of transformation because possibility can only be imagined from the perspective of its impossibility; hope becomes legible only when it is shattered. If historical catastrophe leaves its imprint in the language we use—an imprint whose illegibility demands that we read it but without assuming we can overcome it—language becomes a veritable common-wealth of historical experience and knowledge, a reminder of the accumulated history we carry within us (if unbeknownst to us) and that we also can activate. This common-wealth may tell us how history is transmitted but not how it ends, and, because this end is always uncertain, we can imagine that things also could have been different beforehand, that history could have unfolded otherwise. This capacity to envision different beginnings and ends is the condition of a revolutionary politics, one that begins in a catastrophe that speaks through acts of reading and writing that, in turn, can never be assigned to a single historical actor because transmission always exceeds the personal—it is always impersonal.

This common-wealth of, in Marx's phrase, "associated producers"[6] points to the only inheritance we have that is not entirely governed by ownership and the capitalist barbarism that protects and maintains it. Its vast relationality resists all delimitations and forms of possession and instrumentalization. This shared wealth—a wealth that only increases as it is shared or added to in every act of reading and writing—points to the incommensurability of entanglements that cannot be named or ordered in a manageable and predictable way. It is an index not just of our inscription within a network of shifting relations—within a growing association of producers—but also of our duty to continue to examine critically our place and responsibility in it. It is the measure of the extent to which we have inherited, taken in, the vast

archives that, shaping our present, can be drawn upon and added to in order to facilitate a different future. If this common-wealth is inseparable from the possibilities of revolt and praxis, if its significance depends, as Jameson notes, on "the historical value we attach to 'culture' and the way in which superstructures are seen as an active part of the mode of production" (*BF*, 30–31), its force lies in its destruction of the distinction between superstructure and base (already an outdated distinction in Marx's historical moment), and of "culture" itself. What is at stake is reconceptualizing "culture" so that—no longer a token of class, nation, expertise, or what we have come to refer to as "cultural capital" that can be possessed, but instead a formation disassembled by a critical reading of the codes and systems it formalizes and the violence it enacts—it is transformed through its massification, the multiple modes of its transmission, its plural forms of inheritance. It is when "culture" is thought of as one, when it can be identified as a bourgeois form, that it displays its barbaric underbelly, and this contradiction puts its conceptualization in crisis. The crisis that inhabits and structures culture compels it to distinguish itself from nonculture and to insist on a distance from its own barbarism by projecting it elsewhere. The common-wealth—as what cannot be localized or appropriated, as what, belonging to no one, splinters bourgeois identity—is the enemy of culture. This is why, if this culture would have its way, the common-wealth would never be permitted to emerge. It would be where the common-wealth meets its end; it would be its graveyard. However, the common-wealth interrupts culture as an "object" that can be appropriated for national, ideological, or "cultural" purposes. If culture is a site of production that detaches itself as an object, the common-wealth is a site of collective production without limits. It is *culture on strike* because it is culture from the perspective of the producer, not the consumer. It breaks culture open in order to show its fissures, to expose its incapacity to be what it promises to become—among other things, a mask for capitalist violence and barbarism. It pluralizes and multiplies culture from the "inside," as it were, but in forms that are neither identifiable, countable, nor calculable. The sheer scale of the ever-growing archives of defeat and resistance, and the constant critical labor they demand, present an obstacle to appropriation and commodification. It has the potential to interrupt their subsumption within the monster that capitalism is—with its power to integrate and bury entire networks of relations and transform them into images and words that, when consumed as cultural

objects that efface this violence, would leave us forever impoverished and alone.

In each instance, the figures we have put alongside one another here not only contribute to this common-wealth; they enact one of its most characteristic features: its focus on the dispossessed, and on the impossible but inexorable demand to continue to rewrite history, if not from the perspective of the vanquished—which can only be a vanishing horizon—at least with the vanquished in mind. Each of these writers attend to the violence of racial capitalism, even if differently and with different emphases and manners of proceeding. They write with this violence in view, and, in many respects, it is violence that frames and moves their writing. In several instances, it informs their formal experimentation, and, because it is so pervasive, their task can never be finished, which is why they keep writing and why so many of their texts remain incomplete or imagined. In this final section—a section that itself can only gesture in the direction of a common-wealth that is impossible to contain and determine—we trace another thread of related texts in order to point to the way in which the texts in this expanding archive gather their force in their accumulation. This accumulation is perhaps more *originary* than the economic one imagined by Marx and is always in the process of becoming something else—from its very beginning. It offers a cumulative infrastructure for the political imagination and for the possibility of a different future.

★

We can begin to imagine this alternative cumulative force by recalling what it seeks to counter and interrupt: the violence of capitalist wealth and, in particular, the matter of primitive accumulation. Marx never ceases to point out that the nonoriginary origin of capitalism that is primitive accumulation is "written in the annals of humankind in letters of blood and fire."[7] His language evokes an early document on the genocidal violence of Spanish colonial capitalism in the Americas, Bartolomé de las Casas's 1542 *Brevísima relación de la destruición de las Indias* (*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*), a text he reads and cites more than once and that gives an account of the foundational violence of capital and, in particular—as Benjamin would have it—of capitalism as religion. As Marx suggests, capital announces itself through colonial expropriation and total racial violence: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation,

enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent ... are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation."[8] He makes clear that he identifies the Spanish conquest with the earliest forms of primitive accumulation. "The different moments of primitive accumulation," he writes, "can be assigned in particular to Spain, Portugal, Holland, France and England, in more or less chronological order."[9] In his description of colonial violence, Las Casas addresses Prince Philip of Spain (later King Philip II), asking him to end the savage extraction of capital from the Indies in order to protect the moral integrity of the emerging imperial dominium. He denounces one form of accumulation in favor of another: the brutal and indiscriminate extraction of gold, silver, and other precious minerals and materials in favor of a process of Christianization that, accumulating souls, can enforce a different, and perhaps more effective, form of subjugation. As Daniel Nemser puts it, it is a matter of "'humanizing' Spanish colonial rule, attenuating the violence on which it depends in order to create the conditions in which conversion could proceed." Las Casas's own personal transformation, from a slave-owning colonizer to a "protector de los indios," provides the blueprint for the kind of conversion he has in mind and that both the conquistadors and their indigenous victims must undergo simultaneously, albeit differently. Nemser emphasizes the double sacrificial transformation of Amerindian populations: "indigenous bodies are thus sacrificed to the twinned economies of mineral and spiritual extraction. In the colonial context, primitive accumulation takes a decisively Christian form."[10] The imperative of accumulating spiritual wealth is further legitimated within the Catholic Spanish empire since it is underwritten by a papal bull.

This is why, when Las Casas indicts the violence of colonialist exploitation, he still remains fully inscribed within the imperial project.[11] His preferred version of colonialism is based on the conversion of souls—the true wealth of the church. It transforms material accumulation into spiritual accumulation. Las Casas's Spanish empire is an evangelizing enterprise. His condemnation of the violence of conquest is made in the name of the church and its religious beliefs and has as its aim the further expansion and empowerment of the Spanish church and state.[12] That the Spanish conquistadors brutalize, dehumanize, and exterminate the native populations is not simply violent and sadistic, he suggests, but also wasteful. The real wealth of the Americas is not nature's

riches but the population that can, if converted, increase the number of Christians in the world. If the conquistador assumes that the New World's natural resources are endless, Las Casas argues that the only thing that is infinite in his horrifying accounts is the violence of capital—a violence that is realized either by genocide or enslavement, both of which, murdering the soul, diminish the possibility of Christianization. He understands that, while violence is infinite, natural resources are not. This is largely why Las Casas's prolonged lament—nothing less than a rhetorical and political jeremiad—turns repeatedly to the notion of the infinite (infinite cruelty, pain, loss, death, murder) in order to underscore both the stakes and the impossibility of the task at hand: to relate a violence that is absolutely unimaginable.[13] He repeatedly refers to the impossibility of any chronicle doing justice to the unspeakable violence he witnesses, to the "unspeakable cruelty" that, in his words, "beggars all description."[14] Nevertheless, he gestures in the direction of the endless violence that sustains Spain's colonial enterprise—a genocide that announces other genocides to come and that results from the murderous violence and the epidemics that, a consequence of the initial contact, were intensified by starvation and the destruction of the land that, until then, sustained its native inhabitants. Las Casas himself notes the joint devastation of the people and the land when he returns to Cuba. As he puts it: "The whole of the island was devastated and depopulated, and it now affords, as we discovered on a recent visit, a moving and heartrending spectacle, transformed, as it has been, into one vast, barren wasteland."[15]

If Spanish colonialism is simultaneously an expropriation of land, culture, and life, it is also a burial site that takes the form of a mine dedicated to the extraction of, in Las Casas's eyes, the false god "gold." That gold is the god of the Spanish conquest is mentioned several times in Las Casas's history, but it is confirmed in one of the few moments in his account in which an Amerindian speaks. There, one of the tribal leaders attributes the cruelty and evil of the conquistadors to their devotion to gold: "They have a God whom they worship and adore, and it is in order to get that God from us so that they can worship Him that they conquer us and kill us." Beside a basket of gold jewelry, he proclaims: "Here is the God of the Christians. If you agree, we will do *areitos* ... in honor of this God and it may be that we shall please Him and He will order the Christians to leave us unharmed." After unanimous consent, the dances begin, but he soon notes that, "if we keep this God about us, they will kill us in order to get their hands on Him."

For this reason, he adds, "Let us throw Him into the river," which again they all consent to do.[16] In this way, the tribe repeats the gesture through which the conquistadors destroy and bury indigenous idols and fetishes, albeit for different reasons.[17] Indeed, burials appear repeatedly in Las Casas's account, most notably in connection with the deaths of indigenous workers within the gold, silver, and mercury mines. In excavations and refineries, this interplay between the enforced extraction of precious metals and the burial of native bodies suggests that the real originary accumulation is that of violence. It is revealed rather stunningly in a passage in which Nemser, extending the allegory Las Casas sets into motion, identifies the Indians themselves with the ore they are mining and the graves in which they are buried:

> Cutting minerals from the mountain, the *mitayos* dig their own graves (the Latin *effodiendis* comes from *fodio*, to dig up, from which *fossa*, grave, is derived). In the refineries ... it is not only these minerals but Indians themselves that are ground into powder in preparation for amalgamation. In this powerful image, indigenous bodies are literally worked into the metal that enters into circulation as coin. At the limit of life and death, human liberty and natural slavery, the mines operate as an exemplary zone of indistinction.[18]

Pointing to the merging of Indians and commodities, to the inscription and erasure of labor within coins, the passage offers us another figure for racial capitalism—one that helps us imagine what remains so unthinkable, and this despite the extremity and violence it portends. The unthinkable is embedded here in the ubiquitous everyday object that, circulating daily amongst innumerable hands, sustains the colonial empire.

Las Casas's critique of colonial violence relies on a rhetoric of intensification, amplification, and compression. Rhetorical strategies are no mere writerly details here but rather the conceptual core of his argument: the total violence of colonialism proves to be irrational and unethical precisely because it is unimaginable, because the human mind cannot account for it without becoming undone in the process.[19] This unraveling is mimed in the syntactical unfolding of Las Casas's sentences, in their often long and convoluted cadences, swollen to the point of bursting, in their repetitions and expansions, almost impossible to read without losing one's breath, and this because what these sentences seek to describe—a violence that is indescribable, at the limit of what can be said—should take one's breath away. The *Brevísima* is situated

at the limit between sense and non-sense and seeks to mobilize that border through political emotion. Following Las Casas's logic, it is the indistinction between the two that should instill terror and shame, "espanto," into his readers. Its own critique of violence, its own *Trauerspiel*—one that, like Benjamin's, explores the relation between sovereignty and death, but more directly in relation to questions of race—this abbreviated account describes a "series of events" that "caused astonishment, anguish, mourning, and an overwhelming bitterness and pain to all these people and kingdoms; from here to the end of the world, or until all of these have been exterminated, they will not cease to lament and sing their *areitos* and dances (as we do here in what we call 'romances') about this calamity and loss of their entire nobility, whom they had held in esteem for years and years, and of their future."[20] Las Casas joins in the mournful lament of the Indians, but his book is an impossible one. A failed translation, it is unable to contain the memory of the vastness of this genocide and destruction. Nevertheless, it exists as a record of this impossibility—of the unspeakable truth at the heart of empire. The Spanish atrocities are infinite, which is why all he can offer is a condensation (an all too brief account) of a book that in fact cannot exist. He envisions a book that could strive to match this devastation in a passage whose sentences exhibit the struggle, the incapacity of language, to capture the scale of this genocidal violence. What is so moving in the passage is its inability to hold together. What we witness is a linguistic movement whose grammar breaks down in the face of what it is asked to convey:

> I say truly that what these two expeditions did in terms of evil ... if it were possible to express and understand so much evil, so many ravages, so many deaths, so many depopulations, and so many and such savage injustices, they would terrify present and future centuries and would fill a grand book to the brim, because these exceeded all past and present, both in the quantity and number of abominations that happened upon the peoples that were destroyed and the lands that became deserts, because all of them were infinite.[21]

What has been registered as the poverty of Las Casas's rhetorical powers—the convolution and, at times, inelegance of his writing—is instead the powerful trait of a writer who is fully aware of the limits of his language and who must at every step try to stretch it, even to mutilate it, in order to match the violence that itself fractures his words and breaks the syntax of his sentences,

a violence whose excess remains incomprehensible. The politics of his book lies precisely in this breakdown. We could even say that if the book has power over its readers it is because of this breakdown that, in turn, echoes that of Las Casas's failed mission. Las Casas writes in the hope that his book can be a force of transformation, but he knows he cannot achieve this transformation alone, which is why he so often incorporates testimonies and writings of several of his contemporaries as part of his plea to Prince Philip. If the force of Las Casas's denunciation comes from his faith, this faith ensures his complicity with the project of Spanish colonialism. The transformative power of his denunciation is diminished by its commitment to Christian conversion, since this commitment remains consonant with the expansion of Spain's imperial aspirations.[22] Nevertheless, the dense complexity of Las Casas's at least double commitment is carried forward in the different ways in which his activism—however compromised it may be—remains a resource for later writers.

Benjamin himself formalizes the contradiction at work in Las Casas in an enthusiastic 1929 review of Marçel Brion's *Bartolomée de Las Casas: "Père des Indiens,"* which appeared a year earlier. In the review, he writes that "[t]he colonial history of the European peoples begins with the outrageous process of the Conquest, which transformed the entire newly conquered world into a torture chamber." Tracing Brion's attention to the "unfailing energy" with which Las Casas seeks to improve the lives of the natives, he adds that, when Las Casas dies "in a Dominican monastery in Madrid in 1566," "he had done his part, but, at the same time, the work of destruction was accomplished. ... In the name of Catholicism, a Priest confronts the atrocities committed in the name of Catholicism" (*GS*, 3:180).[23] Indeed, if, as Benjamin writes in *One-Way Street*, "without exception the great writers perform their combinations in a world that comes after them" (*OWS*, 446–447), it is not surprising that Las Casas's condemnation of the Amerindian genocide finds its resonance in several of the writers we have been reading. As we will see, the violence of colonialism and racial capitalism is a red thread that circulates not only in Marx's and Luxemburg's writings on primitive accumulation but also in Benjamin's several references to Las Casas and Mesoamerica.

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Benjamin's interest in Mesoamerican cultures and languages dates to the seminars conducted by the German ethnologist,

archaeologist, and linguist Walter Lehmann in the winter semester of 1915–1916, which he attended while he was a student at the University of Munich (Rainer Maria Rilke also was in attendance) and, again in 1921, when he was in Berlin—Lehmann had moved to Berlin to become the director of the Ethnological Museum there. The seminars took place in Lehmann's apartment, which was filled with Amerindian archaeological artifacts he had extracted from various expeditions and excavations in the Americas (in particular, from an unofficial excavation close to Teotihuacán). The seminars focused on cosmology, with an emphasis on astrological calendars and the measurement of time, the language and culture of ancient Mexico, and Bernardino de Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*. Benjamin's notes from the classes have been lost, but he refers to the sessions in several letters to Scholem and Fritz Radt.[24] He also seems to have been interested in learning Nahuatl, and Scholem claims he noticed a copy of Fray Alonso de Molina's 1555 *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y Mexicana* on his desk in Berlin sometime after 1916.[25] But he was especially interested in Mesoamerican animism, something that is legible not only in several scenes in his later *Berlin Childhood*—where he describes several inanimate objects coming to life—but also in the first of the two Mexican dreams he recounts in *One-Way Street*.[26]

Benjamin presents this first dream in a section entitled "Mexican Embassy" ("Mexikanische Botschaft"). The dream follows a citation from Baudelaire:

> *Je ne passe jamais devant un fétiche de bois, un Bouddha doré, une idole mexicaine sans me dire: c'est peut-être le vrai dieu*. [I never pass by a wooden fetish, a gilded Buddha, a Mexican idol without reflecting: perhaps it is the true God.]
>
> —Charles Baudelaire

> I dreamed I was a member of an exploring party in Mexico. After crossing a high, primeval jungle, we came upon a system of above-ground caves in the mountains. Here, a religious order had survived from the time of the first missionaries till now, its monks continuing the work of conversion among the natives. In an immense central grotto with a gothically pointed roof, Mass was celebrated according to the most ancient rites. We joined the ceremony and witnessed its climax: toward a wooden bust of God the Father, fixed high on a wall of the cave, a priest raised a Mexican fetish. At this, the divine head turned thrice in denial from right to left. (*OWS*, 448–449)

Diego Rivera, *The Arsenal*, 1928

Benjamin's title, "Mexican Embassy," references the envoy sent to Mexico, but "Mexikanische Botschaft" can also be translated as either "Mexican mission" or "Mexican message." In all cases, though, the title's referent remains unstable, and this because this Mexican mission can refer to a mission *in* Mexico—a mission *by* Spanish missionaries in Mexico, for example—but also to a *Mexican* mission, a mission originating not in Spain but in Mexico. Further, the section titled "Mexikanische Botschaft" includes a passage from Baudelaire, a German (Benjamin) in the expedition, perhaps from another era, and a gothic architectural element (and therefore a European and Christian one)—which means that this "Mexican mission," this Mexican message or gospel, is not exclusively "Mexican," or that whatever is "Mexican" cannot be restricted to Mexico. In addition, this message includes a series of relays that, attributing features of one God to another, makes the true godhead undecidable. This undecidability is legible throughout the dream and is intensified if we register that, as a member of the expedition, Benjamin is a displaced figure of Lehmann who also reenacts Baudelaire's encounter with different fetishes (the quotation from Baudelaire—reimagined and rewritten by Benjamin—is itself the dream of a quotation).[27] The dream enables him to find himself simultaneously in different historical moments, including the moment of the encounter between the Spanish missionaries and the Mexica peoples. Within the dreamwork, nothing is determined or fixed, nothing can be identified in a single time or space, and everything moves in the direction of a decolonial account of the history of violence.

Benjamin's dream offers a genealogical allegory of the violence of the Spanish conquest and of German colonialism's own relationship to this history. Reenacting and displacing the initial colonial encounter between Franciscan missionaries and Mexica leaders, the expedition in the dream comes upon a system of caves and, entering what seems to be the central one, they witness a priest holding up a Mexican fetish to the bust of God the Father, who proceeds to deny it three times.[28] The colonial encounter implies a form of mimicry that transforms the colonial power into what it wishes to deny or destroy, initiating a process of *entanglement* that potentially challenges all identifications, even in the instances when it is ideologically instrumentalized. That the bust of God the Father is made of wood, for example, puts it within the purview of the Baudelaire citation and, consequently, it can be said to be just one more fetish. This relay between a Christian fetish and an indigenous one—in which each takes on the traits of

the other—is reinforced by the denying movement of the divine figure's head, since, in this movement, it embodies the animism that would more properly belong to an indigenous deity who, in this instance, would deny a lesser one. The blurring between the two fetishes is reiterated in another form in the "most ancient rites," since these rites are not identified as either Catholic or pre-Hispanic. Putting idolatry alongside the Catholic mass, the priest offers a Mexican fetish to a God in a ritualistic citation of sacrifice and, in doing so, transforms the Christian God into a pre-Hispanic one.[29] Even as God the Father denies indigenous divinity, he confirms it by absorbing the indigenous god and its principle of animation. Affirming that theology is fundamental to the colonial project, the dream unsettles all forms of theological certitude. It archives a syncretism among fetishes, priests, and animated objects that projects characteristics of the figures that are denied onto the ones that would deny them.[30] This is why, in a rather daring and provocative suggestion, Heriberto Martínez Yépez suggests that the priest who offers up the fetish in Benjamin's dream could be Las Casas himself, since, late in his life, in his 1564 "Tratado de las doce dudas" ("Treatise of Twelve Doubts"), he argues that fetishes or idols can be the true God, since God is in every idol.[31] Here Las Casas anticipates the mystical elements of Marxian fetishism—which, in turn, reveals both its transformative potential as a kind of animism and its theological dimensions. Like the Marxian letter, Benjamin's dream traces another kind of primitive accumulation, one that gathers its force in the superimposition of the various layers of interpretive strata condensed in the dream itself. These strata include the condensations and displacements of all the mirroring effects between the colonial project and its presumed subjects but also all the history that supports colonialism in general, and especially its violence. As Benjamin puts it in his review of Brion's biography of Las Casas,

> It is very interesting to pursue the ways in which the economic necessity of a colonization that was not yet imperialist … seeks its theoretical justification: America is an unclaimed good; subjugation is the precondition of the mission; it is the duty of Christianity to intervene against the Mexica's human sacrifices. The theorist of state reason—who does not openly present himself as such—was the Court chronicler Sepulveda. The dispute that occurred between the two opponents in 1550 in Valladolid marks the highest point in the life and, unfortunately, the work of Las Casas as well. For no matter how close this man came into contact with reality, the result of his action remained entirely limited to Spain. After the dispute of Valladolid, Charles V issued decrees that abolished slavery, abolishing the so-called "encomienda," the "patronage," which was one of its most racist forms, etc. Yet the same or similar measures had already been enacted before, almost without any success. (*GS*, 3:180–181)

Reading the Spanish conquest as an early instance of racial capitalism, Benjamin notes that, despite the efforts of Las Casas to expose the violence of the conquest, "the work of destruction" prevails, and what accumulates, he suggests, is more violence, violence on top of violence.

If Benjamin's first dream condenses a network of associations that touch on the relations among religion, colonization, and capital in a way that brings together the Spanish conquest with German colonialism, his second dream, described just a few pages later, returns to this same constellation of themes, but this time reverses the landscape. If the first dream is presumably located in Mexico—but a Mexico that is not entirely "Mexican"—the second dream is located in a Weimar that proves not to be just "German." Whether or not Benjamin actually sends the dream to Lehmann, we can assume that his former teacher is at least one of its addressees, if in encoded ways. This colonial-cosmological dream, presented under the title "Tiefbau-Arbeiten"—which has been translated as "Underground Works" or, more recently, as "Structural Engineering Works"[32]—is written around the time that Lehmann returns from a trip to Mexico during which he collects Amerindian artifacts for the Völkerkunde Museum in Berlin, of which he is then director. If Benjamin imagines sending him an artifact in the form of an enigma to be deciphered and translated, his oneiric missive also appears as a critique of Lehmann's colonial ethnological quest to classify indigenous materials and languages; it is a comic depiction of the failure of such a project.

In the dream, Benjamin wakes up one morning laughing, with a strange word in his head: "Anaquivitzli." As Martínez Yépez has noted—and Ng after him—the word is an imagined Nahuatl word, but a Nahuatl word that, according to Benjamin, is assembled from syllables and words that are also Greek, French, Latin, and German.[33] As Benjamin tells us:

> In a dream I saw a barren terrain. It was the marketplace of Weimar. Excavations were in progress. I, too, scraped about in the sand. There the spire of a church steeple emerged. Delighted, I thought

> to myself: a Mexican shrine from the time of pre-animism, from the Anaquivitzli. I awoke laughing. (Ana = *ἀνά*; vi = vie; witz = Mexican church [!]) (*OWS*, 455; translation modified)

Martínez Yépez argues that, like his first dream, Benjamin's second dream can be contextualized in terms of its reenactment of an encounter between Europe and Mexica history and culture and, in particular, in relation to the Aztec conception of dreams. Viewing the dream as part of a long history of European appropriations of non-European cultural practices, in this instance oneiric ones, he emphasizes the dream's capacity to move across times and spaces and, in every moment, to appear not simply as a text to be deciphered but also as a force of destruction, since it unsettles all order and every distinction, especially economic and political ones.[34]

In this instance, the dream takes place in the Weimar marketplace—an emblem of the city's financial and transactional power, the nexus of its economy of exchange. In Benjamin's oneiric vision, however, this marketplace is not a site of bustling commerce, but rather a bleak and barren terrain, with its only activity the excavations that are taking place. The excavations reveal the tip of a Mexican church, suggesting that Weimar is built over its colonial endeavors, that it buries the signs of its plunder, and that its imperial ambitions are shared with other colonial powers, not the least of which are the Spanish. The "barren terrain" belongs to the indistinction of the dream and to a multitemporal, multigeographical logic, with pre-Hispanic Mexico overlapping not only with Spanish Mexico but also with nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany and Europe. This economy of exchange—based on translations, equivalences, and displacements between Germany and Mexico, between colonized and colonizer, between different nation-states, and between different languages—is located in a Weimar that is also experiencing political and cultural instability and upheaval (it is no accident that, within *One-Way Street*, this second dream immediately follows the book's "Imperial Panorama" section, with its analysis of the destructive character of the bond between imperialism and capitalism, the economic unraveling of Germany, and the exploitation of nature). It is a place of exchange, extraction, construction, and also ruination and impoverishment—its terrain empty and desolate.

If the marketplace embodies the enigma of capital, the almost alchemical equivalence of the most disparate and arbitrary objects, Benjamin's dream constructs its allegorical exchanges

by means of figures and linguistic play. The emerging Mexican church reveals that theology is the hidden infrastructure of the capitalist marketplace, especially when it gets coordinated with the colonial project. The "Benjamin" in the dream is "delighted" with his discovery and immediately translates the scene into an ironically academic act of identification—the Mexican shrine, he tells us, is "from the time of pre-animism"—that soon collides with the amalgamated logic of the dream sequence. The temporal extraction that the identification signals, reminiscent of a museum label, parodically amplifies Europe's archaeological drive, which disconnects, reifies, and desocializes indigenous artifacts. If ruins from the Americas would seem to belong to the European unconscious—if Benjamin helps uncover them by scraping "a bit in the sand"—the Nahuatl neologism that appears in his dream, with its fragments of ancient Greek, Latin, French, and German, marks the inscription of Europe's presence within the indigenous language. But it also recalls the fact that Nahuatl itself is mediated by European hands, through the grammars and dictionaries compiled by Franciscan priests and used by them to teach the Aztec nobility how to translate their thoughts and language into the Roman alphabet. The encounter and conquest should be understood as an encounter between different languages that achieves its colonial aim, beyond brute force, by the imposition of one language upon another. Nahuatl already has undergone the violence of colonization, and the writing that emerges incorporates elements from both indigenous and European traditions. It exhibits the confusion of inexact appropriations and translations, the assimilation and distortion of European traits, a generalized dialectics of misunderstanding, and different forms of alienation, and this because none of the languages involved are monolingual. They are already pluralized before the encounter.[35]

If Benjamin's pseudo-Nahuatl neologism doubles as an indictment of colonial extractivism—which he associates with the academic ethnological authority of Lehmann, who becomes a synecdoche for the violence of colonial plunder under the veil of an expanded cultural understanding—it also indicates the way in which the encounter with another language introduces us to the foreignness of all languages. "Anaquivitzli" proves to be a liminal word that, belonging to an invented language—the word, belonging to no one's native tongue, is also foreign to itself—demonstrates Benjamin's conviction of the mutual contamination that takes place when different languages come into contact with one another, however much we might resist this contamination.

Benjamin demonstrates this—after he wakes up—by breaking the word down into syllables and associating each syllable with either a preposition or word from another language, each of which bears reference to an element in the dream. The syllable *ana*, which Benjamin identifies with *ἀνά* and which, in ancient Greek, can mean "upward" or "again," alludes not just to the emergence of the tip of the church, its rising from the ground, but also to the long history of repeated extractivist colonial endeavors. The syllable *vi*, in which he hears *vie*, French for "life," is legible in the transit from Benjamin's "from the time of pre-animism" to his "from the Anaquivitzli," since, syntactically, the two phrases, superimposed one atop the other, join these different temporal moments together and, in doing so, identify *life* with the animism of the word "Anaquivitzli" itself. Moving simultaneously in different directions—the sentence suggests that this hybrid word also belongs to the time of pre-animism—it points to an animism *before* animism, an animism in language itself. The *witz*, which Benjamin identifies as a "Mexican church," turns the church into a joke that arises because of the incongruity of the church's appearance in Weimar but also into a force of dissolution since its emergence—within the unconscious of Germany and Europe and as part of their colonial archives—unsettles the distinctions on which German and European colonialism depend. Benjamin's neologism asks us to think about the multiplicity that can exist within a word and the foreignness that not only interrupts any monolingual conception of language but also enables us to get closer to the alienating, distancing effects of language.

Benjamin makes this point in his 1921 "Task of the Translator" essay when, citing Rudolph Pannwitz (Benjamin's antennas would not have missed this other *witz*), he writes: "The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue. Particularly when translating from a language very remote from his own, he must go back to the primal elements of language itself and penetrate to the point where work, image, and tone converge. He must expand and deepen his language by means of the foreign language." Benjamin reinforces his suggestion that we deepen our relation to our "own" language when we register the foreignness within it a few sentences later, adding: "[t]his, to be sure, is to admit that all translation is only a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages," including our own.[36] It is not impossible that this insistence on the way in which translation makes our own language

foreign to itself was influenced by his seminars with Lehmann and his engagement with Nahuatl and the *Florentine Codex*. In fact, in a postscript to a letter he sends to Scholem on November 8, 1921, soon after attending Lehmann's seminars again, Benjamin tells his friend of a grand reunion with Lehmann and remarks that, although the seminars are still conducted in the same old style, he now registers them as entirely "Scheerbartian"![37] Like the language of the Pallasians, Benjamin's invented word is foreign to everyone, and absolutely constructed and artificial. It reads as the language of pre-animism, but it is instead a language of the future for subjects who do not yet exist. It is scarcely an accident that, when Benjamin divides "Anaquivitzli" into its respective syllables, he omits one—the *qui*, which, in French and Latin, means "who." The historical processes that Benjamin's dream evokes are without subjects, and certainly without fixed identities of any kind. Within the movement of history—within Benjamin's dream of history—the subject disappears because, produced by this movement, it is instead plural, relational, and impersonal. The "who" of history is no one because it can be everyone; it is the not-yet-existing *nonsubject* of revolution. If Benjamin's two Mexican dreams offer oneiric condensations of the history of plunder and colonization—if they appear as dreamlike condemnations of this history—they also point to a reconfiguration that, revealing the mutually destructive and constitutive relations between colonizer and colonized, gestures in the direction of an enigmatic commons that would no longer be organized around the politics of identity. That this commons to come can only be imagined in the otherworldliness of dreams—in which identities are entirely indeterminate, fetishes can come alive, Gods can be delegitimized, and different geographies and landscapes can find themselves elsewhere—suggests that the transvaluation of capitalism still belongs to a revolutionary future. This future requires not only that we decipher the resources granted to us by dreams but that we also imagine a future in which the primitive accumulation that is legible in the history of colonialism—in the history of racial capitalism—will no longer be just an accumulation of violence. Given Benjamin's interest in Mesoamerica, his critique of the relation between capital and colonialism is consonant with his interest in tracing a connection between communism—as it is imagined, for example, on Scheerbart's Pallas, which, in a letter to Scholem from November 23, 1919, Benjamin describes as "the best of all worlds" (*C*, 151)—and its Amerindian counterparts.[38] As we will see, Marx himself turns to ancient societies in the last

Tina Modotti, *Mexican Sombrero with Hammer and Sickle*, Mexico City, 1927

years of his life in order to further imagine what a planetary communism might look like. If Amerindian thought is a thought of transformation that exceeds the human—we might recall that Scheerbart's Pallasians reject the concept of the "human" in the name of a more relational commons—this planetary commons would embody a model of accumulation in which, in Martínez Yépez's words, "[t]he underworlds and the heavens, plants and animals, humans and things" would be "coparticipants in the formation of another general economy." "Nothing can be left out if this commons is to take place," he adds, "it would include everything … [this commons] is not one. Every single thing is already the entire commons."[39] If Benjamin's dreams are a resource for imagining this commons—for imagining what this communist commons might look like—Marx's and Luxemburg's writings on primitive accumulation, in the negativity of their analyses, also become a means of creatively exceeding capitalist destruction.

★

As Marx notes near the opening of "The So-Called Original Accumulation" (*Die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation*) chapter in *Capital*, "[i]t is well known that conquest, subjugation, pillaging, murder—in short, acts of violence—have dominated the history of the real world. But the gentle world of political economy has always been an idyll. There, law and 'labor' have been the only means of acquiring wealth, although, of course, an exception is made every year for 'this year.' The methods of original accumulation may be many things; what they are not is idyllic." What Marx references here is a capitalist myth of origins, one in which the violence of capital is effaced through a kind of fairy tale about capital's idyllic beginnings. We should view this myth, he adds, from "the standpoint of nursery tales." What we have known as "primitive accumulation" is really "original accumulation," and more precisely "*so-called* original accumulation" (our emphasis), which is to say *not* "original accumulation" at all, or rather not what it is purported to be. In Marx's writerly hands, the concept of "original accumulation"—as he acknowledges, itself a translation and revision of Adam Smith's "previous accumulation"—emerges simultaneously as a capitalist description and a colonial justification of what the noncapitalist world experiences as theft, expropriation, and relentless plunder.[40] As he puts it in his 1853 essay on "The Future Results of British Rule in India," "The profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois

civilization lies unveiled before our eyes, turning from its home, where it assumes respectable forms, to the colonies, where it goes naked."[41] For Marx, history is a history of destruction and, in this history, there can be no capitalism without colonialism. If colonialism is just one index of capitalism, it nevertheless reveals the violence of capital in all its nakedness. This is why "so-called primitive accumulation" is in fact the opposite of what it presents itself as—a mechanism for the accumulation of wealth; it is instead a means of expropriation and impoverishment, of dispossession and death, with force and violence as its modus operandi. Scarcely an idyllic paradise, it is, in Marx's word, a Dantean "Inferno."[42]

Marx not only makes his political point through his use of this "so-called"—which already suggests that "original accumulation" is not what we think it is—but also by putting the phrase "original accumulation" in quotation marks which, like suspended clothespins, hang the concept out to dry. As Marx points out, capitalism employs the term in order to designate colonialism as a necessary phase in its development—as its "idyllic" prehistory. However, "original accumulation" in fact belongs to the colonialist discourse it seeks to justify. The term "primitive" encapsulates the ideology of a positivist narrative that is as essential to capitalism as war and the plunder of nature (to mention two of the instances of capitalist violence that Luxemburg singles out in her critical reading of "so-called 'primitive accumulation'"). But once the negative critical force of the Marxian letter is turned toward the concept, the phrase "primitive accumulation" can no longer be understood as a historical description of an earlier phase of capitalist development. It is rather a term that Marx investigates as part of his ideological critique of the capitalist rhetoric that justifies the brutal structures behind its pervasive colonial violence. It is the continuity of this structural necessity—that it is never just "previous" or past is part of its "secret"—that allows Luxemburg to reinforce Marx's critique when she returns to Marx's phrase in her 1913 *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Explanation of Imperialism*. There she in fact reads the negative rhetorical moves of each of the terms in "so-called 'primitive accumulation'"—repeating Marx's "so-called" but also putting the phrase "primitive accumulation" in quotation marks.[43] In other words, Luxemburg demonstrates her fealty to Marx by reenacting, perhaps unconsciously, the same critical readerly and writerly strategies that Marx displays in his 1875 "Critique of the Gotha Program," which, attending to the smallest grammatical and

linguistic details, effectively argues that the Gotha Program is not communist enough because its manifesto is not written precisely enough, either in its style or diction (not communist enough, that is, because it does not take full responsibility for its language).

The Gotha Program was the program of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany. Marx distances himself from it since, for him, it misrepresents the principles of socialism and therefore jeopardizes the movement by giving its enemies ammunition. When he sends his critique to the leaders of the newly formed SAPD (which would later become the SPD, the Social Democratic Party of Germany), he also sends a copy of the recently published French edition of *Capital*, signaling his sense that the Party has not read him properly, and needs to do so. He also cites his *Communist Manifesto* as a counter to several of its claims. Beyond his critique of the Program's nationalist bent, the Party's retreat from the revolutionary promise of the Paris Commune's effort to offer an alternative to capitalism, the Party's misunderstanding of the source of wealth, and the complicity between its rhetoric and that of bourgeois politics, Marx opposes any determinate program for the future. In his words, "*[e]very step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs.*"[44] Our interest in this remarkable text is Marx's practice of reading—and its essential relation to his political activism. He painstakingly moves through the sentences and paragraphs of the Program—often pausing on particular words—and repeatedly accuses the Party of writing that is imprecise and sloppy, "bungled in style and content," full of "loose notions" and "obsolete verbal rubbish," "botched" quotations, and "hollow phrases" that, miming the language of the bourgeoisie, "can be twisted and turned as desired" and lose all their meaning.[45] He rewrites phrases, asks questions about the use of words or phrases like "labor," "useful labor," "proceeds of labor," "fair distribution," "equal right," and "free state," and claims that the Program's appendix suffers from "slovenly editing." "And what wild abuse," he goes on to note, "the program makes of the words 'present-day state,' 'present-day society,' and of the greater misconception it creates in regard to the state to which it addresses its demands."[46] The text is further evidence that critical reading protocols are a political practice; for Marx, the possibilities of communism cannot be imagined without committed, and even militant, readers and writers—with reading and writing not restricted to just linguistic practices but expanded to include communist strategies for doing political work. Under this light, Luxemburg's attention to Marx's overt citation of the term

allows her to pursue the question of the source of his phrase in the first stage of her and Marx's negative appropriation of Smith's capitalist conceptualization. Her political commitments are legible in her close attention to the slightest rhetorical and lexical shifts in Marx's texts, even to his punctuation.

Like Marx, Luxemburg also points to the excesses of violent expropriation rather than to chronological precedence as the distinguishing feature of "primitive accumulation." In *The Accumulation of Capital*, she points out that the very idea of "previous accumulation" already implies the teleological and self-fulfilling logic of the "total capitalist,"[47] a point of view that, as in Marx, is a cover for "brute force" (Marx refers to force as the "midwife" of a history that is itself "an economic power"[48]). In her reading, Luxemburg underlines the extractive violence directed toward the noncapitalist modes of production on which, paradoxically, capital depends for its survival. As she puts it, "Capitalism needs non-capitalist social strata as a market for its surplus value, a source of supply for its means of production, and a reservoir of labor-power for its wage system."[49] The relation of capitalism to noncapitalist "reservoirs" of labor and natural resources follows a colonial "method of violence":

> permanent occupation of the colonies by the military, native risings and punitive expeditions are the order of the day for any colonial regime. The method of violence, then, is the immediate consequence of the clash between capitalism and the organizations of a natural economy which would restrict accumulation. ... This method is the most profitable and gets the quickest results, and so it is also the most expedient for capital.[50]

Emphasizing the interdependence of colonial violence and capitalist modes of production, Luxemburg points to the ongoing complicities between colonialism and industrialization. In a passage that echoes both Las Casas and Marx, she notes that "[f]orce, fraud, oppression, looting are openly displayed without any attempt at concealment, and it requires an effort to discover within this tangle of political violence and contests of power the stern laws of the economic process."[51] Emphasizing the parallelism between indigenous bondage and the enslavement of Africans by European capitalism, she writes: "[t]he economic basis for the production of raw materials is a primitive system of exploitation practiced by European capital in the African colonies and in America, where the institutions of slavery and bondage

are combined in various forms."[52] Four years later, Luxemburg returns to the study of indigenous communities specifically in relation to the plunder of nature, drawing a connection between this plunder and the extermination of native populations. In a letter dated May 2, 1917, she tells Sonja (Sophie) Liebknecht that she has been studying natural science:

> Only yesterday I read why the warblers are disappearing from Germany. Increasingly systematic forestry, gardening and agriculture are, step by step, destroying all nesting and breeding places: hollow trees, fallow land, thickets of shrubs, withered leaves on the garden ground. It pained me so when I read that. Not because of the song they sing for people, but rather it was the picture of the silent, irresistible extinction of these defenseless little creatures which hurt me to the point where I had to cry. It reminded me of a Russian book which I read while still in Zürich, a book by Professor Sieber about the ravage of the redskins in North America. In exactly the same way, step by step, they had been pursued from their land by civilized men and abandoned to perish silently and cruelly.[53]

Always a reader—and not just of books on natural science or histories of the extermination of native populations but also of nature and the various ways in which it bears the destructive effects of capital in its trees, land, shrubs, and leaves—Luxemburg points to the devastating effects of industrial forestry and agriculture on the conditions of life. The march of capitalism spells the eradication of the warblers and of Native Americans. Leaving behind fallow and unproductive land, clearing its path through deforestation, disturbing nature's means of replenishing and reproducing itself, moving forward through the displacement and genocide of populations, capital's accumulative advance proves to be barbaric, not "civilized."

Luxemburg here follows Marx, who claims that "the squandering and exploitation of the earth" are one of the defining features of the system of capitalist accumulation.[54] "The more a country proceeds from large-scale industry as the background of its development," he writes, "as in the case of the United States, the more rapid is this process of destruction." Marx's argument that capitalist production introduces a rift in "the metabolic interaction between man and the earth" is well known. The destructiveness of capital "prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements," he writes, "it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil." In a later formulation,

he states that capital's dissipation of the "vitality of the soil" creates "an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself."[55] Joining ecological destruction, capitalist production, and the expropriation of life and labor, Marx delineates the contradictions of a capitalism that creates the conditions of its own demise by destroying the very material resources on which it depends. Capitalism meets its limits when it imagines it has none. As Paul Burkett, John Bellamy Foster, and Kohei Saito demonstrate, Marx gathers his understanding of the effects of industrial agriculture on the earth's metabolic system through his reading of various treatises on natural science.[56] Developing his argument in his discussion of ground rent theory in *Capital*, he especially is indebted to Justus von Liebig's 1862 edition of *Agricultural Chemistry*, in which, in his introduction (on which Marx took extensive notes in 1865–1866 as he was finishing the first volume of *Capital*), Liebig points to what he calls industrial agriculture's "robbery" of nature—its depletion of essential nutrients of the soil without establishing a "law of compensation," without replenishing what it extracts. Liebeg views this ongoing depletion as unsustainable, stating, in a passage that has great resonance today, that "if we do not succeed in making the farmer better aware of the conditions under which he produces and in giving him the means necessary for the increase of his output, wars, emigration, famines and epidemics will of necessity create the conditions of a new equilibrium which will undermine the welfare of everyone and finally lead to the ruin of agriculture."[57] As Marx notes, echoing Liebig, "all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility."[58] If Marx points to the strategies and techniques that industrial agriculture puts in place to increase productivity—from technological innovations to different means of fertilizing the soil to international trade—he insists that, in the long run, far from countering the acceleration of the earth's ruination, these efforts actually ensure it. He describes a vicious circle in which the depletion of resources in one geographical area requires either supplying additional resources extracted somewhere else or abandoning the area and diminishing the resources of another one. The effort to broaden the scale of capital's industrial growth only further exposes the contradictions in this expansion, leading to a greater exploitation of nature's resources.

In response to this soil exhaustion—the result of climate, erosion, the removal of organic matter and nutrients, destructive methods of cultivation, and the voracious plunder of capitalist agriculture—Liebig urged crop diversification and rotation, along with the application of fertilizers. The demand for fertilizer was partially filled by various artificial manures, but especially by Peruvian guano. The best guano came from the Chincha Islands, just twelve miles from the coast of Peru, in the bay of Pisco. Since the islands received very little rainfall, the naturally high nitrogen content of the guano remained undiluted in a pungent, brownish-yellow concretion that also was very rich in phosphate. In some of the ravines of the islands, it was said to be nearly 300 feet deep, and some speculated that it must have begun to accumulate there soon after the biblical flood.

At war with Bolivia in the late 1830s and experiencing several civil wars in the early 1840s, Peru found its economy shattered and, in order to reduce its enormous war debt, it began to negotiate with foreign companies for the selling of its guano. In 1841, Peru's President Manuel Menéndez formally nationalized the country's guano resources and, for the next thirty-five years, the Peruvian government would earn most of its foreign revenues from selling guano to other countries. In 1842, the London firm Anthony Gibbs & Sons shared a monopoly on exports for five years and, in 1847, gained sole control of British and North American markets. By 1846, Peru had received more than $1.3 million in guano advances, and by the 1860s seabirds supplied more than 75 percent of the government's revenues. High prices, however, encouraged searches for substitutes and even encouraged fraud. By 1854, several varieties of guano had been introduced from Africa, Central America, the Caribbean, and assorted Pacific islands, but they were considered far inferior in quality to those of Peru. Europe and America hoped to share in the plunder of the resources of native peoples whose cultures were violently altered or destroyed. The guano trade reveals the guiding principle of racial capitalism: in Emerson's words, "expensive races—race living at the expense of race," at the expense, that is, of what he elsewhere calls "the guano-races of mankind."[59] According to Foster, Clark, and York, "the Peruvian guano trade is a classic case of ecological imperialism and of the internationalization of capitalism's metabolic rift. ... The trade enhanced the imperialist integration of distant economies, expanding, deepening, and increasing the global metabolic rift." Indeed, they go on to note, "[t]he international guano trade from 1840 to 1880 perfectly embodies the dynamic of

ecological imperialism, the robbing of resources and the degradation of ecosystems, as European nations—especially Britain—and the United States plundered Peru, extracting 12.7–20 million tons of bird excrement from the islands to enrich their nutrient depleted soils, given the unsustainable practices of industrial capitalist agriculture."[60] Marx himself suggests that the importation of guano enables Europe to defer its acknowledgment of its finitude, even if just temporarily—until the guano reserves are themselves depleted, that is—but only at the expense of the ecological metabolism of Peru's natural economy.

As a commodity, guano bears the traces of the history of imperialism and colonization. Its trade suggests that the liberty and economic prosperity of empire are entangled with the oppression, and often the death, of millions of slaves and ethnic immigrants. As Emerson puts it, in a line that easily could have been written by Marx, "in each change of industry, whole classes and populations are sacrificed."[61] This point is confirmed when we note that the workers involved in supporting and maintaining the guano trade included not only the German, Irish, and African Americans to whom Emerson refers but also, among so many others, the Peruvian convicts, natives, and Chinese coolies that worked the Peruvian guano fields. According to Evelyn Hu-Dehart, from 1849 to 1874, as many as 100,000 contract laborers or "coolies" were transported, under deception or coercion, across the Pacific to help meet the demand for cheap labor on the coastal guano fields.[62] There would in fact have been no guano trade without these laborers. Amidst the ravages of war and the labor shortages resulting from the end of African slavery, Peru—hoping to encourage foreign investment and unable to find enough cheap labor among the small coastal peasantry, freed slaves, or the highlanders, to meet the growing demand—decided to seek it overseas. When it was clear that European immigrants were not drawn to the lack of available land and low wages in Peru, the Peruvian government—following the example of the British planters in the West Indies, including Cuba—resorted to a racialized system of bondage in the form of Chinese laborers. In south China, Westerners used Chinese "runners"—the same term their counterparts in Africa were called—to "recruit" poor young men, often by force but also by persuading them that they were to work the gold mines in California. Some boarded ships in Amoy or other Chinese ports, but the greater number probably passed through the Portuguese colony of Macao. As Hu-Dehart points out, many of the same ships and captains used in the African slave trade "transported

Chinese coolies, packing them on board in the same way as slaves, across a 'middle passage' that was even longer in distance and more arduous."[63] Mortality rates on these ships—often referred to as "floating coffins"—were as high as 30 percent or more, due to overcrowding, insufficient food, lack of proper ventilation, and poor hygienic conditions. Once the Chinese laborers arrived in Peru, they were auctioned, and then housed in long, rectangular slave quarters. The working conditions on the islands were unbearable, not only because of their inhospitable nature—the climatic conditions on the islands made any work there a matter of privation and hardship, since the heat and lack of rainfall made water and food supplies very scarce—but also because of the viciousness with which the laborers were driven to dig and load the guano. In response to these harsh conditions, the coolies often chose to commit suicide in order to escape their enslavement.[64] The pressure experienced by the Peruvian government to stop what was often referred to as "another African slave trade" did not, however, prevent the deaths of tens of thousands of coolies and Peruvian laborers—many of whom, buried in the guano fields in which they died working, became, like the flesh and carcasses of birds and sea lions, part of the guano that soon would be exported to Europe and the United States to fertilize their lands and crops. The guano harvesting also resulted in the deaths of the guano-producing seabirds, as their nests were destroyed in the mining of the fields. The ecological system sustaining them and allowing them to reproduce was ravaged by the process of extraction, just as Luxemburg's warblers were destroyed by the industrialization of agriculture.

As Marx notes, the very fact that England needs to manure its fields with guano imported from Peru and other countries confirms that capitalist agriculture is no longer "self-sustaining"; "it no longer finds the natural conditions of its own production within itself, naturally arisen, spontaneous, and ready to hand," but instead requires "an independent industry separate from it—and, with this separateness the whole complex set of interconnections in which this industry exists is drawn into the sphere of the conditions of agricultural production."[65] This industry emerges as a historically created necessity and is supported by an economic infrastructure that gathers its force through the legalization of the coolie labor system in the form of racialized contract slavery.[66] Foster points to the expansion of this industry around the globe, noting that "[t]he trade in scalps promoted by the British and the Puritans of New England, the slave trade in Java, the conquest and plunder of

India, the opium trade, and so on, were all means in which capital created a world system under its control that extracted wealth and raw materials for capitalist industry for the benefit of Europe, while destroying communal systems of property elsewhere. All of this is part of the larger, global expropriation that provided the primary accumulation for the genesis of industrial capital."[67]

Following Liebig and other natural scientists—in particular Carl Fraas, whose interest in the physics of nature expands Liebig's emphasis on its chemistry by focusing not only on climatic influences on soil and plant growth but also on the detrimental effects of deforestation in works like his 1847 *Climate and the Plant World Over Time: A Contribution to the History of Both*[68]—Marx repeatedly points to capital's "exploitation" and "squandering of the powers of the earth." He argues that the conditions of the earth's endurance and survival require its "systematic restoration," insisting on "a conscious and rational treatment of the land as permanent communal property, as the inalienable condition for the existence and reproduction of the chain of human existence." "Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together are not the owners of the earth," he goes on to explain, "[t]hey are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as *boni patres familias*."[69] Joining his ecological activism to his critique of political economy, Marx indicates that the task of communism is the protection and preservation of the metabolic relation between society and nature. Here to be red requires that we simultaneously be "green," but in a way that does not in turn capitalize on the rhetoric of sustainability itself. In the words of Foster and Clark—we quote them with the proviso that, in our reading, the "human" in Marx is never, strictly speaking, just human, but already an amalgam of historical and material traces, an ensemble of social relations that can never be reduced to a single entity—"if the revolutionary struggle for socialism failed in the past," it was because "[i]t did not demand the reconstitution of human labor based on a society of associated producers and a world of creative labor—aimed at the fulfillment of human potential, while rationally regulating the human metabolism with nature so as to protect the earth for future generations."[70]

★

If Marx finds resources for imagining this "society of associated producers" and this "world of creative labor" in Fraas and other

natural scientists he reads at the time, it is because he sees in them what he calls—in a letter to Engels from March 25, 1868 in which he mentions Fraas directly—"an unconscious socialist tendency."[71] While all of Marx's work aims at making this tendency more manifest, at having it be materialized, this effort is particularly evident in his late work—and across a wider temporal and global panorama. In addition to his readings in natural science, he reads several books on precapitalist and non-Western societies, focusing on agriculture, landed property, communal forms of production, nonhierarchical modes of organizing family structures, and gender relations. Kevin Anderson notes that, after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, Marx begins to look for other "forms of resistance to capital outside Western Europe and North America." This search is legible in the changes he makes to the French edition of *Capital* soon after the defeat of the Commune, in the notes he takes from 1879–1882 on non-Western and precapitalist societies—some of which have been published as his *Ethnological Notebooks*—and in a series of writings on Russia from 1877 to 1882 in which, in Anderson's words, he suggests that "agrarian Russia's communal villages could be a starting point for a socialist transformation, one that might avoid the brutal process of the primitive accumulation of capital."[72] Dunayevskaya herself remarks, adding Marx's 1875 "Critique of the Gotha Program," that these threads in Marx's thought need to be understood as part of his ongoing wish to find resources for imagining noncapitalist possibilities, to extend his thinking and research beyond Eurocentric constraints, beyond the *jus publicum Europaeum*.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* or, during this same period, in the various drafts of his correspondence with the Russian activist Vera Zasulich about the revolutionary potential of Russian communes.[73] While interest in these Marxian multilingual glosses has grown exponentially in the last years,[74] Dunayevskaya was among the first to register the transformative character of the *Notebooks*, noting that these "profound writings ... summed up [Marx's] life's work and created new openings ... a new vantage-point from which to view Marx's oeuvre as a totality."[75] As a collection of working notes—and, as we will suggest, so much more than just this—they not only give us a glimpse into Marx's process of production and, in Dunayevskaya's words, "let us hear [him] think," but they also "reveal, at one and the same time, the actual ground that led to the first projection of the possibility of revolution coming first in ... underdeveloped

countries like Russia; a reconnection and deepening of what was projected in the *Grundrisse* on the Asiatic mode of production; *and* a return to that most fundamental relationship [between men and women] which had first been projected in the 1844 essays." "Marx's hostility to capitalism's colonialism was intensifying," she adds, and "he returns to probe the origin of humanity, not for purposes of discovering new origins, but for perceiving new revolutionary forces."[76] He searches for resources as much to think about the origins of different forms of hierarchy within past societies as he does to think about transforming social relations in contemporary capitalist ones. What the *Notebooks* critically embody is *the method of reading* that Marx develops during the course of his lifetime, and we can see this in the way in which he records, summarizes, and transforms passages from the books he reads and studies. Franklin Rosemont captures the wildness of the *Notebooks* when he writes:

> Karl Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*—notes for a major study he never lived to write, have [a] fugitive ambiguity. These extensively annotated excerpts from works of Lewis Henry Morgan and others are a jigsaw puzzle for which we have to reinvent the missing pieces out of our own research and revery and above all, our own revolutionary activity ... the book presents the reader with all the difficulties of *Finnegan's Wake* and more, with its curious mixture of English, German, French, Latin and Greek, and a smattering of words and phrases from many non-European languages, from Ojibwa to Sanskrit. Cryptic shorthand abbreviations, incomplete and run-on sentences, interpolated exclamations, erudite allusions to classical mythology, passing references to contemporary world affairs, generous doses of slang and vulgarity; irony and invective: All these the volume possesses aplenty, and they are not the ingredients of smooth reading. ... Rather it is the raw substance of a work ... the spontaneous record of his "conversations" with the authors he was reading, with other authors whom they quoted, and, finally and especially, with himself. ... On page after page Marx highlights passages wildly remote from what are usually regarded as the "standard themes" of his work. Thus we find him invoking the bell-shaped houses of the coastal tribes of Venezuela; the manufacture of Iroquois belts "using fine twine made of filaments of elm and basswood bark," "the Peruvian legend of Manco Capac and Mama Oello, children of the sun"; burial customs of the Tuscarora; the Shawnee belief in metempsychosis; "unwritten literature of myths, legends and traditions"; the "incipient sciences" of the village Indians of the Southwest; the *Popul Vuh*, sacred book of the ancient Quiche Maya; the use of porcupine quills in ornamentation; Indian games and "dancing (as a) form of worship."[77]

Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* present us with a multilingual coalition of quotations, fragments, and notations that are assembled and disassembled before our eyes on every one of its crowded pages. What is available in print is just a selection of the more than 800 pages that comprise the notebooks and that, beyond what is now published, cover a vast range of societies and historical periods, including notes on, among other things, the history of India and Latin America, communal forms in Indonesia and Ceylon, ancient rules of finance, especially in Egypt, Dutch colonialism and its global consequences, gender and kinship patterns in the Americas and in ancient Greece, Rome, and medieval Europe, works in physical anthropology and paleontology, and Russian-language studies of rural communes in Russia. The variegated and often seemingly chaotic presentation of materials, as Rosemont notes, makes the reading of the notebooks a rather formidable task, if not an impossible one.[78] What we have before us is a massive attempt to reconceptualize "primitive accumulation"—with its long history of violence and expropriation—through a different process of accumulation, one that accumulates political resources and possibilities, that superimposes elements from different societies, customs, and languages one atop another, often in the same sentences. Gathering together histories of different modes of communal organization and putting them atop and alongside one another, Marx's notebooks perform a kind of equality—in the sense that, through the critical lens of Marx's reading practice, these varied communal forms emerge as so many resources for moving modern capitalist formations toward more "archaic" forms of communal ownership and production, and a more sustainable and less predatory metabolism with nature. To put it another way: in the last decade of his life and, in particular, in the last three years of his life, Marx intensifies his exploration of communist possibilities. Understanding, as Dunayevskaya notes, "that revolutionary forces do not easily arise and that they are not easily imagined,"[79] he expands his network of resources onto a more global scale and especially includes indigenous materials, along with excerpts on noncapitalist communal forms around the world. By the time he assembles his *Notebooks*, he has been analyzing the apparatuses of capitalism for more than four decades. Having honed his antennas during the course of a lifetime of combating capital and its devastating effects, he knows almost instinctively how to register evidence of noncapitalist forms of association that can help him (and especially us, who, after all, belong to the future for which he relentlessly toils)

imagine a different historical outcome. Near the end of his life, Marx is not simply an expert reader of capitalism's totality and its brutal violence but a full-on militant in search of any crack and fissure in its seamless surface. This has to be the *late* Marx, since finding noncapitalist resources requires knowing capitalism inside-out, demands, in fact, the wisdom of a lifetime. We can see this wisdom in every transformation Marx enacts in the language he copies and changes in every instance. We see him imaginatively drawing from his sources—he writes that the "imagination [is] that great faculty" that has so greatly contributed "to the elevation of mankind" (*EN*, 130)—glimpses of "unconscious" socialist tendencies in the truncated potentials of the communal forms he studies. This different kind of accumulation works against capitalist teleology by substituting the latter's false causation with a paratactic logic that allows Marx to gather, massify, and mobilize a different kind of wealth—a common-wealth on the page. We need only cite a few passages to confirm this and, for our purposes here, we will turn to passages Marx cites—and often revises—from Lewis H. Morgan's 1877 *Ancient Society*.

Lawrence Krader's edition of Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks* consists primarily of excerpts from Marx's readings of John Lubbock's *The Origin of Civilization* (1870); Henry Sumner Maine's *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* (1875); John Budd Phear's *The Aryan Village in India and Ceylon* (1880); and Morgan's *Ancient Society*—although, inserting throughout references ranging from Aeschylus to Herodotus, Homer to Aristotle, Plutarch to Lucretius, Shakespeare to Darwin, Cervantes to Dickens, and more, Marx displays an erudition and reading that vastly exceeds these primary sources. Nevertheless, because Engels bases his 1884 *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* on Marx's excerpts from Morgan's book, these are the best known of his ethnological notes. The Russian jurist and sociologist Maksim Kovalevsky gives Marx a copy of his *Communal Landownership*, along with Morgan's book, in 1879, and Marx is immediately drawn to Morgan's project because it resonates with his own interests. In his book, Morgan divides the history of societies into three "evolutionary" moments—Savagery, Barbarism, and Civilization. His narrative of the development of one stage into another is just one more version of the "idyll" of primitive accumulation that, for Marx, effaces the racism, violence, settler colonialism, and indigenous genocide that are the engine of this developmental story, but Marx still sees the text as a great resource. Morgan offers him a history of the material conditions of subsistence, the origins of

state formations, the links among property, familial structures, and hereditary inheritance, and the contradictions between communal forms and the emergence of capital. Although Marx does not follow Morgan's evolutionary and teleological account of historical progress—nor does he neglect the violence that attends this so-called "progress"—he especially is drawn, as Engels is, not only to Morgan's sense that the immense "outgrowth of property" has become an "unmanageable power" that contains the elements of its own "self-destruction," but, more importantly, to his prediction, on the basis of his rather monumental study of ancient societies, of a potential "revival, in a higher form, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the ancient gentes."[80]

What Marx and Engels find in Morgan are different possibilities for communal existence; they are reinforced in their conviction that hierarchies of class, property, and gender are not the only means of organization, nor are there set ways of forming families, states, or governing structures in general. That the outcome of historical processes could have taken many different forms—that they did not have to lead to capitalism—suggests that the beginnings of these processes also could have been different. Communism in fact requires that we be able to imagine different beginnings and endings, that we register what Morgan understands as the vicissitudes and accidents of circumstances, and this even though Marx sees indications of social stratifications already in early clan societies—so many signs of all the antagonisms that will develop in time across the world of capital. Still, Morgan provides Marx with empirical evidence of nonhegemonic modes of association and exchange that potentially can become part of a multilingual, multitemporal, noncapitalist arsenal for a revolutionary future—one that would not be condemned to reenact scenes of capitalist accumulation throughout the globe.[81] This arsenal is not only drawn from what Marx takes from the books he reads; it also takes shape through an act of notetaking that is simultaneously an act of political reading whose mode of operation is visible in the unruliness of the patchwork he puts together in each of his entries. This unruliness corresponds to the enthusiasm, awe, and wonder that Marx exhibits on every page. It is as if in his late years he discovers a way of reading the world anew. Like Benjamin in his Mexican dreams, however, he does not present his accumulation of fragments as fetishes or artifacts that belong to capital's museums; he neither romanticizes nor idealizes them. It is perhaps not an accident that Morgan, like Lehmann, was a great collector of indigenous material objects. This colonial form of accumulation—this form of plunder,

however "liberal" its intention—runs counter to the accumulation displayed by the writing practices of Marx and Benjamin. Their writing accumulates resources that, never belonging to either one of them, can be activated in political directions and, in particular, in anticolonial ones. In the *Notebooks*, Marx presents these resources in all their motility. This movement is what is activated and intensified in every passage he cites and in which he intervenes; his practice of notetaking ensures that it never ceases, that it leaps from one passage to another, requiring that we read the fragments he puts together syntactically, with endless possibilities for rearranging them.

We can see this movement at work in the following passage, in which, referring to the Spanish encounter with the Aztecs—an encounter that, like his with the texts he reads, is mediated and interrupted by language—he traces the different means of designating and translating words that correspond to the establishment of hierarchical order, and that function across different indigenous populations. Referencing a series of passages from Morgan's pages on "The Aztec Confederacy" and, in particular, the section entitled "The Tenure and Functions of the Office of Principal War-Chief," he writes:

> D. Name des office d. Montezuma—*Teuctli*, war chief, als member d. *Council of chiefs* er manchmal genannt *Tlatoani* (= speaker). This office of a *general military commander* the highest known to the Aztecs, war sonst same als d. Haupt *war-chief* der *Iroquois Confederacy*. D. office machte seinen Träger ex officio *member of the Council of chiefs*. The title of *Teuctli* added als a sort of surname wie: *Chichimeca-Teuctli*, *Pil-Teuctli* etc. | Bei *Clavigero* heissts: "The teuctli took *precedency* of all others in the *Senate*, both in the order of sitting and voting, and were permitted to have a *servant behind them* (der *subsachem* dr Iroquois) with a seat, which was esteemed a privilege of the highest honour." D. *Spanish writers* brauchen nie d. Wort "*teuctli*", verwandeln es in *king* für Montezuma u. dessen successors. *Ixtlilxochitl*, of mixed Tezcucan u. Spanish descent nennt d. *head warchiefs* of *Mexico*, *Tezcuco* u. *Tlacopan* nur "*warchief*" *teuctli* u. andrem Wort to *indicate the tribe* (*teuctli* = warchief = general). Obiger *Ixtlilxochitl* sagt, sprechend von der *division* of power zwischen d. 3 chiefs, when the confederacy was formed etc:
>
> "The king of *Tezcuco* was saluted [dch d. assembled chiefs der 3 tribes] by the title of *Aculhua Teuctli*, also by that of *Chichimecatl Teuctli* which his ancestors had worn and which was the mark of the empire [das Beiwort tribal designation]; *Itzcoatzin* (Itzcoatl), his uncle, received the title of *Culhua Teuctli*, because he reigned over the *Toltecs-Culhuas* [war warchief of the Aztecs, when the confederacy was formed]; and *Totoquihuatzin den of Tecpanuatl Teuctli*, which had been the title of Azcaputzalco. Since that time their successors have received the same title." (*EN*, 194)

As can be seen here, Marx's practice of notetaking cannot be reduced to a simple process of transcription or synthesis. While he bases his notes on a particular passage in Morgan, he reorders its lines, interrupts them with German—sometimes just a translation of Morgan's English into German, but not always—blurs the distinctions between what is Morgan's and, in this instance, what is Francisco Javier Clavigero's (the line before the citation from Clavigero is also his, but, because Marx inserts it alongside Morgan's language, it appears to be Morgan's), and, in general, wreaks havoc on the narrative arc of Morgan's paragraph by breaking it up into fragments. He refuses to distinguish between what belongs to the main body of Morgan's text and what is in his footnotes by transferring materials from the footnotes into the fragments he cites. He eliminates conjunctions, interrupts temporal order, breaks with any teleological narrative, and, in general, enacts a scattering that becomes increasingly difficult to contain. If, following Morgan, he traces the different words that—across Nahuatl, Spanish, German, and English—refer to the office held by Montezuma and other indigenous leaders, he politicizes the ethnologist's account of the Spanish mistranslations of Aztec words and customs by emphasizing the way in which the encounter involves a process of erasure and loss. The encounter does not take place, or, rather, it takes place only in an equivocal encounter between languages, one that is marked not only by the force of empire but also by hierarchical structures—structures that can be registered among the Spanish, the Aztecs, and the Iroquois, if in different measures.

Inserting his German into Morgan's text—mixing his language with Morgan's, thinking his thoughts, that is, in the heads of others—becomes a means for Marx to prevent any one language from having authority over another one. He performs a leveling that, because language is one of its most powerful means of subjugation, targets colonial dominance in general. This insistence on a kind of horizontality can be seen throughout the *Notebooks*, and can be registered at times simply in the alteration of a single word. There are several instances of this, but one particularly striking example pertinent to our present discussion occurs when, in response to a remark that Morgan makes in his discussion of the governance structure of the Iroquois, Marx substitutes a German word for one of Morgan's, turning his argument against him.

Morgan praises the emergence of the office of war-chief as "a permanent feature" in the confederacy of the Iroquois—an office he likens to that of a general, "Hos-gä-ä-geh'-da-go-wä" can also mean a "great war soldier"—suggesting that the similar position within Aztec culture is, like that of the Iroquois, "a great event in the history of human progress."[82] When Marx transcribes the line into his *Notebooks*, however, he replaces "great" with the German "verhängnisvoll," which makes the sentence read: the "*introduction of this office as a permanent feature verhängnisvoll event* in the history of human progress" (*EN*, 173). In this small intervention, Marx affirms his sense of the "*verhängnisvoll* [disastrous]" and deleterious effects of hierarchical forms, a stance that can be registered throughout the *Notebooks*. These catastrophic effects belong to different modes of stratification and arise within these early communal, proto-communist forms, with, in Dunayevskaya's words, "the establishment of ranks—relationship of chief to mass—and the economic interests that accompanied it." As she explains, "Marx demonstrated that, long before the dissolution of the primitive commune, there emerged the question of ranks *within* the egalitarian commune. It was the beginning of a transformation into opposite—gens into caste. That is to say, within the egalitarian communal form arose the elements of its opposite—caste, aristocracy, and different material interests. Moreover, these were not successive stages, but *co-extensive* with the communal form."[83] Like capital itself, these early noncapitalist communes move toward their ruin at the very moment they organize themselves not only around family and private property but, more significantly, around the antagonism between a chief and the masses. For Marx, the dissolution of the early communal form is as much a result of its own internal movement, its own transitional state, as it is of external forces. Dunayevskaya makes this point again when, referencing what Luxemburg calls "the world historic act of the birth of capitalism," the Spanish conquest and its enslavement and extermination of indigenous populations, she writes that Marx

> called attention to the fact of conquests, even when the commune was at its height. Just as there was conquest, even when the commune was at its height, and the beginning of slavery when one tribe defeated another, so there was the beginning of commodity exchange between the communes as well as emergence of conflict within the commune and within the family, and not only between the family and the gens. All these conflicts coalesced during the dissolution, which is why Marx's *Notebooks* keep stressing the duality in primitive communism.[84]

The resources into which Marx taps in order to imagine different communist possibilities bear the kernel of their own dissolution within them. This fact, however, neither effaces the violence that often leads to their destruction nor erases their potential within a socialist future. If Marx views history as a catastrophic form that unravels in the volatility of its formlessness, its force breaks through the cracks and fissures it opens in order to allow for unexpected, revolutionary events to unfold in insurgent and ungovernable ways. It is because the unfolding of history is never fully finalized or absolutely determined that, again in Dunayevskaya's words, there can be no "world historic defeat." Even in an imagined capitalist totality, there are always elements of resistance, often hidden under the signs of defeat and erasure, that guarantee that the antagonism between capitalist and noncapitalist forms can never be at a standstill, and this because history is another name for constant movement and flux. There is "always one more revolution to make," she writes, "and the proof [is] in what one learn[s] from defeat to transform the next battle into a victory."[85]

This oscillation between defeat and revolution—an oscillation whose rhythm is as unpredictable as it is irrepressible—can be registered throughout Marx's *Notebooks*, and indeed throughout his work. Having assiduously studied the brutal suppression of the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830, 1848, and 1871, the violence of the American Civil War, and the defeat of rebellions around the globe, he is particularly attuned to the way in which the rhetoric of liberty and equality—always evoked in contexts of great inequality—can be mobilized not simply by revolutionary movements but also by counterrevolutionary regimes in order to protect the interests of the privileged, propertied classes. The mere evocation of these revolutionary "ideals," in other words, is not a guarantee that they are not at the same time betrayed and instrumentalized by colonial or state forces whose aim is only to protect the liberty of the few. While Morgan himself privileges equal rights and "the cardinal principles of democracy" and understands the threats to these rights and principles that are introduced by an insistence on property—he argues that, "when property [is] created in masses," slavery emerges, along with "despotism, imperialism, monarchy, [and] privileged classes"[86]—his insistence on the evolutionary development of history enables him to describe the collective accumulation of property as part of the progress from less developed communities to more advanced ones. In the end, consonant with his paternalistic concern for American Indians, he claims

that the "Aryan" family "has proved its intrinsic superiority by gradually assuming control of the earth" and that the United States—which has inherited everything before it—is the cumulative realization of a "representative democracy."[87] The movement through the different stages of development is presented as the result of natural evolution rather than of violent colonization. Marx would be particularly attentive to these contradictions in Morgan's text. He references another instance in which Morgan evokes the revolutionary phrase "liberty, equality, and fraternity," but this time in a passage that also points to the European colonization of the Americas, even if indirectly. Marx's excerpt reads:

> All the members of an Iroquois gens *personally free*, bound *to defend each other's freedom; equal in privileges u. personal rights.* Sachem u. chiefs claiming no superiority; a *brotherhood bound together by the ties of kin. Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,* though never formulated, were *cardinal principles der gens* u. diese d. *unit of a social u. governmental system*, the foundation wor<au>f *Indian society organized.* Erklärt *sense of independence* u. *personal dignity universally an attribute of Indian character.*
>
> Zur Zeit der europäischen Entdeckg waren d. *American Indian tribes* generally organized *into gentes*, *with descent in the female line;* In einigen *Tribes*, wie den *Dacotas*, *the gentes had fallen out;* in andern, wie unter *Ojibwas*, d. *Omahas* u. d. *Mayas of Yucatan*, descent has changed from female to male line. *Throughout aboriginal America* die *gens* nahm ihren *Namen von some animal*, or *inanimate object*, *never from a person;* in this early condition of society, the *individuality of persons was lost in the gens.* (*EN*, 150)

First citing Morgan, the excerpt begins by characterizing the Iroquois as a gens that privileges equality, rights, and independence and is nonhierarchical. Marx continues with Morgan's reference to the tripartite slogan of the French Revolution and the ethnographer's claim that, even "though never formulated" as such, the Iroquois gens manifests these ideals. He follows Morgan a bit more and then, excising a paragraph, he moves directly to his German rendition of Morgan's "At the epoch of European discovery," "Zur Zeit der europäischen Entdeck[un]g." Translating the phrase not only calls more attention to it, but also permits Marx to distance himself from Morgan's silence regarding the Spanish conquest and early British and French colonizations, all of which involved colonial massacres of indigenous populations. Marx accomplishes at least two things by insisting on this phrase in German: First, he recalls the European origins of the "Doctrine of Discovery," formulated in 1493 in the papal bull issued by Pope

Alexander VI and giving Spain the right to claim ownership of any "discovered" non-Christian land in the New World. The doctrine became the basis of European claims in the Americas and the foundation for the expansionism of the United States' manifest destiny, since it was reaffirmed by the US Supreme Court in 1823, when Chief Justice John Marshall's opinion in a unanimous decision argued "that the principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to New World lands."[88] And, second, he returns us to his own language in order to recall to us what he himself has written on European colonialism in general and on the Spanish conquest in particular. For Marx, Morgan's "European discovery" is a euphemism for the violence of conquest and colonization—for the dispossession, murder, and forced assimilation of indigenous populations that has characterized the colonial project for more than three centuries.

Marx's German insertion is just one register of his political reading of Morgan. He transmits the catastrophe obscured in Morgan's omissions in the caesura he creates between his paragraphs—which brings the revolutionary slogan closer to his translation of Morgan's line—and this is his real act of translation. Following Althusser, we might say that he offers a "guilty" reading of Morgan—one that inflects his own interests, but also brings Morgan's complicity to the page's surface. Marx reads Morgan symptomatically by evoking what the ethnographer does not say. He excavates Morgan's text as Benjamin excavates Weimar's marketplace. If the European "discovery" of the Americas marks a decisive break, it is because it disorganizes, fractures, discards, erases, and vanquishes. This is why Marx's *Notebooks* become a means for him to read the fragments and remains that have been left behind, to read the histories that are hidden in the histories bequeathed to us and, through this work of gathering and excavation, to retrieve and reactivate the traces of different protosocialist communal forms. In the context of Morgan's reading of the progress of history in terms of an evolutionary tendency toward governance, property, and family structures, Marx excerpts this passage because it includes the traces of a world in which, as he puts it, again joining his German to Morgan's English, "*[t]hroughout aboriginal America* die *gens* nahm ihren *Namen von some animal*, or *inanimate object*, *never from a person;* in this early condition of society, the *individuality of persons was lost in the gens.*" In this fraternity, there are no proper names but rather only the common names of animals and inanimate things. The absence of proper names works against the nominalism of property,

possessive individualism, and propertied forms of inheritance—forms of hereditary succession which, as Marx notes elsewhere in the *Notebooks*, "when first established, *came from force* (usurpation), nicht *by the free consent of the people*" (*EN*, 173). From the fragments of the now destroyed Iroquois gens—Marx refers to the "*[c]onstant tendency to disintegration*" that exists in "the elements of gentile organization" (*EN*, 156)—he can imagine the fusion of the individual into the communal, a metabolism among humans, animals, nature, and objects that has nothing to do with the hierarchical and familial structures at the heart of capitalism, or even with the concept of a generalized "humanity" that, in line with Morgan's recourse to European Enlightenment tropes, supports it. Instead, binding together a communal social metabolism and a nonexploitative metabolism with nature, it points to the possibility of an Iroquois gens that is still to come, that has not yet been fully realized. The movement in his excerpts becomes a way of enacting not simply the mobility and transience of social formations but also the mobility and transience of language itself; in Marx's words, both are "*incapable of permanence*" (ibid.), and it is this impermanence that makes transformation possible.

This transformation is not only legible in the alterations Marx makes in Morgan's language or in his translations of sentences into German, but also in the insertion of passages from a vast constellation of texts that he sets in motion as part of his intervention in the texts he reads, including, among so many others, Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, *Seven Against Thebes*, and *Prometheus Bound*, Demosthenes's *Appeal Against Eubulides*, Homer's *Iliad*, Herodotus's *Histories*, Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Strabo's *Geography*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Plutarch's *Theseus* and *Solon*, Tacitus's *Germania*, Cicero's *Republic*, Edmund Spenser's *A View of the State of Ireland*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Machiavelli's *Discourses*, Hobbes's *Leviathan*, and Alexis de Tocqueville's *The Ancién Regime and the Revolution*. That he places these passages in multiple languages alongside—and often inside—the excerpts he draws from Morgan, Lubbock, Maine, Phear, and others enables him to engage in an act of reading that is at the same time an act of gathering and assembling, that is entirely collaborative and that again confirms that we never read alone. As with the frontispiece from Marx and Engels's "Theses on Feuerbach" with which we began, the *Ethnological Notebooks* are another window into the process of Marx's production. Even if Engels is not taking notes alongside him, the fact that he writes his *Origin of the Family* based on Marx's notes on Morgan confirms their ongoing

conversations, conversations Marx extends to all the comrades on his library shelves, a much larger common-wealth of texts than in his earlier life, since his archive has grown vastly in the intervening years. The texts he reads are transformed into a means of production that creates a mass of collaborators and, as in Engels's doodle, we witness *the slow emergence of a mass through the movement of his pen*. This time the mass is contextualized, even if only fugitively because of the intensification of its movement across Marx's pages, in a broader exploration of different communal forms. There is a deliberateness to his choice of texts—he calls forth texts that resonate or produce a tension with the language he puts them in relation to, even if these associations, drawn from the library in his head, cannot always be pinned down exactly and do not always emerge with a full consciousness on his part of their expansive mobility, which is to say that he is not always in full control of their effects within the *Notebooks*. This is why the common-wealth of texts he gathers here becomes a means of enacting a community at loose ends, a community whose expansiveness cannot be delimited since, as we have seen, reading itself is a work of amplification and multiplication. If texts have to be supplemented, however—if they have to be put in relation to other texts—it is because they are never sufficient by themselves. This insufficiency has its counterpart in all the communal forms Marx studies in his *Notebooks*, each of which succumbs to a process of ruin and disintegration unless it aligns itself with other communes. What Marx learns—or rather what he reinforces throughout his *Notebooks* and his late works in general—is that it is precisely because no commons can survive on its own that it has to be inscribed within a common-wealth. It must become part of an always fugitive, always transient, always moving international set of coalitions.[89] Marx's *Notebooks* show him thinking and writing like a mass. His last will and testament, they bequeath to us a fleeting vision of how a communist community might be assembled, one that refuses to be circumscribed by borders or identities of any kind and that, instead, moves in the direction of incalculable and unpredictable coalitions that have, as their aim and means, the destruction of all ends. As Marx and Engels put it in *The German Ideology*, "[c]ommunism for us is not a *state of affairs* which is to be established, an *ideal* to which reality [will] have to adjust itself," but rather "the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things."[90]

★

Among the many things we inherit from Marx is his relentless effort to bring about an international movement that, without bounds, is nevertheless finite—always open to revision, alteration, and metamorphosis. This internationalism is at stake in Marx's 1881 correspondence with Zasulich, which can be coordinated with his *Ethnological Notebooks*, and which is also evident in the last journey of his life, including a trip he makes to Algeria in April 1882. Zasulich writes to Marx in February 1881. She tells him how critical the Russian edition of *Capital* has become for the cause of Russian socialism, and she asks him—she declares it a "life-and-death question" for the socialist party—if he believes the Russian peasant communes can become a revolutionary force or if they are destined to perish under an approaching capitalism. It is worth noting that, by the time he receives Zasulich's letter, Marx's work is already in danger of being instrumentalized and ideologically reified, and not only in Russia. Zasulich herself mentions explicitly how Russian "Marxists" resist any deviation from what they perceive as Marx's dogma. But Marx is anything but a dogmatic thinker, and his late work becomes increasingly more plural and less certain, organized as it is around the not yet determined possibilities and transformations of multitemporal non-Western alternatives to capitalism.

In the first draft of his reply to Zasulich, speaking of the crisis of capitalism in Western Europe, he writes, in a passage whose last sentence is a slightly revised quotation from Morgan, that today capitalism finds itself, "both in Western Europe and the United States, in conflict with the working masses ... and with the very productive forces which it generates—in short, in a crisis that will end through its own elimination, through the return of modern societies to a higher form of an 'archaic' type of collective ownership and production." In the final version of his reply to Zasulich, Marx adds that, given his study of the situation—he begins teaching himself Russian in 1869 in order to have access to the debates more directly—"the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia."[91] If the commune is to have a revolutionary future, however, Marx argues that it must form a coalition with Western working-class movements. Marx and Engels reiterate this point in the 1882 preface to the second Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, the very last text Marx publishes before his death. They write:

> Can the Russian *obshchina* [peasant commune], a form, albeit heavily eroded, of the primeval communal ownership of the land, pass directly into the higher, communist form of communal ownership? Or must it first go through the same process of dissolution that marks the West's historical development? Today there is only one possible answer: If the Russian revolution becomes the signal for a proletarian revolution in the West, so that the two complement each other, then Russia's peasant communal landownership may serve as the point of departure for a communist development.[92]

Here Marx and Engels reinforce the lesson of the *Ethnological Notebooks*: no commune can endure on its own; if it remains isolated, it inevitably experiences a process of dissolution and disintegration. Again, in the first draft of his letter to Zasulich, Marx insists that "[o]nly a general uprising can break the isolation of the 'rural commune,' the lack of connection between the lives of different communes."[93] For any commune to persist, it must form alliances with revolutionary movements elsewhere; in Russia's instance, in order to reap the benefits of Western modernity rather than be destroyed by it. There can be no revolution, in other words, without a red common-wealth, without coalitions that do not respect national borders and that, in their massification across different geographies of time and space, create all the possibilities that Marx envisions in the amalgamation of resources he puts together in his *Notebooks*. If Marx is another name for an ever-widening and ever-new series of encounters, we might recall Althusser's claim that "the materialism of the encounter is ... contained in its entirety in the negation of the End, of all teleology ... that the materialism of the encounter is the materialism, not of a subject ... but of a process, a process that has no subject, [and] no assignable end."[94] In the common-wealth, there is no subject—there is only a multilayered process of encounters, coalitions, alliances, with unforeseeable shapes and outcomes, and even these are always moving in relation to the openness that comes with a relation to the future, that comes, that is, with a relation to others.

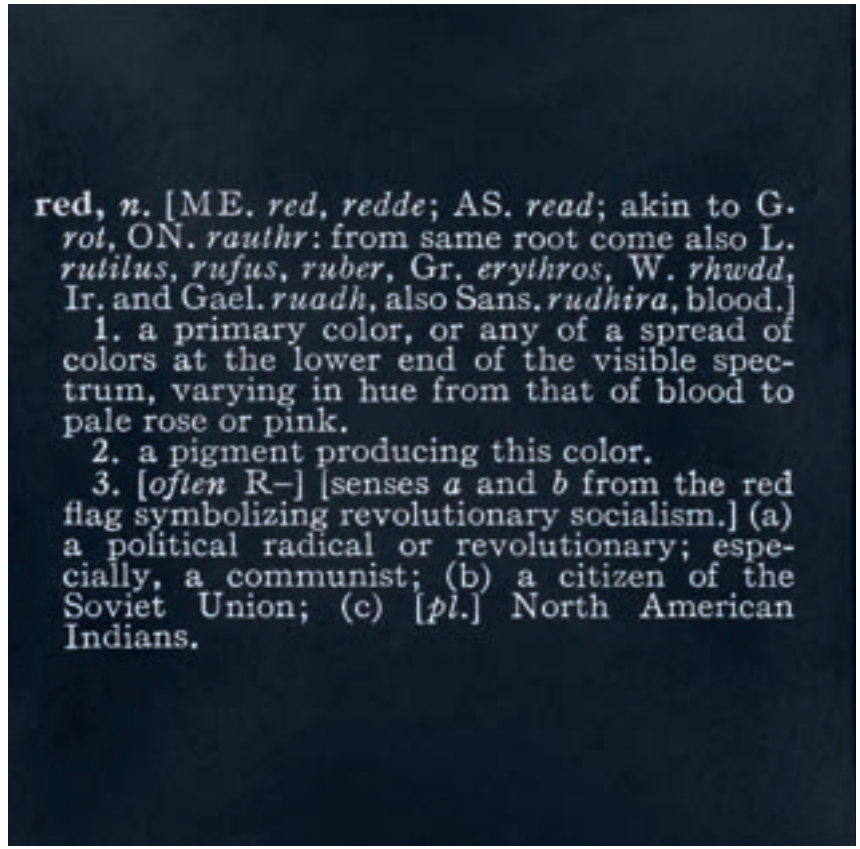
Marx again insists on the necessity of this openness when, on his way to North Africa, he crosses the borders of Europe for the first time in April 1882. His two-month sojourn in Algiers is mediated by several texts but particularly by his reading of Kovalevsky's writings on Algeria; in his *Notebooks*, Marx associates the violent repression of the 1871 Paris Commune with the 1873 seizure of communal land in Algeria by the same French colonial state. As in his letter to Zasulich, Marx's letters from Algeria to Engels, Lafargue, and his daughter Laura emphasize that, although Muslim Algerians are "neither subjects nor administrative objects," although

they experience "*[a]bsolute equality in their social intercourse*"—things he admires about their rural communes and which he experiences as a measure of hope—"they will go to hell without a revolutionary movement." He imagines the "magical panorama" of the "wonderful combination of Europe and Africa."[95] This wonder is consonant with the wonder he experiences when, as in his *Ethnological Notebooks*, he envisions the many possibilities for organizing society differently. Marx encourages us again to understand that communism depends on our capacity to keep a relation to the wonder and surprise of a world that—even in the face of atrocities, violence, and injustice—can still inspire hope in the face of hopelessness. All the writers and thinkers we read in this book exist in relation to this sense of wonder, which is a reservoir of strength for them, but also an experience that preserves their relation to a future, to Marx's "poetry of the future."[96]

Marx's communist common-wealth—his belief in the possibility of international coalitions and assemblages of anticapitalist forces whose "*real* movement" would abolish "the present state of things"—finds its echo and expansion in each of the readers and writers we have gathered together in our book. Their works add to the common-wealth of resources that Marx spent his life amassing and that he bequeathed to us as just one starting point. He knows no one can do this work alone; it requires a mass. Like Marx, Luxemburg, Benjamin, Du Bois, and all the other writers who are in turn evoked in each of their texts and under each of their names, this common-wealth belongs to the motility of an endless process without a subject that will not be silent in front of capitalist violence or shy away from its own violence, that is impossible to transform into dogma or to synthesize into a system, that will demand a reading that exceeds the text in order to make each text a site of encounters and possibility, that risks being political because it knows politics is the only means we have for not only encountering what is incalculable but also for maximizing it. It is a politics that can never have a determinate or fixed form and that, because of the danger of an almost inevitable complicity with what it believes goes in the direction of the worst, must remain in movement. The task is how *to set the masses in motion*, and, as we have seen, this task is folded into an activity of reading and writing that, accumulating its force through the common-wealth it mobilizes, reminds us that, whenever we think and struggle for change, we are never alone.[97]

In an essay that takes Lenin's title "What Is to Be Done?" as its own, Jean-Luc Nancy writes that, more than ever, "it is necessary

at one and the same time to affirm and denounce the world as it is," to make the world into the place of its own contradictions, but always in motion. These contradictions are "what [prevent] us from ever knowing in advance what is to be done," and require an inventiveness, creativity, and experimentation that are "always without model and without guarantee." But "where certainties come apart," he adds, "there too gathers the strength that no certainty can match."[98] This inventive gathering of anticapitalist resources is enriched by each act of reading and writing that calls us *to a movement*, and *to movement "itself."* As the readers and writers we have assembled note time and again, this movement must be invented; it must be composed in a collaborative, collective, and endless process out of the fragments, ruins, and shards that capitalism leaves behind and discards. The answer to the question "what is to be done?" is to invent a world in which nothing is ever done or finished. Our greatest resource in this work of invention, in this struggle, is the red common-wealth, a common-wealth that—ours and not ours at the same time—may have as one of its names, as one of its passwords, the shibboleth *Anaquivitzli*.



Joseph Kosuth, *"Titled (Art as Idea as Idea),"* 1967

Smith [Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999], 727).

5. For a wonderful introduction to the history, culture, and politics of the planetarium and, in particular, the London Planetarium and its function as a cinematic and technical medium, see *AA Files* 66, ed. Thomas Weaver (2013).
6. Benjamin admired Friedlaender's 1919 *Creative Indifference*, but was particularly interested in the latter's review of Ernst Bloch's *The Spirit of Utopia*—which he planned to discuss in relation to *Lesabéndio* in his politics book. He especially appreciated Friedlaender's insistence on the relation between metaphysics and politics. For Friedlaender—who published under the pseudonym *Mynona*, a backward spelling of the German word for "anonymous"—thought must be understood as a creative principle that is indifferent to the separation between subject and object, between the mind and the body, and is capable of creatively overcoming the limitations of the self. This overcoming not only allows for the formation of a higher communal being, a being both objective and technological, but it is also the beginning of all genuine politics. It permits the possibility of a state that would be composed of singular pluralities. For a discussion of Friedlaender's influence on Benjamin, see Uwe Steiner's "The True Politician: Walter Benjamin's Concept of the Political," trans. Colin Sample, *New German Critique*, no. 83 (Spring–Summer 2001), esp. 62–68.
7. Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema," *October* 109 (Summer 2004), 43.
8. Donna Haraway, *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeye* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 120.
9. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4: *1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 387 (translation modified). For the original French, see *GS*, 2.2:631–632.
10. Here we reference Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's concept of "cosmological perspectivism." See Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere* (Manchester, UK: HAU Masterclass Series, 2012). This book brings together four lectures that Viveiros de Castro first delivered in the Department of Social Anthropology at Cambridge University in the spring of 1998.
11. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 2:733.
12. Paul Scheerbart, *Lesabéndio: An Asteroid Novel*, trans. Christina Svendsen (Cambridge, MA: Wakefield Press, 2012), 54–55. All references to this novel are to this edition and will be noted parenthetically by *L* and page number.
13. That Pallasian is a learned language means that it is no one's native tongue. As Benjamin puts it, "What is crucial about this language is its arbitrary, constructed nature, in contrast to organic language." This linguistic detail appeals to Benjamin because it allows him to conceptualize further what a depersonalized or impersonal language might look like, and, in turn, to begin to move beyond forms of national identification, birthright, and property that often are associated with so called "native" languages. This depersonalization and impersonality also point to a difference between Benjamin and Scheerbart in relation to their respective conceptions of the human body. If Scheerbart exhibits a certain aversion to bodily functions—sex, birth, digestion (the Pallasians are sexless, they are "hatched" from pods, and they absorb nutrients through their pores)—Benjamin chooses to read what is desexualized and dematerialized in *Lesabéndio* not as something to be averted but as something to be embraced, and specifically in order to formalize a more precise political understanding of impersonality. This difference becomes clearer if we note that Scheerbart's aversion to the human body is tied to his aversion to violence of all kinds, and that, as we will see, his novel—associating violence most directly with the planet Earth—eliminates everything that could potentially cause friction within the community, anything that would move in the direction of private property, possessiveness, greed, and even sexual difference. The sources of friction are either eradicated altogether or reduced through rhetorical persuasion that moves the Pallasians to an eventual consensus. Benjamin, on the other hand, believes that violence cannot be fully eradicated, so his critique is directed toward the antagonisms that fuel, justify, and instrumentalize violence.
14. Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 2:733–734.
15. Interestingly, the Glass Movement itself began with the publication of private epistolary exchanges between thinkers and architects; it was, to a large degree, the direct result of the elimination of elitist practices of privacy in favor of more transparent, public conversations.
16. *Lesabéndio*'s emphasis on the subjugation or surrender to the "One" would appear to be at odds with Benjamin's proto-communist reading of the text; indeed, as is the case with quite a few avant-garde texts of the time, *Lesabéndio*'s language could easily bend in the direction of proto-fascism. Benjamin's emphasis on the collectivist characteristics of Lesabéndio's plan does not entirely eliminate the risks of Scheerbart's language, with its logic of sacrifice, cathexis, redemption, and messianism. These risks are particularly present in the passages that describe the Pallasians' often comic instrumentalization of the Quikko and the massive "harvesting" of new Pallasians that are then indoctrinated into the collective purpose of building Lesabéndio's Tower. That Benjamin often focuses on materials whose political valence is ambivalent or illegible again suggests the indeterminacy he sees at the heart of political gestures, and which belongs to the risk of transformation. In the instance of *Lesabéndio*, however, he is particularly interested in the way the novel's language of the "One" is fissured by the multiplicity, plurality, and metamorphosis that characterizes it. In other words, while the language of *Lesabéndio* may at times have relays with the program of fascism, Benjamin's reading of the text finds in these same moments resources for moving the text in an antifascist direction.
17. Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 3: *1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 124–125.
18. That the revolutionary transformation of Pallas requires the joining of its head and torso, its "mind" and "body," can be read as an enactment of a philosophical fragment that Blanqui writes in 1849 in which he suggests that there can be no revolution that does not bring thought and matter together. In Blanqui's words, "[i]t is a disastrous error to think one can transform a country by purely material means." Scheerbart understands that the same holds for the planetary as well. See Louis Auguste Blanqui, "1830–1880: Philosophical and Political Fragments," in *The Blanqui Reader*, ed. Peter Hallward and Philippe Le Goff, trans. Mitchell Abidor, Peter Hallward, and Philippe Le Goff (New York: Verso, 2018), 129.
19. Louis Auguste Blanqui, "Communism: The Future Society," in *The Blanqui Reader*, 250. Blanqui's sense that communism was still to come distanced him from most "Marxists." As Philippe Le Goff has noted, Luxemburg's subtle understanding of Blanqui and his place within the history and politics of communism, both during and after his life, enabled her to register a difference between Blanqui and "Blanquism" (just as she saw a difference between Marx and Marxism, a difference that would be reinforced later by Raya Dunayevskaya). Citing her 1906 essay on "Blanquism and Social Democracy," Le Goff writes:

    > The actual validity of this account was seldom considered. Rosa Luxemburg for one did recognize that the question of whether or not Engels's characterization of Blanqui "is perfectly just can still be discussed. For in 1848," she explained, "Blanqui did not foresee his club forming a 'small minority' at all; on the contrary, in a period of powerful revolutionary upsurge, he was certain that, upon his call, the entire working people—if not in France, then at least in Paris—would rise up to fight the ignominious and criminal policies of the bourgeois government." "Nevertheless," she continued, arriving at the crucial point, "this is not the main question. What concerns us is whether, as comrade Plekhanov strives to demonstrate, Engels's description of Blanqui can be applied to the Bolsheviks." At stake, then, was not the extent to which "Blanquism" represented an accurate description of Blanqui's own politics and project, but the term's function as a category in contemporaneous political disputes to denote—and thereby condemn—voluntarist adventurism, substitutionist vanguardism and anti-democratic elitism.

    In other words, what was at stake—something Blanqui knew very well—was a matter of reading, and the consequences of reading and misreading, politically. See Philippe Le Goff, *Auguste Blanqui and the Politics of Popular Empowerment* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 12. For Luxemburg's essay, see https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/06/blanquism.html. It would be interesting to trace her own complex relation to Blanqui, but, if—anticipating Lenin, Trotsky, and the Bolsheviks in their conviction that armed uprisings require planning and organization—Blanqui believes that the seizure of power cannot be left to spontaneity, Luxemburg (putting her own distance between her and readings of her) believes such uprisings always need to be mediated by the masses and cannot be organized or planned by either a party or an elite committee.
20. Louis Auguste Blanqui, "Letter to Tessy," September 6, 1852, in *The Blanqui Reader*, 123.
21. See Frank Chouraqui, "At the Crossroads of History: Blanqui at the Castle of the Bull," in Louis Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars: An Astronomical Hypothesis*, trans. Frank Couraqui (London: Contra-Mundum Press, 2021), 7.
22. Louis Auguste Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*, in *The Blanqui Reader*, 295, 292, and 295.
23. Blanqui, "1830–1880: Philosophical and Political Fragments," 131–132.
24. Ibid., 129.
25. Ibid., 133.
26. Ibid., 130.
27. Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*, 305.
28. Blanqui, "1830–1880: Philosophical and Political Fragments," 132.
29. Blanqui, *Eternity by the Stars*, 293.
30. Ibid., 284.

XXI. A RED COMMON-WEALTH

1. Werner Hamacher, *Minima Philologica* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 76; and Fred Moten, *Stolen Life (consent not to be a single being)* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 138.
2. Here we nod in the direction of Marx, who praises the Paris Commune for "storming heaven." See Karl Marx, "Letter to Dr. Kugelmann, Concerning the Paris Commune," April 12, 1871, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1871/letters/71_04_12.htm.
3. That Benjamin does not restrict the practice of citation to the citation of texts—that he does not dissociate texts from history and materiality—can be seen in this passage from his *Arcades Project*:

    > The events surrounding the historian, and in which he himself takes part, will underlie

his presentation in the form of a text written in invisible ink. The history which he lays before the reader comprises, as it were, the citations occurring in this text, and it is only these citations that occur in a manner legible to all. To write history thus means to *cite* history. It belongs to the concept of citation, however, that the historical object in each case is torn from its context. (*AP*, 476)

4. On this point, see Gerhard Richter, *Inheriting Walter Benjamin* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 10.
5. Leonard Cohen makes a similar point in his song "Anthem," in which he says: "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." Cited in *Leonard Cohen: Poems and Songs*, ed. Robert Faggen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 188.
6. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 3, trans. David Fernbach (New York, Penguin Books, 1991), 959. As Agnes Heller notes in her analysis of Marx's communism of "associated producers," a society no longer based on property and a capitalist value and labor system would also understand wealth, value, and need differently. She argues that these three core concepts should be understood in relation to species-being and not to individuals, altering our relation to nature. Wealth is reconstituted as time and relation rather than possession, and capitalist waste ceases because necessity and surplus are no longer opposed to one another. See Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (London: Verso, 2018).
7. Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 875. We have used here the conventional translation of Marx's *ursprüngliche Akkumulation* because most of the secondary sources and present translations of Marx's *Capital* also use "primitive accumulation." We will discuss this phrase later, but, as Rosalind Morris points out, the phrase can more properly be translated "originary accumulation" and there is also textual evidence that Marx believed the word "accumulation" should even be "expropriation," in which case another version would be "originary expropriation." This alteration makes it an issue of what happens to the expropriated rather than what is accumulated by the capitalist. See Morris, "*Ursprüngliche Akkumulation*: The Secret of an Originary Mistranslation," *boundary 2* 23, no. 3 (2016), 31–34. We look forward to Paul Reitter's new edition of the first volume of *Capital*, which will be the first English translation of the book in nearly fifty years. We thank him and Paul North, who is coediting the edition, for their kindness in letting us preview the translation.
8. Marx, *Capital*, 1:915. We have excerpted the part of this passage that focuses on the Spanish conquest because we are interested here in the thread of Las Casas that one can follow from Marx to Benjamin, but the full passage also references, as we have noted before, "the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins," and, "hard on their heels," Marx adds, "follows the commercial war of the European nations, which has the globe as its battlefield."
9. Ibid.
10. Daniel Nemser, "Primitive Spiritual Accumulation and the Colonial Extraction Economy," *Creative Commons* 5 (2014), 3.
11. Marx makes several references to Las Casas, but he would have been particularly attuned to the closeness between Christianity and colonization because of his reading of William Howitt's 1838 *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in All Their Colonies*. In "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist" section of *Capital*, he quotes what

> W. Howitt, a man who specializes in being a Christian, says of the Christian colonial system: "The barbarities and desperate outrages of the so-called Christian race, throughout every region of the world, and upon every people they have been able to subdue, are not to be paralleled by those of any other race, however fierce, however untaught, and however reckless of mercy and of shame, in any age of the earth."

See Marx, *Capital*, 1:916.
12. The complexity of Las Casas's stance can be viewed, in its most negative light, through the lens of a passage in Du Bois's "The Souls of White Folk." There, referencing "the robbery of other times and races," he points to "conquest sugared with religion; mutilation and rape masquerading as culture." See W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Souls of White Folk," *DW*, 19.
13. While Las Casas offers a detailed account of the plunder, enslavement, and physical torture the Mexica endured, he chooses not to recount the violence of indigenous cultures themselves and the continued and ferocious strife between them. The bloodiness of the expansion and settling of the Aztec empire—often the result of strategic and commercial interests—increased with the establishment of the so-called Triple Alliance among the Mexica, the Texcocans, and the Tacubans that secured Aztec rule. Assuming power in 1440, Moctezuma began a series of campaigns against the Chalca, the people of Puebla and Tlaxcala, and, moving toward the Gulf of Mexico, the Huaxtecs and Totonacs. There are records of victims decapitated or having their hearts cut out, shot full of arrows, stoned, crushed, skinned, burned or buried alive, or thrown from the tops of temples. Although the Aztecs were able to centralize their power, it was the imperialist extension of their rule that made them vulnerable and that Cortés could not only take advantage of—recruiting enemies of the Aztecs to assist in his siege—but could also *a posteriori* use to justify Spanish savagery and insist on the religious and legal need for the Catholic conversion of Amerindians. As we will see in our discussion of Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, caste and property often signal the beginning of the ruination of noncapitalist societies, as was the case with the Aztecs. We mention all this to discourage a romanticization of Amerindian cultures, but without minimizing the genocidal violence perpetrated by the Spanish empire. If Las Casas points to the infinity of Spanish violence, he willingly circumscribes that infinity in order to preserve the myth of "the noble savage," which, in turn, he uses to argue that Amerindians are ideal candidates for Christian conversion.
14. Bartolomé de Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, ed. and trans. Nigel Griffin (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 55, 65.
15. Ibid., 30.
16. Ibid., 27–28.
17. In a rather remarkable text that points to the way in which trees are often granted rights that are not given to human beings, Marx references this same story, which he cites from Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas's 1601 *Descripcion de las Indias Ocidentalises*, a text which, in turn, takes the story from Las Casas: "The *savages of Cuba* regarded gold as a *fetish of the Spaniards*. They celebrated a feast in its honor, sang in a circle around it and then threw it into the sea. If the Cuban savages had been present at the Rhine Province Assembly, would they not have regarded *wood* as the *Rhinelanders' fetish?*" See Karl Marx, "Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Provincial Assembly—Debates on the Theft of Wood," trans. Jack Cohen et al., in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 262. For a reading of Marx's essay in the context of a wonderfully extended and detailed reading of the concept of fetishism, see Rosalind C. Morris's "After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation, Comparativism, Critique," in *The Returns of Fetishism: Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 133–319. We will return to Marx's suggestion that one man's god is another man's wooden stick in our discussion of Benjamin's first Mexican dream in *One-Way Street*, but here we wish to mark the circulation of particular texts and passages through time, since this is part of what we are calling a "red common-wealth" and part of what we view as the rich resources from which we can draw in order to address the present but also to reactivate the past in the name of a different future.
18. Nemser, "Primitive Spiritual Accumulation and the Colonial Extraction Economy," 6.
19. As David Michael Smith writes, citing David Stannard and considering the devastation of the indigenous population in the Americas after 1492, "the almost inconceivable number of deaths caused by the invasion and conquest of these lands by Europeans and their descendants constitute 'the worst human holocaust the world [has] ever witnessed.' … No words or numbers can adequately convey the scale of the horror and tragedy involved in the greatest sustained loss of human life in history." See Smith, "Counting the Dead: Estimating the Loss of Life in the Indigenous Holocaust, 1492–Present," https://www.se.edu/native-american/wp-content/uploads/sites/49/2019/09/A-NAS-2017-Proceedings-Smith.pdf.
20. Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 50–51, translation modified. For the original Spanish, see Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destruición de las Indias, Colegida por el Obispo Don Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas o Casaus, de la orden de Santo Domingo Año 1552*, in *Digitalia Hispanica* (2006), 147.

    The mournful lament of the Amerindians in response to the gratuitous and violent excess of the colonizers poignantly echoes that of Niobe. In Benjamin's critique of violence, the myth of Niobe conveys the massification of violence and the reciprocal installation of force and its justification, both of which resonate with the Spanish imperial genocide. As with Niobe, there is no indigenous action that justifies the mass murder of millions, including the killing of children and pregnant women in front of their families. Any attempt at justification (infractions, laziness, idolatry, paganism, cannibalism) are *a posteriori* instantiations of a border (here between the human and the inhuman, subject and object) that can justify and excuse, to use Las Casas's word, the "infinite" violence that sustains the Spanish empire and its laws.
21. Las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, 54–55. For the original, see Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destruición de las Indias*, 151.
22. On this point, see Alberto Moreiras, "Ten Notes on Primitive Imperial Accumulation: Ginés de Sepúlveda, Las Casas, Fernández Oviedo," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 3 (2000), 352–353.
23. Benjamin's declared wish to give voice to the vanquished could be said to be related to his early interest in the conquest and colonization of the Americas. In this context, he would have been particularly attentive to the fact that any attempt to have the vanquished speak would itself be mediated and translated by the colonial endeavor.
24. For a discussion of Benjamin's engagement with Lehmann, during and after the seminars, see Peter Fenves, "Walter Benjamin, *Altmexiko*, and the Dream of a Different Archaeology," forthcoming in *Archaeology and Its Avatars*, ed. Jorge Coronado and Alexander Herrera Wassilowski (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2024); and Julia Ng, "Afterword: Toward Another Critique of Violence," in Walter Benjamin, *Toward the Critique of Violence: A Critical Edition*, ed. Peter Fenves and Julia Ng (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 150–153.

25. See Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin: The Story of a Friendship* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), 43.
26. Benjamin's two Mexican dreams appeared a few months before their inclusion in *One-Way Street* in slightly different versions in a collection of dreams put together by Ignaz Ježower. See Ježower, *Das Buch der Träume* (Berlin: Rowolt, 1928), 270–271. Fenves offers translations of these two earlier versions of the dreams (numbered 523 and 524 in Ježower's compendium):

> 523 A dream came to me of being a member of a research expedition [*forschende Expedition*] in Mexico. After having penetrated a high primordial forest, we happened upon an above-ground system of caves in the mountains, where, from the time of the first missionaries [*aus der Zeit der ersten Missionare*] a [religious] order has maintained itself up until now, an order whose brothers continue the work of converting the indigenous people. In an immense and enclosed central grotto, pointed in a gothic manner, a worship service [*Gottesdienst*] took place according to the oldest rite [*dem ältesten Ritus*]. We approached and received its article of faith [*Hauptstück*]: toward a wooden bust of God the father, which somehow appeared as though attached to one of the cave walls high above, a Mexican fetish was raised by a priest. Then, the head of God moved three times, negating [*verneinend*], from right to left.
>
> 524 In a dream I saw a desolate stretch of land. It was the marketplace in Weimar. There, excavations were organized. I, too, scratched in the sand a little. Then came forth the tip [*Spitz*] of a church tower. Overjoyed [*Hocherfreut*], I thought to myself: a Mexican sanctuary [*Heiligtum*] from the time of pre-animism, from the anaquivitzli. I woke up laughing. (ana = prae, vi = vie, Witz = Mexican church!)

See Fenves, "Walter Benjamin, *Altmexiko*, and the Dream of a Different Archaeology."
27. If Benjamin is a displaced figure of Lehmann, Lehmann is in turn a displacement and condensation of several other figures and texts. Within the dream's plastic logic, any figure can become any other figure. In this instance, the name "Lehmann" references an ever-widening set of associations. As Fenves notes, Lehmann appears as a cover for Konrad Preuß, a German ethnologist, a rival of Lehmann's, who had written an account of his exploration of caves and his witnessing of religious rites in Mexico. It is Preuß and not Lehmann who, according to Fenves, is more decisive for Benjamin's first Mexican dream, but, within the logic of the dream, it is impossible to prioritize either ethnologist since neither appears as himself. Each character in the dream already belongs to the archive of texts Benjamin has read, materials he has studied, and figures he has encountered either in person or through their writings. As in all dreams, the mechanisms of displacement and condensation that work within Benjamin's dream do not follow strict identificatory operations. This does not prevent us, however, from registering the richness that the figure of Lehmann both manifests and obscures here.
28. This denial evokes Matthew 26:34 in which Jesus tells Peter that "before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." That Benjamin's dream is also a citation machine suggests that it is itself an archive; it is the dream of an archive, of what an archive might be—in this instance, an archive of the mutual denial between Spanish missionaries and indigenous communities, a denial that sets one fetish against another, and even against "itself."
29. A ceremony that climaxes in a gesture in which a priest raises a Mexican fetish toward "a wooden bust of God the Father" plays with the structure of the mass. As Russ Leo has suggested to us in a note from January 6, 2023, "in early modern and modern masses, the 'climax' of the mass—the liturgy of the Eucharist—occurs when the priest elevates the 'bread' and 'wine' which become the body and blood of Christ." Benjamin's dream "replaces this sacramental act with a confrontation between a 'sacramental' Mexican idol and a 'Father' whose images or idols are prohibited in *Exodus*. … The Mexican fetish takes place in the gesture of sacramental offering." This is just one more instance of the blurring of the distinction between Christianity and its indigenous counterpart in Benjamin's dream.
30. On these points, see Heriberto Martínez Yépez, "*¿Sueñan los marxistas con revoluciones aztecas?* Poéticas del náhuatl y el México de Karl Marx y Walter Benjamin" (PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2018), 107 and 120. We are grateful to Peter Fenves for sharing this dissertation with us.
31. Ibid., 161.
32. The title of the dream is given as "Underground Works" in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1: *1913–1926*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 455, and as "Structural Engineering Works" in Ng, "Afterword: Toward Another Critique of Violence," 156.
33. Martínez Yépez, "*¿Sueñan los marxistas con revoluciones aztecas?*," iii and 168–169.
34. Ibid., 104. Martínez Yépez emphasizes what he considers Benjamin's complicity with colonial extractivism, but we suggest that Benjamin's dream offers resources for criticizing this same extractivism. While Martínez Yépez's decolonial reading of the two dreams is wonderfully nuanced and the most extended political reading of them we have, he falters in too quickly condemning Benjamin for his "Eurocentrism" and, in turn, Marx for his racism, in the name of an identity politics that his own argument would seem to belie.
35. Besides Nahuatl, over a hundred languages were spoken in New Spain. Through migration, these languages not only touched one another but also altered one another. Because Nahuatl was the language of the nobility, however, it became the lingua franca of the other regions, and a catalyst for different forms of acculturation. Its privilege became the reason why the Spanish priests selected it above the others. As Serge Gruzinski has noted, the indigenous nobility "learned the language of Cicero, read the Latin classics, and translated great European texts into Nahuatl." See Gruzinski, *The Aztecs: Rise and Fall of an Empire*, trans. Paul G. Bahn (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 104. Even so, Nahua writers incorporated elements from indigenous traditions, including pictographic designs. Here reading and writing become a means of subjugation and colonial rule as well as a means of survival.
36. Walter Benjamin, "Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 1:262 and 257.
37. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Briefe*, vol. 2: *1919–1924*, ed. Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996), 208.
38. In a letter to Werner Kraft from October 28, 1935, Benjamin again evokes Scheerbart, this time to claim that the world is still waiting for a culture that can move beyond the accumulation of violence, the "blood and horror," that, until now, has been culture's signature. This culture has to be imagined since it has never yet existed. He writes, warning of the dire outcome of not imagining this world:

> I have hardly succumbed to the compulsion to make some kind of sense of the current state of the world. There have already been many cultures on this planet that have perished in blood and horror. It is naturally necessary for us to hope that the planet will some day experience a culture that has gone beyond both of those things—indeed, just like Scheerbart, I am inclined to assume that the planet is waiting for this. But it is terribly doubtful whether we will be able to present the planet this gift on its one-hundred- or four-hundred-millionth birthday. And if not, it will ultimately dish out as punishment for us, the planet's heedless well-wishers, the last judgment. (*C,* 516)

39. Martínez Yépez, "¿Sueñan los marxistas con revoluciones aztecas?," 227.
40. Marx, *Capital*, 1:874 and 873, translation modified.
41. See Karl Marx, "The Future Result in British Rule in India," in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 12 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), 221.
42. Ibid., 356. William Clare Roberts makes a wonderfully persuasive case that Marx structures the first volume of *Capital* around Dante's *Inferno*, rewriting it "as a descent into the modern social Hell of capital." See Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of* Capital (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 24.
43. See Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Explanation of Imperialism*, trans. Agnes Schwarzchild (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino Publishing, 2015), 161. As Rosalind Morris insists, "originary accumulation is a problem of translation … Marx's own text is marked, in its punctuational, lexical, and syntactic forms, by a recognition of the nontransparency of the concept in a manner that implies the irreducibility of structural principles to temporal ones in the analysis of capitalism." See Morris, "*Ursprüngliche Akkumulation*," 62.
44. See Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, trans. Kevin B. Anderson and Karel Ludenhoff (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2023), 48.
45. Ibid., 54, 59, 62, 53.
46. Ibid., 52–55, 67, 75, 68.
47. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 81.
48. Marx, *Capital*, 1:916.
49. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 368.
50. Ibid., 371.
51. Ibid., 452.
52. Ibid., 359. Luxemburg demonstrates the reach of the violence of capitalism around the globe by emphasizing the colonial infrastructure of commercial expansion, technological innovation, public debt, and militarization. Like Marx, she opposes her analysis to the dominant "illusion" that this colonial network extends itself through "peaceful changes":

> The triumphant march of commodity economy thus begins in most cases with magnificent constructions of modern transport, such as railway lines which cross primeval forests and tunnel through the mountains, telegraph wires which bridge the deserts, and ocean liners which call at the most outlying ports. But it is a mere illusion that these are peaceful changes. Under the standard of commerce, the relations between the East India Company and the spice-producing countries were quite as piratical, extortionate and blatantly fraudulent as present-day relations between American capitalists and the Red Indians of Canada whose furs they buy, or between German merchants and the Negroes of Africa. Modern China presents a classical example of the "gentle," "peace-loving" practices of commodity exchange with backward countries. Throughout the nineteenth century, beginning with the early forties, her history has been punctuated by wars with the object of opening her up to trade by brute force. Missionaries provoked persecutions of Christians, Europeans instigated risings, and in periodical massacres a completely helpless and peaceful agrarian population was forced to match arms with the most modern

> capitalist military technique of all the Great Powers of Europe. Heavy war contributions necessitated a public debt, China taking up European loans, resulting in European control over her finances and occupation of her fortifications; the opening of free ports was enforced, railway concessions to European capitalists extorted. By all these measures commodity exchange was fostered in China, from the early thirties of the last century until the beginning of the Chinese revolution. (Ibid., 386–387)

53. Rosa Luxemburg, *Letters from Prison: By Rosa Luxemburg: With a Portrait and a Facsimile*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul, Young International at Schönberg in Berlin, 1921–1923 (public domain: Luxemburg Internet Archive, 2005). While this passage portrays the devastation of the native population as a kind of surrender to the inevitability of their demise, elsewhere Luxemburg registers their resistance, even if they are eventually defeated: "The redskins put up a desperate resistance; but all who survived the slaughter of forty Red Indian campaigns were swept away like so much rubbish and driven like cattle to the West to be folded in reservations like so many sheep." Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, 402–403.

    Luxemburg's interest in indigenous cultures later finds its counterpart in the attention *indigenismo* gives to her work, already in the 1920s, but also in the 1960s and '70s, and now again in Latin America's Feminist General Strike/Paro internacional de mujeres, which includes important participation by indigenous women. The still largely unexplored relationship between Luxemburg's political theorizations and Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui's Marxist *indigenismo* is a red thread we cannot pursue here (further proof that a red common-wealth is an unfinished labor for the many). We only note here that, after Mariátegui's trip to Germany in 1922, he gives two lectures on the German Revolution in which he refers directly to Luxemburg's leadership in it. Later, in 1930, he returns to Luxemburg in his *Defense of Marxism*, and also translates one of her texts into Spanish for his journal *Amauta*. For a good summary of Luxemburg's relation to Latin America, see Hernán Ouviña's "Rosa Luxemburg in Latin America" (March 4, 2020), https://rosalux-ba.org/en/2020/03/04/from-mariategui-to-todays-popular-struggles/
54. Marx, *Capital*, 3:949.
55. Marx, *Capital*, 1:637–638 and 3:949–950.
56. See Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 141–177; John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, *The Robbery of Nature: Capitalism and the Ecological Rift* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2020), 13–23; Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017), 63–137; and Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
57. Cited in K. William Kapp, *The Social Costs of Private Enterprise* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 35. As Marx notes in a footnote to his chapter on "Machinery and Large-Scale Industry," one of Liebig's "immortal merits" is "to have developed from the point of view of natural science the negative, i.e. destructive side of modern agriculture." See Marx, *Capital*, 1:638.
58. Ibid., 637–638.
59. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Fate," in *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 6: *The Conduct of Life*, ed. Douglas Emory Wilson (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 4; and Philip L. Nicoloff, *Emerson on Race and History: An Examination of* English Traits (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 134. On Emerson's relation to the guano trade, see Eduardo Cadava, "The Guano of History," in *Cities without Citizens*, ed. Eduardo Cadava and Aaron Levy (Philadelphia: Slought Books, with the Rosenbach Museum & Library, 2003), 137–165.
60. See Lola Loustaunau, Mauricio Betancourt, Brett Clark, and John Bellamy Foster, "Chinese Contract Labor, the Corporeal Rift, and Ecological Imperialism in Peru's Nineteenth-Century Guano Boom," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 49, no. 3 (2022), 530 and 515.
61. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 14: *1854–1861*, ed. Ralph H. Orth et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 16. As Emerson puts it, noting that America is flourishing over the fertilizer that ethnic minorities have become: "See the shades of the picture. The German and Irish millions, like the Negro, have a great deal of guano in their destiny. They are ferried over the Atlantic, and carted over America, to ditch and to drudge, to make corn cheap, and then to lie down prematurely to make a spot of green grass on the prairie." See Emerson, "Fate," 9.
62. Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "Coolies, Shopkeepers, Pioneers: The Chinese of Mexico and Peru (1849–1930)," *Amerasia* 15, no. 2 (1989), 92.
63. Ibid., 108.
64. One contemporary account published in *The Southern Planter* in 1855 tells of mass suicides, sometimes involving up to fifty coolies at a time. These suicides were so frequent that the Peruvian government was forced to station guards around the cliffs and shores of the islands to prevent them. Stories about the atrocious work conditions in the guano fields, often similar to abolitionist accounts of the abuse and mistreatment of southern slaves, circulated frequently. See "Interesting from the Chincha Islands," *The Southern Planter* (January 1855), 20–21. Eventually, the gross abuses in the recruitment and transportation of the coolies generated such fierce international and national criticism that the Peruvian government suspended the trade between 1856 to 1861, and only reopened it later under the more relaxed supervision of the Portuguese.
65. See Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), 527. On this point, see Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 156.
66. This legal coercion eerily echoes the Spaniards' 1510 "Requerimiento," the Latin ultimatum read to Amerindians ostensibly to have them accept the political and religious authority of the Spanish Crown in the Americas. Once the document had been read aloud, in a language that no Amerindian was likely to understand, any resistance to royal subjection became legally punishable by death, enslavement, or indentured servitude (the last two being only nominally different). Here the legal, regulatory infrastructure supporting colonial capitalism confirms the absolute complicity among capitalism, law, and violence; it is reenacted, almost verbatim, to justify the enslavement and debt peonage of the coolie contracts.
67. Loustaunau, Betancourt, Clark, and Foster, "Chinese Contract Labor, the Corporeal Rift, and Ecological Imperialism," 512. On this point, see also Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 173. Kohei Saito's recent *Marx in the Anthropocene* presents a Marx who—once capitalism is revealed as a system that requires and produces scarcity, inequality, and the destruction of nature—embraces "degrowth communism" as an essential feature of a postcapitalist common-wealth, one that would entirely transform what wealth means and how it is shared. This wealth would no longer appear as an "immense collection of commodities." There can be no communal wealth, Saito suggests, that does not begin with the interruption of capitalism's endless logic of production—with the interruption, that is, of its concomitant destruction of nature and generalized exploitation. He cites Benjamin's well-known passage on the "emergency brake" in order to evoke a relation between revolution and degrowth communism (see *Marx in the Anthropocene*, 216). In Benjamin's words, "Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely the human race—to activate the emergency brake" (*CH*, 402). In our terms, Benjamin's "emergency brake" is another name for the general strike and its force of deposition, and it provides further evidence of his attentive and nuanced reading of Marx—a reading that far exceeds that of the orthodox Marxism of his time, and that only now, in the midst of a climate catastrophe—and with the aid of Saito's work—are we perhaps ready to hear.
68. For an extended account of Fraas's importance to Marx, see Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, 228–255.
69. See Marx, *Capital*, 3:948–949 and 911. After the work of Foster, Clark, and Saito, these passages are all very well known. We owe a felt debt to these scholars' intersecting work on Marx's ecologico-political interests. We also wish to acknowledge the important role that the *Monthly Review* has played in the dissemination of this work and the collaborative character of its endeavors. In a recent article in the journal, Foster notes the pertinence of Marx's ecological analyses to our own precarious ecological moment:

    > Marx's ecological critique, coupled with that of Engels, embraced nearly all of the ecological problems known in his time: the expropriation of the commons, soil degradation, deforestation, floods, crop failure, desertification, species destruction, cruelty to animals, food adulteration, pollution, chemical toxins, epidemics, squandering of natural resources (such as coal), regional climate change, hunger, overpopulation, and the vulnerability to extinction of the human species itself. It has now been extended by Marxian ecologists via his theory of metabolic rift to the entire set of anthropogenic rifts in the Earth System present in the twenty-first century, including the contemporary rift in the earth's carbon metabolism.

    See Foster, "Marx's Critique of Enlightenment Humanism: A Revolutionary Ecological Perspective," *Monthly Review* 74, no. 8 (January 2023).
70. Foster and Clark, *The Robbery of Nature*, 103. Although we do not have the space here to elaborate the role and place of the "human" in Marx, it is important to remember that he explicitly states in *Capital* that the popular belief in the concept of a common humanity can happen "only in a society where the commodity form is the universal form of the products of labor" (*Capital*, 1:152). Humanity arrives only where the commodity form dominates the historico-political domain. This is why Althusser claims that Marxism is not a humanism, but a "theoretical anti-humanism." See Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism," in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), 231. The essay begins with an epigraph from Marx that reads: "My analytical method does not start from man" (ibid., 219). An interesting debate—and one that should be elaborated further—can be had with Foster's recent essay, "Marx's Critique of Enlightenment Humanism," since there he responds to Althusser's claim and usefully clarifies that Marx's conception of the human is itself a critique of bourgeois humanism.
71. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 42 (New York: International Publishers, 1987), 558–559.
72. Kevin B. Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 196. Although Marx and Engels initially dismissed the Paris Commune as premature, they came to see it as the communist experiment it quickly

became, albeit a short-lived one that was brutally suppressed. That even revolutionaries such as Marx and Engels can be surprised by revolutionary upheavals, and this despite all their study and activism, tells us something about the nature of revolutions. They always arise as a surprise; it is never possible to prepare fully for their arrival. We can only join the revolution, not plan it, and this because its temporality takes the form of an interruption.

73. See Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, ed. Lawrence Krader (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1974), and, on Marx's Russian materials and related correspondence, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and "the Peripheries of Capitalism,"* ed. Teodor Shanin (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983). All references to the *Ethnological Notebooks* will be to Krader's edition and will be noted parenthetically by *EN* and page number.

74. Raya Dunayevskaya, "The Last Writings of Marx Point a Trail to the 1980s," in *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 175–197; Franklin Rosemont, "Karl Marx and the Iroquois," in *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion* (Chicago: Black Swan Press, 1989), 201–213; Kevin B. Anderson, "Late Writings on Non-Western and Precapitalist Societies," in Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 196–236; Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*, 263–266; John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Hannah Holleman, "Marx and the Indigenous," *Monthly Review* 71, no. 9 (February 2020), 9–13; and Bruno Bosteels, "El Marx tardío o la vía mexicana: De los *Apuntes etnológicos* a la correspondencia con Vera Zasúlich," in *La comuna mexicana* (Mexico City: Ediciones Akal México, 2021), 271–311. In the pages that follow, we are most indebted to Dunayevskaya and Anderson (her student).

75. Raya Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, 188 and xxi.

76. Raya Dunayevskaya, *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002), 294, and Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, 121 and 139.

77. See Rosemont, "Karl Marx and the Iroquois," 201 and 205.

78. It is not possible for us to offer an extended reading of these remarkable notebooks here. We will only gesture in the direction of a frame for reading them and for attending to what makes them so significant within Marx's corpus. We will return to the *Notebooks* at greater length in a future study of the relation between Marx's dissertation on Democritus and Epicurus's different philosophies of nature and these later notebooks—with particular attention to materialism's basis in what he calls, following Lucretius, the "swerve" of differentiation. For now, we will restrict ourselves to just a few passages in order to convey the richness of these fragments.

79. Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, 24.

80. See Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, ed. Leslie A. White (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 467. It is well known that Morgan was influenced by Darwin's writing on evolution, but what Marx finds in Darwin is a mode of proceeding that—emphasizing transmutation, change, transience, the struggle for existence, and nonhuman agency—moves against teleological ends. As he puts it in a letter from January 16, 1861 to Ferdinand LaSalle soon after he reads Darwin's treatise, "Darwin's work is most important and suits my purpose in that it provides a basis in natural science for the historical class struggle. … Despite all shortcomings, it is here that, for the first time, 'teleology' in natural science is not only dealt a mortal blow but its rational meaning is empirically explained." See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, trans. Dona Torr (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 115. It should be noted that Marx reads Darwin through their shared interest in Epicurus, whose materialist philosophy was critical to both of them.

81. Luxemburg's attention to the displacement and extermination of indigenous Native Americans is prompted by her readings of Marx but also by her reading of Morgan's *Ancient Society*, a text that, under Engels's influence, would be appropriated as a Marxist classic for decades after its publication (Luxemburg, for instance, first reads it as a teenager in Poland). Morgan's study of ancient indigenous cultures in the American continent provides her—and Marx before her—with an archive of noncapitalist formations that exhibit their resilience against all odds. Marx's and Luxemburg's interest in Morgan's ethnographical study of indigenous forms of association reveals not simply their lifelong commitment to study and reading but also their remarkable attention to the specificity and singularity of sociohistorical conditions, situating them at the antipodes of a Hegelian understanding of "universal history."

What also would have been of great interest to Marx is that Morgan writes most of his work in collaboration with Ely Samuel Parker, a Seneca who maintained a close relationship to his tribe and became Morgan's interpreter and adviser during their ethnographic travels to gather data and artifacts. Morgan dedicates his first book of empirical research, his 1851 *The League of the Iroquois*, to Parker. Despite his condemnation of America's treatment of Native Americans, Morgan, like Las Casas before him, views Christianization and full assimilation as the only path forward for the expropriated and colonized American Indian. In his words, "[t]here are but two means of rescuing the Indian from his impending destiny; and these are education and Christianity." See Morgan, *The League of the Ho-Dé-No-Sau-Nee or Iroquois* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1904), 111. Marx does not follow Morgan here, but the ethnographer is by no means his only source. In 1851, while writing *Capital*, Marx is reading William Howitt's 1838 *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in All Their Colonies,* a bristling indictment of the colonial genocide of Native Americans; William Prescott's 1843 *History of the Conquest of Mexico* and his 1847 *History of the Conquest of Peru*; Thomas Fowell Buxton's 1840 *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*; Herman Merivale's 1841 *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies*, and Thomas Stamford Raffles's 1817 *History of Java*. As Foster, Clark, and Hannah Holleman note in their essential essay, "Marx and the Indigenous":

> By the end of the 1850s and before Marx wrote *Capital*, there was a decisive shift in emphasis in his and Engels's writings toward the defense of indigenous, anticolonial struggles, exhibiting a strong concern for and a recognition of the lasting importance of noncapitalist cultural formations/modes of production. Much of the impetus for this shift in perspective was the growth of wars of anticolonial resistance emanating from the indigenous populations themselves, namely the Algerian revolt against French settler colonialism, led by Emir Abdelkader in the 1830s and '40s; the Taiping Rebellion of 1850–64; the "Indian Mutiny" or what Marx called the "Sepoy Revolt" of 1857–59; the nationalist struggle in Ireland led by the Fenians in the 1860s and after; and the Zulu War against the British in 1879. In each of these cases, Marx and Engels were to take the side of the indigenous anticolonial forces.

See Foster, Clark, and Holleman, "Marx and the Indigenous," 8. The essay is a review of Glen Sean Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks*, which, focusing on indigenous communities in Canada, makes the broader point that "for Indigenous peoples to reject or ignore the insights of Marx would be a mistake, especially if this amounts to a refusal on our part to critically engage his important critique of capitalist exploitation and his extensive writings on the entangled relationship between capitalism and colonialism." See Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 8.

82. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 128.

83. Dunayevskaya, *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution*, 180–181.

84. Ibid., 46 and 184.

85. Ibid., 184.

86. Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 291.

87. Ibid., 468 and 291.

88. Chief Justice Marshall asserts that Christian European nations assumed "ultimate dominion" over the lands of America during the Age of Discovery and that, as a result, North American Indians had lost "their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations"; they only retained a right of "occupancy." When the United States became independent in 1776, he adds, it retained the British right of "discovery," inheriting Britain's power of "dominion." See Johnson & Graham's Lessee v. M'Intosh, 21 U.S. 543 (1823), https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/21/543/case.html. As Benjamin already notes in his review of Brion's biography of Las Casas, however, the absolute denial of indigenous land rights was replaced less than fifty years later when the Spanish emperor Charles V declared that indigenous peoples were the rightful owners of their lands and that the "Doctrine of Discovery" should only function in instances when land was not already owned. He adds, sorrowfully, that, in the end, this declaration did not prevent further violence and dispossession.

89. Marx's suggestion here that revolution requires the gathering together of different communes moves between the figures of the one and the many, a structural couple that appears at different moments in the *Notebooks*, especially in his use of the word "severalty." We cite just one example:

> The *Roman tribes, from their first establishment*, had a *public domain, Ager Romanus*; while lands were held by the *curia* for religious uses, by the *gens*, u. by *individuals in severalty*. Nachdem diese social *corporations* ausgestorben, *the lands held by them in common gradually became private property. Diese several forms of ownership* show dass die älteste *land tenure was die in common dch den tribe*; nach Beginn *ihrer Cultivation*, ein *Theil der tribe lands divided unter d. gentes*, jede wovon *held their portion in common*; diesem folgte im Lauf der Zeit *allotments to individuals* u. diese *allotments finally ripened into individual ownership in severalty. Personal property*, generally, was subject to *individual ownership*. (*EN*, 134)

The point Marx makes here about the gradual *ausgestorben*, extinction, of communal ownership of land in favor of personal or private property is a transition he marks throughout his *Notebooks* and that he sees at work in indigenous tribes across the centuries and around the globe. This transition belongs to the movement from "social *corporations*" to models of possessive individualism and capitalist bourgeois identity. What he also notes, however, is the way in which older forms of land tenure are nevertheless not extinguished altogether, which is why their traces still can be reactivated in new communal efforts. He captures this oscillation between communal ownership and individual ownership in his use of the word "severalty," a word that can mean both "the quality or state of being several"—of being separate and, in particular, of

having sole and exclusive possession, dominion, or ownership over land—and "the quality or state of being individual or particular." While land owned in severalty assumes a single owner—an owner with exclusive right to this or that property—it would have been impossible for Marx not to register the word "several" in "severalty." We would suggest that this movement from several to one and back points to Marx's sense that the commune is never just one, never just homogeneous, but also several, already differentiated from within. The suggestion that individual ownership itself is interrupted by an irreducible plurality or multiplicity is reinforced if we recall what would have been for Marx the closest German equivalent for severalty, *Bruchteilseigentum*. As Gerhard Richter notes, in a message he sent us in January 2023, "the 'Bruch' or break encoded in the word already suggests an internal rupture, pointing to a form of multiplicity. It is as though the 'Bruch' or break not only pertains to the way that the property in question is divided up, but also to the idea that the very concept of Eigentum, or property, is traversed by a crack or leap, a traversal that renders it plural," indicating "the fractured, multiple, and plural nature of the kind of property that is governed by *Bruchteilseigentum* or severalty." When Marx states that communes tend to disintegrate when they remain isolated, he not only suggests the necessity of communes joining other communes in order to form a common-wealth of resistance against capital—against the forces, that is, that would extinguish communal forms of ownership in the name of capitalist private property—but he also wants us to understand how any single commune is already "several," which is why the collaboration among communes can become a force of intensified accumulation and multiplication. In this view, "individuals in severalty" is another name for the impersonal agency of radical, revolutionary communal forms.

90. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, trans. W. Lough, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 49.
91. For Zasulich's letter to Marx, see Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 98–99, and for Marx's passages, see ibid., 111 and 124.
92. See ibid., 139. We follow Anderson's discussion here; see *Marx at the Margins*, 234–236.
93. Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 112.
94. Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–87*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian, ed. François Matheron and Oliver Corpet (London: Verso, 2006), 190.
95. Marx and Engels, *Collected Works*, vol. 46 (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 242 and 213–214, translation modified.
96. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. Daniel De Leon (New York: International Publishers, 1963), 18.
97. Since we are writing these last words of the book on January 16, 2023, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, we wish to recall his own formulation of this point, in a sermon he delivers on December 24, 1967 at his Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. In the sermon, he declares:

> Our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective. No individual can live alone; no nation can live alone, and as long as we try, the more we are going to have war in this world ... we must either learn to live together as brothers or we are all going to perish together as fools. ... We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. ... Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.

If King aligns himself here with the late Marx, in another passage in the sermon he makes a point that resonates with Benjamin's effort to imagine a politics of pure means. He writes: "we will never have peace in the world until men everywhere recognize that ends are not cut off from means, because the means represent the ideal in the making, and the end in process." See Martin Luther King, "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper Collins, 1986), 70–71 and 72.

98. Jean-Luc Nancy, "What Is to Be Done?," in Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Retreating the Political*, trans. and ed. Simon Sparks (New York: Routledge, 1997), 151–152.