

Primitive Accumulation: the Aleatory Foundation of Capitalism

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It is a matter of common knowledge that Karl Marx presents the difference between his analysis and all previous (bourgeois) understandings of political economy as a historical versus an ahistorical conception of capitalism. What is considerably less certain is how Marx, or those who came after him, understood this disparity: that is, what are its theoretical grounds and what were or could be its effects in the realm of philosophy, historical understanding, and political practice? There have been many interpretations of this difference; in this day and age this difference is often represented as either an incorrect prophecy (capitalism will collapse) or a contribution to a vague and inconsequential awareness of history (something, some economy existed before capitalism). If it is possible today to propose another thought of the distinction between Marx and political economy, or to attempt to reanimate the question, problem, and lines of investigation from behind this accepted bit of academic common sense, I would suggest that for Marx this difference, the difference history makes, has entirely different grounds, and different effects, than mere prophecy, transforming what is understood by society, the economy, materiality, power and subjectivity (Althusser and Balibar, 158).

Marx's critique of the conception of human nature and subjectivity supporting bourgeoisie political economy, as well as his development, albeit partial and often incomplete, of a radically different thought of the historicity and materiality of subjectivity, are perhaps nowhere more forcefully developed than in the points where Marx presents his account of the formation of the capitalist mode of production and its radical difference from all prior modes of production. I am referring here to the final chapters of volume one of *Capital*, the chapters on "So-called primitive accumulation". Which is to suggest that these chapters have to be read as something other than an either a debate with classical political economy or the history of capitalism in England. As Marxist philosophers as divergent as Louis Althusser and Antonio Negri have argued, in "Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre" and *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* Marx's theory of primitive accumulation can be read as a contribution to an understanding of the "materiality" of social relations and subjectivity, and ultimately, despite appearances, to an understanding of the capitalist mode of production itself.¹

Of course the term "mode of production" has a long history within Marxist philosophy and theory. The various different positions and debates within this history perhaps have as their foundation and precondition in the complex and ambiguous sense that Marx gives the term

“mode of production.” As Althusser argues, Marx uses the term “mode of production” to refer to two different relations: the relation between the forces and relations of production, in the narrow or restrictive sense (found most famously in the Preface to *The Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*), and the relation between the base and superstructure, which encompasses all of the social relations within a determinant society (in the expansive sense of a mode of production developed in Marx’s writing on pre-capitalist economic formations and underlying Marx’s rewriting of universal history) (1995 45). The second sense approaches a conception of the social totality, encompassing the economic, political, and social relations within a given historical period (Negri 1991, 151). In the writing on the mode of production following Althusser, the first limited sense, “the articulated combination of forces and relations of production structured by the dominance of the relations of production,” has been accepted as the legitimate meaning of the mode of production, while the larger sense has been thoroughly criticized for ascribing too much explanatory power to economic relations (Hindess and Hirst 9). Following Althusser, the term “social formation” has been adopted to designate a concrete society; the advantage of this later term is that it allows for the co-existence of multiple modes of production (capital, feudal, etc.) within a given social totality and their complex interaction (Hindess and Hirst 13). Moreover, it is argued that it is only possible to grasp the overdetermined structure of any society through the concept of “social formation,” a structure that exceeds the economic determination of the mode of production (Resnick and Wolff 22). Althusser and Negri’s (somewhat) recent return to the problematic of primitive accumulation as constitutive of the very definition of the mode of production would seem to constitute an interesting addition to this debate in that it places dimensions of social existence generally seen to be seen as necessary supplements to the mode of production, the state, law, power relations and the constitution of subjectivity, as constitutive elements of it.² Thus it is possible to glimpse in Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation a “non-economistic” account of the mode of production, in which the mode of production does not simply designate a particular economic relation which has its linear effects on other social relations, but as the dense point of articulation of power relations. Moreover, to offer something of a provocation, while post-marxism and postmodernism stress contingency as a category fundamental to rethinking the constitution and transformation of social and political identities, arguing that the contingency of social relations and transformations is unthinkable from Marx’s perspective of history viewed as the succession and transformation of modes of production, a re-reading of primitive accumulation makes it

possible to think at one and the same time the contingency of social relations, their constitution by the encounter, and the materiality of social relations, their inscription within the mode of production.³

One: The Moral of Subjectivity

So-called primitive accumulation [*sogenannte ursprünglichen Akkumulation*] is the answer posed by political economy to a seemingly irresolvable problem: the fact that capitalist production would seem to continually presuppose itself, it presupposes wealth in the hands of capitalists as well as a population of those who have nothing but their labor power to sell. These elements, capital and workers, are the preconditions of any capitalist production, yet they cannot be explained from it. Capitalist accumulation would seem to be something of an infinite regress, always presupposing its own conditions. In order to accumulate capital it is necessary to possess capital. There must then be an original or previous accumulation, an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but rather its point of departure, and which constitutes the originary differentiation between capital and workers. This foundational distinction has generally been understood by political economy as a moral difference. As Marx writes:

This primitive accumulation plays approximately the same role in political economy as original sin does in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race. Its origin is supposed to be explained when it is told as an anecdote about the past. Long, long ago there were two sorts of people; one the diligent, intelligent, and above all frugal elite; the other lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living. The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential. Never mind! Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort finally had nothing to sell except their own skins. (1977, 873)

Thus, as much as so-called primitive accumulation posits a theory of the formation of the capitalist mode of production, albeit one predicated on a presupposed division between the diligent and the lazy, it turns this explanation towards the present in the form of a moral tale. The origin provides the present with a moral alibi, dividing the capitalist and the worker along the lines of the good and the bad.

Not only does the theory of so-called primitive accumulation function in the present, aiming for the present or a particular moral characterization of the present, it never leaves the

present even as it offers itself as history. The theory of “primitive accumulation” takes the idealized memory of an individual capitalist’s accumulation—saving money, which itself is a morally coded, or best case, (ideological) presentation of accumulation within capitalism, and turns it into the conditions of capitalist accumulation in general.⁴ It mistakes this memory for history, the conditions *within* capitalist accumulation for the conditions *of* capitalist accumulation. Etienne Balibar asserts that: “The analysis of primitive accumulation thus brings us into the presence of the radical *absence of memory* which characterizes history (memory being only the reflection of history in certain predetermined sites—ideology or even law—and as such, anything but a faithful reflection).” (1975 283) As a theory of the capitalist mode of production so-called primitive accumulation constitutes a failure to think different conditions, limitations, and effects in history, or to think history as difference—a failure that is perhaps not entirely explained by self-interest. So-called primitive accumulation can only extend the conditions of the capitalist mode of production infinitely backwards in time: capitalism was (and always will be) possible; in order to become real, it only required the industriousness and intelligence of the first capitalist.

The fantasy of the thrifty proto-capitalist, whatever its function as nursery tale may be within the schoolbooks and ideologies of capital, is wholly inadequate to the task of accounting for the formation of the capitalist mode of production. The accumulation of money without the conditions to transform it into capital, such as workers or those who have only their labor power to sell, is not capitalist accumulation but “hoarding” [*Shatzbildung*] (1988 144). For Marx “hoarding” is a subjective disposition towards money, and in part produced by money, prior to capital; that is, prior to the possibility of investment or surplus value. “Hoarding” as a disposition is constituted by money and its particular character of being qualitatively without limits—it has the power to stand in for any other commodity, for anything desired—and quantitatively limited, one always has a particular finite amount of money (1977 230). Thus as much as there is a long history of capitalist accumulation prior to the formation of the capitalist mode of production, in the forms of mercantile capital and money-lending, it does so within certain relatively stable limits, limits imposed in part by the money form. What is interesting for our purpose here is that Marx’s deduction of the affective comportment of hoarding from the money form as an unstable combination of work, thrift, and greed, reproduces at least a certain presupposition or assumption of the theory of so-called primitive accumulation—that desire and will are themselves sufficient to generate history—but parodically as farce. Without the proper historical conditions the

“miser’s” desire for accumulation is destined only to collide into certain structural limits. As Marx states, “This contradiction between the quantitative limitation and the qualitative lack of limitation of money keeps driving the hoarder back to his Sisyphean task: accumulation. He is in the same situation as a world conqueror, who discovers a new boundary with each country he annexes” (1977 230). Assuming that hoarding or the desire for wealth is in some sense contemporary with the money form, and thus pre-exists capital, it is possible to invert Marx’s formula and to argue that farce comes before tragedy.⁵ (The comic image of the miser with his bags of money comes before the tragedy of capitalist accumulation and massive expropriation.) The question then becomes, under-what conditions, and through what other causes, is this desire actualized? How does accumulation cease to be the dream of the “hoarder” and become an effective practice, one that constitutes an entire mode of production?⁶

In order for money to constitute capital, and in order for the desire to hoard to constitute capitalist accumulation, there must be the conditions for its investment: that is, the capitalist must be able to purchase both the means of production and labor. These elements must be dissociated from any form of property or social relation that would leave the “means of production,” tools, or the land in the hands of the producers. When capital controls the means of production it ceases to operate at the margins of society, as merchant capital or money lending, and occupies center stage, becoming directly productive as industrial capital. There thus are at least two conditions of the formation of the capitalist mode of production, two conditions that make possible the generation of capital in production rather than in circulation or money lending. As Marx writes, in a deceptively simple and frequently repeated formula:

In themselves, money and commodities are no more capital than the means of production and subsistence are. They need to be transformed into capital. But this transformation can itself only take place under particular circumstances [*bestimmten Umständen*], which meet together at this point: the confrontation of, and the contact between, two very different kinds of commodity owners; on the one hand, the owners of money, means of production means of subsistence, who are eager to valorize the sum of values they have appropriated by buying the labor power of others; on the other hand, free workers, the sellers of their own labor-power, and therefore the sellers of labor. (1977 874)

The capitalist mode of production is formed by the conjunction of money, or possessors of money, and those who have only their labor power to sell. Marx calls this second group free or

“bird-free” [*vogelfrei*], meaning at one and the same time, that while they are not property (as slaves) they are themselves without property and cast out of the human community, as a community of property owners. As Althusser argues, thinking the mode of production from its presuppositions entails thinking the mode of production from the moment where these presuppositions come together in time and space, it entails thinking the mode of production from the “encounter”. The constitutive elements of the formation of any mode of production, the elements that enter into relations, such as free laborers and money freed from any productive use, have different and divergent histories (1994a 571). From the moment of the encounter, however, once the worker and the flows of money encounter each other within a determinate space, the space of wage labor, there is the emergence of a particular mode of production, with its attendant forms of necessity and stability. (To continue our example, one could think here of the multiple necessities of the capitalist mode of production, the necessity of getting a job, to produce commodities, to extract surplus value, and to realize a profit; to name a few, all of which impose themselves to different degrees and for different groups within the mode of production.) The encounter itself is contingent. As Deleuze and Guattari argue: “The encounter might not have taken place, with the free workers and the money-capital existing ‘virtually’ side by side” (1983 225).⁷ Necessity, or the regular reproduction of a mode of production, is itself generated by contingency, and as such it is perhaps never free of it. This imposes a particular demand on how one thinks of the mode of production. As Althusser writes: “Instead of thinking of contingency as a modality of or an exception to the necessary, one must think necessity as the becoming-necessary of contingent encounters.” (1994a 566, translation mine). A “becoming necessary”, a process, and not a simple transition from contingency to necessity, because the different elements of a mode of production the social, technological, and political conditions have independent histories and relations, and this independence threatens any mode of production with its dissolution or transformation. As Marx has repeatedly indicated, capital is constantly threatened by the unhinging of its two constitutive elements: the flow of workers could dry up or leave, and capital could be wasted rather than invested. The encounter is not only the contingency of the origin it is the uncertainty of the future.

The “encounter” replaces the teleological logic of intentions and their realization underlying classical political economy with a logic of encounters, detours, and effects which are not the realization of intentions but are constitutive of them. However, it is not only within classical political economy that historical teleology and the continuity between the past and

future is posited through the figure of a subject. In Marx's other writings, most famously *The Communist Manifesto*, it is the bourgeoisie as collective subject whose will and desire constitutes the capitalist mode of production. In "Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre" Althusser criticizes Marx's sloppy use of the term bourgeoisie as the name of both the social force destructive of feudalism and the dominant class within the new order. Such a narrative effaces the constitutive power of the encounter, the event, the fact that the capitalist class, like the proletariat, cannot exist prior to the series of encounters constitutive of capitalism. The term "bourgeoisie" subsumes the facticity of the event under a logic of predestination. Paradoxically "so-called primitive accumulation" and the polemics of the manifesto both efface the constitutive difference of history with a single figure, that of the bourgeois or proto-capitalist, which is situated both before and after the capitalist mode of production. Thus Althusser draws a line of demarcation within Marx's corpus not between the early and late Marx, as he so famously did earlier, but between two divergent materialisms at work in Marx's writing: a materialism of the event or the encounter versus a materialism of teleology and necessity. This line of demarcation also cuts through different conceptions of subjectivity. This division is not between subjectivity understood as the self expression or alienation of the humanist subject and subjectivity understood as the bearer (*Träger*) of social processes, as Althusser's early work infamously tried to argue, but between subjectivity as a necessary cause or effect of the capitalist mode of production and subjectivity as constituted by and constitutive of the encounter. Althusser places two seemingly opposed conceptions of subjectivity within the same schema of necessity: the bourgeoisie as cause of capitalism and the proletariat as automatically produced by capital. To these conceptions each of which are governed by a certain teleology or necessity, whether it is a telos of the will, in the first case, or the necessary effect of the economy, in the second, Althusser juxtaposes another conception of subjectivity, found in the chapters on primitive accumulation.⁸

The conjunction of the flow of money, on one hand, and a flow of those who only have their labor power to sell, on the other, as the necessary or minimal constitution of capitalist accumulation, would seem to indicate that the capitalist mode of production cannot, in either its constitution or definition, be considered as a simple effect of one term or element—it is a relation, or an ensemble of relations (Althusser and Balibar 215). To argue that the capitalist mode of production ought to be grasp as an "ensemble of relations" is in a primary and almost entirely negative (or critical) sense, to separate a thought of the capitalist mode of production from a thought of "human nature". The capitalist mode of production cannot be understood as a

simple expression or deviation of human nature: it is neither the realization of a fundamental and originary desire to hoard, nor the suppression of an ancient communal essence.

In the *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx uses the term “ensemble of human relations” to displace the question of the human essence. Marx argues against Feuerbach’s concept of the abstract human essence, and its alienation in religion: “But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality (*in seiner Wirklichkeit*) it is the ensemble of the social relations (*das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*).” Marx’s statement ‘displaces’ the question of the human essence in that it does not argue against essence in general, but rather proposes that such an essence does not exist in an idea, but rather exists, or effectively exists, in the multiple and active relations that individuals establish with each other (Balibar 1995a 30). What human individuals have “in common” is not some abstract idea of humanity but their specific relations; relations which are constituted each moment, through various encounters, in multiple forms. There is an affirmative aspect of this concept of an “ensemble” which follows this displacement: just because capital cannot be related back to some abstract essence of humanity does not mean that it is separable from human desires, human intentions, or human subjectivity altogether, but rather these desires must be considered from the particular relations, and the history of these relations. Or, put otherwise, the formation of the capitalist mode of production is not reducible to the simple desire to accumulate on the part of the capitalist, nor to the simple moral difference between capital and worker, although it involves and implicates desire as well an entire moral discourse on the values of saving and spending as its component elements.⁹ However, these elements or relations do not have as their causes some abstract nature of humanity, but rather their causes are other relations; relations which coexist and precede this particular ensemble of relations. As Althusser writes in his remarks towards a general theory of aleatory materialism, every “thing” (body, subject, social relation) must itself be viewed as an effect of a series of different encounters, an effect that once constituted has its own particular causality or effectivity (1994a 565).

For Marx the relations which form the capitalist mode of production are “the product of many economic revolutions, of the extinction of a whole series of older formations of social production.” the most direct and immediate extinction being the breakdown of the feudal mode of production (1977 273). The “extinction” of the feudal mode of production encompasses multiple elements and trajectories. It includes the dissolution of the regime of the guilds, the breakdown of the system of peasant land-ownership, and the massive disintegration of existing

structures of wealth and prestige through merchant capital and usury.¹⁰ These elements of dissolution are not the effects of a single strategy or aspects of a single process; they are rather entirely disparate. Etienne Balibar explains that "...the elements combined by the capitalist mode of production have different and independent origins"(1975 281). These elements of dissolution such as usury often stem from the margins and pores of the old society, and only begin to occupy center stage in terms of their effects, the effects of constituting a new economy and a new mode of production. Whatever intelligibility or unity they have is produced after the fact when they retroactively become the conditions of the capitalist mode of production.

Where the theory of so-called primitive accumulation imagines a vague identity of past and present, unified by a particular memory, morality, and subject, Marx finds the intersection of disparate historical trajectories and itineraries that only come together in the common space that they mutually create. For example, the laws and acts which turned common lands into pasture and forced the peasantry off the land did not have as their goal the creation of the "proletariat" as a propertyless working class; this was rather an unintended effect that was later seized by other agents and actors.¹¹ "The knights of industry, however, only succeeded in supplanting the knights of the sword by making use of events in which they had played no part in whatsoever" (1977 875). To continue the comparison between "so-called primitive accumulation" and primitive accumulation, we could add that where the theorists, or apologists, of political economy find an idyllic and moralizing transformation Marx finds violence and bloodshed. This violent transformation has two acts. First, as I have noted, there are multiple conditions of expropriation, including usury, which quite literally tear the producers from their means of production, most importantly the land.¹² Expropriation in-itself does not produce "free workers", however, only disenfranchised peasants and artisans who are just as likely to resort to beggary or crime as they are to show up at the doors of the factories and mills of the newly emergent capitalist class looking for work. As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*: "The propertyless are more inclined to become vagabonds and robbers and beggars than workers" (1973 736). The period of expropriation is followed by the period of "bloody legislation": laws are drawn up and regimes of penalization and torture are enacted to curtail criminality and control the new class of criminals.

Hence at the end of the fifteenth and during the whole of the sixteenth centuries, a bloody legislation against vagabondage was enforced throughout Western Europe. The fathers of the present working class were chastised for their enforced transformation into

vagabonds and paupers. Legislation treated them as “voluntary” criminals, and assumed that it was entirely within their powers to go on working under the old conditions which in fact no longer existed (Marx 1977 896).

While such laws are founded on the fantasy that it is possible to go on being a peasant after feudalism, their secondary, and perhaps unintended, effect is the control and containment of a “working class,” of those who have only their labor power to sell. Those “freed” from previous forms of labor and existence must be violently coerced and contained into the new structures of labor and existence.

Centuries are required before the ‘free’ worker, owing to the greater development of the capitalist mode of production, makes a voluntary agreement, i.e. is compelled by social conditions to sell the whole of his active life, his very capacity for labor, in return for the price of his customary means of subsistence, to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage. (Marx 1977 382)

The transition from feudalism to capitalism is neither smooth nor easy, and it requires the necessary intervention of law, the state, and new forms of police to transform disenfranchised peasants and artisans into subjects of labor. As Marx argues, the state, and particularly its powers of police and violence, are then a contingent, but necessary condition of the capitalist mode of production (1977 899).

The perspective that Marx assumes in the section on primitive accumulation is similar to that of Machiavelli.¹³ It is situated at the historical perspective of the emergence of capital, an emergence it views from the people: in other words, it views the origins of capital from its initial victims, the violently disappropriated peasantry (Montag 97). Although Marx does not share Machiavelli’s solitude, his historical vantage point of being a witness to the formation of the nation state (or, in this case, capital), through his research on primitive accumulation in England, and in the colonies, he excavates the violent encounter of foundation that classical political economy effaces.¹⁴ Whereas the perspective of classical political economy assumes the formation of capital as an accomplished fact, which it retroactively justifies through a moral difference, Marx writes from perspective of the aleatory formation of capital. Thus Marx can be juxtaposed to classical political economy in the same way that Machiavelli can be opposed to the philosophers of natural law, such as Hobbes: in each case the moral discourse of right is replaced

with a materialist understanding of force. Machiavelli's writing cannot simply be identified with the figure of the founding violence of the "prince," it also includes his enumeration of the multiple aleatory conditions (*fortuna*) which both limit and make possible the prince's assumption of power (1999 74). The perspective of the aleatory beginning, which Marx and Machiavelli share, does not simply oppose the contingency of the event to the moral narrative of origins, but thinks the event in the overdetermination of its conditions.

The difference between Marx and the narrative of "so-called primitive accumulation" is not simply framed at the level of their respective ideologies: it is not simply a matter of replacing a tale of the moral foundation with a tale of the a-moral origins of capital. The difference at the origin is carried over into the present. Just as Machiavelli's account of the violent interruption of the state into feudal conditions cannot simply be adjudicated with the moral discourse of natural law, as two different perspectives on the same "thing." Marx's account of primitive accumulation constitutes a fundamental transformation of the object under consideration. The violence of primitive accumulation cannot appear within the discourse of classical political economy, given the manner in which it constructs its object—it conforms neither to the moral discourse underpinning classical political economy nor to its conception of the market as an invisible hand functioning without state intervention (Perelman 196). Primitive accumulation is the constitutive blind spot of classical political economy.

As I have suggested, it is through the critique of so-called primitive accumulation that the elements of the historical definition of the capitalist mode of production are given. So far these elements are perhaps only given in a dim outline through the points of contrast with the moralists of so-called primitive accumulation. First, a mode of production is irreducible to, and, in excess of, the intentions of an individual subject. While the "fairy tale" of primitive accumulation founds the possibility of historical transformation and capitalist accumulation on individual intent and the morality of those that save rather than squander, Marx argues through the character of the miser not only that intentions in general cannot be actualized without their material conditions, but that these conditions are constitutive of intentions. Subjectivity is inseparable from the ensemble of relations which makes it possible. There is perhaps a second, albeit more oblique, element to this materialist critique of intentionality. Marx's account of the disparate conditions of primitive accumulation would seem to separate this thought of the mode of production from a subject of history. It is not the same subject, subjects, wills or desires that dissolve the old mode of production and produce the new one. Althusser has shown how this

dimension of Marx's thought of primitive accumulation can be turned back against some of the cruder formulations of Marxism. At the most rudimentary level this means that Marx's thought of the historicity of the capitalist mode of production is completely separated from any attempt to write a "great man" philosophy of history, in which history is nothing more than the realization of ideas and intentions within a neutral and passive space of history. If Marx's history is not simply the *tabula rasa* upon which the actions and events of great men are unfolded it is also not the eternal battle (now hidden, now open) of two classes. Classes are constituted by and constitutive of the aleatory encounter of material conditions. There are no laws of history, or epic agents, engaged in struggle, on the multiple overlapping effects of encounters. Finally, Marx's critique of so-called primitive accumulation begins to point to a specific problem within the mode of production—the manner in which a mode of production is constitutive and constituted by desires, forms of living, and intentions: subjectivity.

Two: Economy of Force

While Marx's critique of so-called primitive accumulation provides a beginning point from which to think the conditions and constitutive elements of the capitalist mode of production it is a paradoxical starting point from which to elucidate a consideration of the capitalist mode of production. Paradoxical, because it is unclear where or within what mode of production the conditions of primitive accumulation are to be located according to a historical periodization: they could be placed within the feudal mode of production, from whose dissolution they stem, or within the capitalist mode of production, whose birth it represents. Primitive accumulation is situated between two types of violence and two types of power, between the feudal forms of servitude that it destroys and the capitalist forms of exploitation that it renders possible. Thus primitive accumulation would seem to exceed any strict periodization, or division of history into a succession of modes of production (Asiatic, ancient, feudal, capitalist, and communist), it is rather a point of passage and transition.

It is unclear, however, whether primitive accumulation can be simply relegated a moment of transition in the pre-history of the capitalist mode of production. As a process of accumulation it would seem to encompass both the conditions for the historical formation of capital, and its extension into other spaces and other modes of production. As Marx writes in a passage illustrating the overdetermined historical appearance of capital:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of indigenous population of a that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of early capitalist production... These different moments are systematically combined together [*systematisch zusammengeßt*] at the end of the seventeenth century in England; the combination embraces the colonies the national debt, the modern tax system, and the system of protection. These methods depend on brute force [*brutalser Gewalt*], for instance the colonial system. But they all employ the power of the state, the concentrated and organized force of society [*Gewalt der Gesellschaft*], to hasten, as in a hothouse, the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition. Force is the midwife of every old society which is pregnant with a new one. It is itself an economic power [*ökonomische Potenz*]. (1977 915)

As the passage above indicates, primitive accumulation is situated both at the historical formation of the capitalist mode of production as well as at the point of its extension into other modes of production through the violence of colonization. Primitive accumulation serves as the name not only for an event, but a process, the expropriation and legislation necessary to destroy other economic and social relations in order to make them productive for capital. Thus primitive accumulation becomes not only a cause of the capitalist mode of production but its effect. The two essential results of primitive accumulation—workers with only their labor power to sell and capital free to invest anywhere—are also effects of the capitalist mode of production’s encounter with other modes and economies. While the above quote crosses a multitude of question and problems regarding the relationship between capitalism and colonialism (introducing a series of questions which cannot be dealt with here) it opens up the possibility of understanding primitive accumulation as the long process by which capital expands to other spaces across the globe.

The assertion that “force” [*Gewalt*] is the transforming agent, the common ground where the disparate strategies of colonization and accumulation meet, would seem to suggest another sense in which primitive accumulation continues beyond the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Even if we bracket for a moment the forms of colonization and neo-colonization that would make primitive accumulation a continual process, these questions are difficult to answer due to the intimate relationship that the violence of primitive accumulation has with the new

order it engenders. Poised as it were at the point of transformation the moment of violence almost disappears in its execution.¹⁵ Thus the violence of primitive accumulation is immediately justified within and by the new order that it constitutes. For example, the destruction of the common lands by the enclosure acts only appears violent from the perspective of the old order and practices that it destroys, from the new order, from the expansion of wage relations which have as their presupposition a mass of disenfranchised individuals and an entirely new relation between property, law, and labor, it cannot appear as violent, or even appear at all. As Michel Foucault argues the period of primitive accumulation entails a fundamental transformation of the definition of illegality and property: the longstanding relations of traditional use surrounding land (free pasture, wood collecting etc.) were replaced by a new regime of property. "...[L]anded property became absolute property; all the tolerated 'rights' that the peasantry had acquired or preserved were now rejected by the new owners who regarded it simply as theft" (1977 85). It is not by accident, or even through the cunning of the emergent bourgeoisie that primitive accumulation is characterized by an intermingling of violence and law. In fact, it is this intermingling of violence and law, the simultaneity of accumulation and the right to accumulate that Marx understands as primitive accumulation. As Antonio Negri writes with respect to primitive accumulation: "Violence thus constitutes the vehicle between accumulation and right"(1999 254).

If the violence of primitive accumulation is difficult to locate as an event because it loses itself in the law and the new society that it produces, it is also difficult to locate because it is always situated with respect to a transformation of violence—the emergence of a new type of violence. In the long passage from feudalism to capitalism this transformation is in the first instance the passage from the dispersed violence of feudal lords to violence monopolized and standardized by law and the bourgeois state. As Marx states, in the beginning, "[t]he rising bourgeoisie needs the power of the state, and uses it to 'regulate' wages, i.e., to force them into the limits suitable for making a profit, to lengthen the working day, and to keep the worker himself at his normal level of dependence. This is an essential part of so-called primitive accumulation" (1977 899). In the first instance the sporadic and excessive feudal forms of violence pass into the universality of law, but this is not the entirety of the transformation. Marx also seems to indicate a second moment of this transformation of violence in which violence disappears not into the neutrality of law, but into the quotidian relations that are the effects and cause of the law. In Marx words: "The silent compulsion of economic relations sets the seal on

the domination of the capitalist over the worker. Direct extra-economic force is still of course used, but only in exceptional cases” (1977 899). Marx is somewhat ambiguous with respect to the closure of primitive accumulation, and its relation to the mode of production it engenders. At times, Marx seems to argue that primitive accumulation and the overt violence it involves ends in the day-to-day relations of exploitation. While at other times it appears that the violent law making power of primitive accumulation is merely privatized and brought indoors into the factory. Marx emphatically illustrates the order of discipline imposed by the factory codes:

The overseer’s book of penalties replaces the slave-driver’s lash. All punishments naturally resolve themselves into fines and deductions from wags, and the law-giving talent of the factory Lycurgus so arranges matters that a violation of this laws is, if possible, more profitable to him than the keeping of them. (1977 550)

Marx suggests that there is a qualitative difference between primitive accumulation and the capitalist economy it engenders, in terms of the formers bloody discontinuity and the latter’s continuity and silent functioning. At the same time, however, Marx would suggest that this qualitative change is perhaps best understood as a change in the form of violence itself, capitalist accumulation is nothing other than primitive accumulation continued onto the shop floor, and thus nothing other than a continuation of the modification of violence begun with “bloody legislation” and the enclosure acts.

Primitive accumulation cannot be reduced to a dialectic of “law-producing” and “law-conserving” violence since it entails a transformation of violence itself.¹⁶ “The immediate violence of the exploitation and the juridical superstructure becomes a mediated violence and a structure internal to the productive process. The law—or really, the form of violence—becomes a machine, or really, a permanent procedure its constant innovation and its rigid discipline.” (Negri 1999 257) Reading *Capital* for its nascent theory of power reveals that force does not simply end with the moment of primitive accumulation but it migrates into the process of production itself. As Foucault summarizes“...[O]ne can find between the lines of *Capital* an analysis, or at least the sketch of an analysis, which would be the history of the technology of power, such as it was exercised in the workshops and factories” (1994 189). Furthermore, Foucault’s own theory of disciplinary power can be understood as the conceptualization of a thought of violence that is articulated “without concept” through Marx’s multiple allusions to the power of ancient despots internalized in the capitalist mode of production.¹⁷ Thus Foucault, at

least in his writing of the 1970s, can be understood to be producing a sort of “symptomatic reading” of Marx’s theory of power, one that destabilizes any opposition between primitive accumulation as contingent event and the capitalist mode of production as silent necessity.

The problem of the relation between primitive accumulation and the capitalist mode of production opens onto yet another problem: the definition of the capitalist mode of production, or stated otherwise, the difference between capitalism thought as a mode of production and capitalism thought as an “economy”. What is at stake in such a distinction the understanding of the continuity of capital, the reproduction of the forces and relations of production over time. To understand capital as a mode of production is, in some readings, to insist upon the necessarily complex conditions of this continuity—an entire series of complex factors including the state, law, and ideology are necessary to the functioning of capital. To understand capitalism, or any other mode of production, as an economy is to lapse into an “economism” of sorts.

“Economism,” briefly, is the guarantee of the adequacy of the economy to its own reproduction without the necessary implication of other factors, or elements, such as the state, ideology, law, or subjectivity. Economism takes the law-like nature of the economy as a given, and understands its effects on other elements to be that of a simple linear cause. To return to ambiguity indicated above with respect to the closure of primitive accumulation, we can see the possibility of interpreting the “silent compulsion of economic relations” as either the dominance of the economy over other instances of the social, or, following Marx’s statements regarding the disciplinary power of the capitalist, as the internalization of the violence within the system itself.

Three: The Difference of Primitive Accumulation

At the level of individual quotes and citations the problem of the contours and complexity of the mode of production is strictly speaking irresolvable; it will always be possible to oppose an “economist” Marx to a “non-economist” Marx—the entire history of Marxism bears witness to this possibility. In order to get beyond the seemingly endless back and forth of this or that statement, or concept, of Marx’s writing, it is necessary to pose another seemingly unrelated question, the question of the place of primitive accumulation in the exposition, or logic, of Marx’s *Capital*. Louis Althusser has argued that Marx’s later writings, especially the first volume of *Capital* (since it was completed by Marx) engage philosophical problems articulated through their very exposition, in the order of chapters, and the logic of categories. Marx himself writes in the afterward to the second edition of *Capital*:

Of course the method of presentation [*Darstellung*] must differ in form from that of inquiry [*Forshung*]. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real movement be appropriately presented. (1988 27)

Capital, according to Althusser, is not an incomplete manuscript, a manifesto, or a series of notes “written for self clarification”; it is a completed text, or at least part of one, and as such it engages and enacts a particular question; the question of its exposition or logic. That is, the relation between abstract concepts, examples and historical events, a relation which poses the problem of the presentation, or even the representation of something called the capitalist mode of production itself. We have already perhaps glimpsed something of this problem in the critique of so-called primitive accumulation. In part, and if it is possible to put aside the clear differences of ideology and politics, *the difference between the bourgeois theory of primitive accumulation and Marx’s theory can be expressed as a difference of representation*. For the bourgeois theorist before Marx, the moral difference between thrift and expenditure is adequate to the representation of capital as a social relation; whereas for Marx the presentation of primitive accumulation and the formation of capital involved not only fundamentally different elements, such as the entire history of the dissolution of the feudal mode of production, the violent formation of the capitalist mode of production, and the history of colonialism, but also the

question of the relations between these elements. If there is a specifically materialist dialectic, as a thought of contradiction, antagonism, and relation, or if Marx is something other than Hegel turned upside-down, Hegel applied to the material world, then this “dialectic” (if that word is still appropriate) would have to be found in the logic of the presentation of *Capital*.

Marx cannot give a definition of the capitalist mode of production; any such definition would belie its fundamental complexity and overdetermination.¹⁸ What is being represented is not a simple object for thought, but a relation or series of relations and their particular dynamism and tensions (1973 102). That is, Marx’s text deals with the problem of the relations between structures, the division of labor, relations of production, etc., which are different elements of a larger structure, the capitalist mode of production.¹⁹ The relation between these structures cannot be contained or presented within existing models of causality (they are not simply the causes or effects of each other in a mechanical or expressive sense) or presentation (most notably the often presupposed division between essence and appearance); rather, this relation is one of immanent causality: the cause, or structure, is immanent in its effects, there is nothing outside of its effects. Thus there is no simple division or priority between cause and effect: every effect is equally and at the same time a cause (Althusser and Balibar 191). This cause is both immanent and absent, because to be immanent and present in its effects is also to be un-localizable. This cause cannot be present or empirically given at any one point, hence the other name that Althusser gives it: “metonymical causality.” Classical political economy is trapped in a “fetishization” of the concrete in that it understands the capitalist mode of production to be constituted by the simple moral difference between thrift and greed: it fails to recognize the overdetermination of any cause. To risk something of an example of this overdetermined relation: elements of the capitalist mode of production that would seem to be its effects, such as the desire for accumulation on the part of the capitalist, or “rationalized” hoarding, must equally be thought as causes and elements of its functioning. Without necessarily following all of the ramifications of Althusser’s reading of *Capital*, it is important to indicate that Althusser’s insistence on the intimate relation between presentation, or philosophical exposition, and structure and the relations of the mode of production, displaces the earlier question regarding the place of transition or transformation in the mode of production from the infinite and inexhaustible series of quotes and counter-quotes of what “Marx thought” to another and different problem—that of the exposition or logics (holding open for a second that there at least may be more than one) at work in Marx’s text.

Marx's re-writing of the fantasy of primitive accumulation poses particular problems when placed within this question of textual presentation. Although primitive accumulation deals with the intersecting questions of the real relations which have formed the capitalist mode of production, the dissolution of feudalism, and the imaginary apprehension of those relations (the morality tale) it is placed at the end of *Capital* in the final chapters. There is thus a considerable difference between the presentation of primitive accumulation within the articulation of *Capital*, and its place in the historical formation. The text, *Capital*, begins from the famous analysis of the commodity form which constitutes the phenomenological appearance and common sense of the capitalist mode of production, where " [t]he wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an 'immense collection of commodities [*ungeheure Warensammlung*]'." (126) Marx does not begin *Capital* with the question of origins but with an element of capital that is at once quotidian and all encompassing in its scope. Marx's decision to begin with the commodity is also somewhat curious since as much as capital confronts us as "an immense accumulation of commodities" it is not at all possible to equate capitalism with commodity production: the commodity, an object produced for the market, necessarily pre-exists the capitalist mode of production.²⁰ From the starting point of the commodity form, Marx develops the contradictory relationship between exchange and use values and abstract and concrete labor. Without attempting to offer anything like an overview or synopsis of the exposition of *Capital*, I will attempt to indicate something of the difference between primitive accumulation as the historical emergence of capital and the commodity form as the starting point for the presentation of capital. The difference between these two points is not only the difference between the synchronic articulation of the relations of capital and its historical emergence; it is also the difference between two different tendencies within the presentation [*Darstellung*] of the capitalist mode of production.

In a posthumously published text titled *Marx dans ses limites*, Althusser argues that Marx's writings, in even mature texts such as *Capital*, cannot be reduced to the articulation of a single presentation, but rather must be understood as themselves determined and constructed by multiple presentations and multiple logics. Thus in this later text (and others written at the same time) Althusser argues that it is no longer possible to separate Marx from the deviations of Marxism: that is, once it is recognized that the tendencies one is fighting against (most importantly economism and humanism) are not simply additions, or perversions, but have their condition of possibility in the tensions and divergent tendencies of Marx's own writing (Negri

1996a 51).²¹ Despite the transformation of strategy in these later texts Althusser's tactics remain the same, the tension between these different dimensions of Marx's thought are not located at the level of this or that quote, but must be extracted from the conflict presentations or logics of Marx's writing. As with the later work on "aleatory materialism," which it in some sense lays the ground for, this earlier division is not datable, with a definite before and after. Rather it manifests itself as an inner theoretical tension, which is the source of Marx's limits and productivity. As Balibar makes clear the "break" separating Marx's thought from its constitutive adversaries (classical political economy and Hegel) is not completed once and for all, but is continually reposed. "Every break is at the same time irreversible and precarious, threatened with an impossible return to its ideological prehistory, without which it would not *last*, it would not *progress*" (1994 172).

There is a tension between the different beginnings of capital: a tension between the beginning of *Capital*, the commodity form, and the historical emergence of capitalism, primitive accumulation. The commodity form and the first chapter of capital proceed by a series of internal contradictions: from use value and exchange value, to abstract and concrete labor, and finally to surplus value itself. This movement is also the movement from the indeterminate abstraction of the commodity or value to what is finally the specific articulation of the capitalist mode of production including the day to day relations and struggles on the factory floor. It is in part due to the forceful linearity of this argument, in which the day to day struggles over the working day seem to unfold from the contradiction between use and exchange value, that many writers have argued that the "commodity form" is itself the essence of the capitalist mode of production.²²

The "logic" that opens *Capital Volume I* does not account for the entirety of the text. Althusser contends that it is continually interrupted by chapters and analyses which incorporate relations and levels irreducible to the enfolding of the internal contradictions of the commodity form, and are outside the order of presentation [*hors ordre d'exposition*], constituting a break with its economistic logic (1994b 397). While this rupture includes the chapters on primitive accumulation, and thus the problem of the foundation of the capitalist mode of production, it is not limited to it. This "other" logic that breaks with economism includes the chapters on co-operation, the working day, and the chapters on machinery and large scale industry. What is at stake in this other logic that remains outside of the dominant order of exposition? How might an alternative be thought of in other than negative terms, as other than an interruption or an outside

to the dominant logic—a logic in which the relations and conflicts of capitalism all appear as simply effects of the contradictory essence of the commodity form?

The beginning of a response to these questions can be found in the disparity between the two starting points: the commodity form and primitive accumulation. The first assumes what the second puts into question by historicizing—that is, the commodification of labor itself. Whereas primitive accumulation reveals the violent operations necessary to constitute a laboring subject, to constitute those who have only their labor power to sell, the analysis of the commodity form takes this condition as an already accomplished fact. Once the commodification of labor is assumed, surplus value or surplus labor is only the labor in excess of what is necessary to reproduce labor power: the value of what is produced over the value of what labor power costs.

When you read Section 1 Book 1 of *Capital*, you find a theoretical presentation of surplus value: it is an arithmetical presentation, in which surplus value is calculable, defined by a difference (in value) between the value produced by labor power on the one hand and the value of the commodities necessary for the reproduction of this labor power (wages) on the other. And in this arithmetical presentation of surplus value, labor figures purely and simply as a commodity (1979 233).

The “arithmetical presentation” assumes abstract labor: that is, it assumes that labor power as an anthropological constant. Human beings are already exchangeable as different deposits of labor power and thus capitalism is always possible. ²³

In taking labor as always already constituted as a commodity, as already a quantifiable unit of abstract labor, what is overlooked are the interlacing apparatuses that transform bodies and relations into units of labor power—what Althusser famously explored through his examination of the ideological “reproduction of the relations of production” (Negri 1996a 52). What is overlooked are not only the aleatory conditions of capitalism, its constitution as a political, legal, and cultural order, but the overdetermined conditions of its survival. In Marx an indication of these necessary conditions (apparatuses or ensembles) are given through the analysis of primitive accumulation, albeit in the form of an almost negative outline. Antonio Negri indicates that the destruction and violence that defines primitive accumulation can only be understood if one posits forms of cooperation and social relations which pre-exist capital, and must be destroyed or seriously modified in order to produce the “free worker” necessary to capitalist accumulation. In Negri’s terms, “in the period of primitive accumulation, when capital

enveloped and constricted pre-existent labor forms to its own valorization, it was capital which posed the form of cooperation—and this consisted in the emptying of the pre-constituted connections of the traditional laboring subjects” (1996b 165). The intimate relation between the formation of the capitalist mode of production and violence found in primitive accumulation has as its correlate the materiality of social relations that pre-exist capital. Thus it is possible to find in Marx a third moment of primitive accumulation, after the expropriation or destruction of the previous mode and its violent legislation, a moment of normalization that bears on subjectivity and sociality itself. As Marx writes: “The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education [*Erziehung*], tradition, and habit [*Gewohnheit*] looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self evident natural laws” (1977 899). The violence and dissolution of the old mode of production is followed by the normalization of the new mode of production, a normalization which obliterates the memory of the past mode of production as well as any traces of the violent foundation of the new mode of production. This normalization constitutive of the regularity and functioning of the capitalist mode of production, is actualized not only at the levels of laws or institutions but at the level of subjectivity (Albiac 13). In order for a new mode of production such as capital to be instituted it is not sufficient for it to simply form a new economy, or write new laws, it must institute itself in the quotidian dimensions of existence—it must become habit (what Althusser termed the “society effect”). This is one aspect of the “becoming necessary” of the mode of production its constitution—it makes it impossible to live or imagine another world. Whereas the chapters on the commodity and on abstract labor would seem to present labor as an anthropological constant, the section on primitive accumulation reminds us that “[t]he positing of the individual as worker, in this nakedness, is itself a product of history” (1973 472). What “primitive accumulation” reveals is that there is no *mode of production* without a corresponding *mode of subjection*, or a production of subjectivity.²⁴ The “economy,” as something isolated and quantifiable only exists insofar as it is sustained by its inscription in the state, the law, habits, and desires.

Four: Primitive Accumulation Today

The continuation of primitive accumulation would then encompass all of the dimensions of the concept sketched out above. What primitive accumulation reveals through its sheer violence is that the capitalist mode of production cannot simply be equated with a market or an economy, its origin cannot be accounted for through a narrative of thrift and greed or buying and selling. In order for the capitalist mode of production to assert itself historically it must destroy the pre-existing economies of subsistence and their corresponding ways of life. Thus, primitive accumulation continues wherever the capitalist mode of production produces its own legality, norms, and its own forms of subjectivity. That is to say, if in this first sense primitive accumulation refers to the necessary non-economic conditions of the capitalist mode of production, its inscription in laws, codes of behavior, and habits, then primitive accumulation, or the production of subjectivity associated with it, is coextensive with the capitalist mode of production. Thus Althusser's turn to primitive accumulation in the essay on "aleatory materialism" follows one of his most important theoretical innovations: that there is no simple functioning of a mode of production without ideological and cultural conditions, conditions which constitute individuals as subjects of the mode of production.

Moreover, if wanted to look for the relevance of primitive accumulation for capitalism today, then it is also necessary to pose the question as to what are the contemporary equivalents of "the commons." If primitive accumulation in its classical sense used a combination of force and law to dismantle relations of laboring cooperation, then the question is what are the currently existing relations of cooperation and sociality that are being dismantled. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri contend, there is today a sort of neo-primitive accumulation, an accumulation not simply of wealth and workers but of subjective potentials, desires, and knowledges, many of which were formed outside of capitalism, in the public sector and in the interstices of commodified existence (258). Moreover, it is increasingly the power of life itself, the capacity to reproduce and live, from the genetic code to the basic necessities of existence, which, like the feudal commons, is increasingly coming under the rule of "absolute private property".

As much as these two instances, primitive accumulation as the accumulation of subjectivity necessary to any mode of production and the accumulation of the remaining non-commodified spaces, point to the continued relevance of the concept today, its relevance is not

limited to detailing the entrenched status and absolute reach of the capitalist mode of production. There is also finally a “revolutionary” status of primitive accumulation, or at least one oriented towards a thought of social transformation. Primitive accumulation is the persistence of the encounter at the heart of the capitalist mode of production. It is the insistence of the encounter in the simple fact that the constitutive elements of the mode of production, money, desires, bodies, belief, etc. can always become unhinged from their particular articulation. Primitive accumulation insofar as it deals with the overdetermined and complex conditions of the capitalist mode of production, attests to the persistence of non-capitalist social relations, of the cooperative multitude that threatens capitalism (Negri 1999, 259). The fact that multiple conditions, multiple relations of force, law, and ideology, are necessary to constitution of the capitalist mode of production is also means that its reproduction is not guaranteed, and thus constitutes the possibility of its transformation: overdetermination is inseparable from underdetermination (Balibar 1996 115).

The placement of “primitive accumulation” at the end of *Volume One of Capital* can thus also be understood as a reminder of the sheer contingency of the mode of production, the possibility that things could be and thus can still be otherwise. As Althusser writes: “[Primitive accumulation] continues to today, not just in the visible example of the third world, but as a constant process that inscribes the aleatory at the heart of the capitalist mode of production” (1994a 573, translation mine). Thus primitive accumulation opens a space between the orthodox Marxist belief in the inevitable collapse of capitalism and current ideologies that argue that capitalism is eternal. There are no such guarantees only the overlapping histories of the encounter—in the space between these encounters there is the possibility for invention.

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¹It is not my concern here to stage a philosophical reconciliation between Althusser and Negri. Which is not to suggest that such a project would not be interesting. However, such a project would have to include not only the lines of convergence of the later writings, commented on by Negri himself in “Notes on the Evolution of the Thought of the Later Althusser,” but would ultimately have to interrogate the common place acceptance of their divergence: a divergence which posits Althusser as the philosopher of a history as a process without subjects or goals and Negri as a philosopher concerned primarily with living labor as subjectivity.

²Fredric Jameson’s insistence on maintaining the term “mode of production” is worth noting at this point. Jameson argues that the term mode of production is essentially a differential term in that even in the attempt to specify one particular mode of production, such as the capitalist mode of production, it is necessary to think in terms of the manner in which it differentiates itself from other modes of production. Marx could not define the capitalist mode of production without differentiating it from feudalism, just as the capitalist mode of production exists in tension with other possible modes. However, Jameson rejects the term “social formation” to account for this conflictual co-existence, arguing that it reintroduces the empiricism which the former term was intended to include, and instead suggest the term “cultural revolution” to account for the dominance of one mode of production over others. (1988 174) Jameson’s understanding of “cultural revolution,” as a necessary supplement to the mode of production, comes very close to the interlinking between the mode of production and the “mode of subjection” explored in this paper.

³ Here I am referring to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. In the companion volume to this work *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* Slavoj Zizek entertains the idea that the understanding of politics as the contingent contestation of political hegemonies must necessarily repress the critique of political economy. I am indebted to Geoff Boucher for making the point that Althusser’s work on aleatory materialism can be understood as an attempt to think maintain contingency without necessarily dispensing with the materiality of the mode of production.

⁴ It is important to distinguish between the classical texts of political economy, which present so-called primitive accumulation as primarily a moral difference between thrift and greed, and the *practical interventions* of some of the same early economists. As Michael Perelman has argued often the same political economists who theoretically presented the accumulation of capital as a moral difference practically understood the necessity of actively destroying the pre-capitalist practices of subsistence through state power (98). Marx recognized a similar duplicity in the early writings on the colonies (America) in which the scarcity of Europe did not yet exist. As Marx writes: “In the old civilized countries the worker, although free, is by a law of nature dependent on the capitalist; in the colonies this dependence must be created by artificial means” (1977 937).

⁵ The sentence I am referring to here is the famous sentence from *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all facts and personages of great importance in world history occur, as it were, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” (Karl Marx *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* pg. 15)

⁶ As Marx writes drawing the parallel between the miser and the capitalist: “This boundless drive for enrichment, this passionate chase after value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser. The ceaseless augmentation of value, which the miser seeks to attain by saving his money from circulation, is achieved by the more acute capitalist by means of throwing his money again

into circulation.”(1977 255) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari explicitly pose the question of the formation of the capitalist mode of production in terms of the actualization of desire in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

⁷ At several points in *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari seem to prefigure statements found in Althusser’s essay on the materialism of the encounter: for example, in both texts the encounter between “money and those who have only their labor power to sell” becomes grounds for speculation on the materiality of the event. While it is possible that Althusser had read or considered Deleuze and Guattari’s text it is also worth noting, in this note towards a philology, that Deleuze and Guattari were reading and drawing from Balibar’s contribution to *Lire le Capital*. Althusser also implicitly draws from this text in stressing the divergent and contradictory histories that pre-exist the formation of capitalism. Thus it is possible that Deleuze and Guattari’s text only serves to magnify tendencies already at work in the previous project.

⁸ Althusser does not explicitly name subjectivity as the deciding factor in distinguishing between these two different conceptions of the mode of production. However, his central example in defining what he calls the essentialist and philosophical conception of the mode of production is Marx’s thought of the proletariat as automatically produced and reproduced by capital (1994a 573). As I have noted in a latter portion of the manuscript Althusser also criticizes the idea of a bourgeoisie that pre-exist capital (575). In each of these cases, and in different ways subjectivity is linked to necessity, as either effect or cause. Thus, reading Althusser’s fragmented manuscript somewhat symptomatically Althusser’s aleatory conception of the mode of production must have a different relationship to subjectivity than is suggested by these concepts.

⁹ As early as the *1844 Manuscripts* Marx recognized in Political Economy a self-contradictory moral discourse on the values of thrift and spending, which Marx recognized to be something of a reflection of the contradictory tendencies of reducing ‘necessary labor’ while selling more commodities. (1964 150)

¹⁰ It should be clear given these particulars that Marx, following the political economists his is critiquing, is primarily concerned with western Europe, particularly England, and to a lesser extent North America.

¹¹ Louis Althusser calls this process by which the effects of a particular process are seized and turned to other purpose and other ends *détournement*: “This “detouring” is the mark of the non-teleology of the process and the inscription of its result in a process which has rendered it possible and which was totally alien to it.” (1994a 572, Translation Mine)

¹² In *Capital Volume I* in the chapters on “so-called primitive accumulation” Marx primarily deals with the expropriation of peasants from the land, and he is primarily concerned with the legal, or state centered, elements of this process. In *Capital Volume III* Marx provides something of a complement to this analysis in his analysis of the effects of usury and merchant capital on pre-capitalist property and social relations mode of production. What is important, I will argue about the relation between these two chapters, and volumes, is not that they complete the picture, as it were, comprising two sides of a finished picture, but that they open the formation of the capitalist mode of production, and the mode of production itself, up to its constitutive complexity. (1981 728-48)

¹³ Althusser makes a direct analogy between Machiavelli and Marx referring to “primitive political accumulation” in the former, the accumulation of the people and arms necessary to the constitution of the state. As Althusser writes: “We are all familiar with Part VIII of the first volume of *Capital* in which Marx tackles so-called ‘original [or primitive] accumulation.’ In this original accumulation, the ideologists of capitalism told the edifying story of the rise of capital just as the philosophers of natural law told the story of the rise of the state. In the beginning there was an independent worker who worked so enthusiastically, intelligently and economically that he was able to save and then exchange...Hence the accumulation of capital: by labor thrift and generosity. We know how Marx replied: with a story of pillage, theft, exaction, of the violent dispossession of the English peasantry...with quite a different story and one far more gripping than the moralizing platitudes of the ideologists of capitalism.” (1999 125)

¹⁴ In a published lecture course titled «*Il Faut Défendre la Société*» Foucault offers a genealogy of the counter-discourse of war and struggle, conceived as either a war of races or classes. While Foucault recognizes the a similar strategic significance to the discourse on war, an overturning of a moral discourse of right through an insistence of the violent conditions of the foundation of the state or social order, he explicitly rejects Machiavelli and Marx as “pretenders” to this counter-discourse. As Foucault writes: “the dialectic assures the constitution, across history, of a universal subject, a reconciled truth, a right in which all particulars would have their ordained place. The Hegelian dialectic, and all that have followed...must be understood...as the authoritarian colonization and pacification, by philosophy and right, of a historico-political discourse that is at the same time, a statement, a proclamation, and practice of social warfare.”(1997 50, Translation Mine) It would seem, however, that Foucault’s categorical denunciation overlooks the constitutive tension that Althusser underscores between the aleatory materialism of primitive accumulation and the teleology of other logics in Marx.

¹⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have related Marx’s critique of political economy to a particular type of violence that is difficult to critique because it is always presented as pre-accomplished and carrying its justification.

As Deleuze and Guattari write: “Hence the very particular character of state violence: it is very difficult to pinpoint this violence because it always presents itself as pre-accomplished. It is not even adequate to say that the violence rests with the mode of production. Marx made the observation in the case of capitalism: there is a violence that necessarily operates through the state, precedes the capitalist mode of production, constitutes the primitive accumulation and makes possible the capitalist mode of production itself. From a standpoint within the capitalist mode of production, it is very difficult to say who is the thief and who is the victim, or even where the violence resides. That is because the worker is born entirely naked and the capitalist objectively “clothed” an independent owner. That which gave the worker and the capitalist this form eludes us because it operated in other modes of production.” (1987 447)

¹⁶ The concept of law-making violence, the violence that instantiates a new legal order, as well as the distinction between law-making and law-preserving violence, the violence that maintains an existing order, is drawn from Walter Benjamin’s influential essay “The Critique of Violence.”(280)

¹⁷ In “Les mailles du pouvoir” Foucault goes so far as to argue for the reciprocal determination of disciplinary power and capitalism: capital requires disciplinary power and disciplinary power makes capitalism possible (1994 200). This lecture which was originally presented in Brazil in 1981 constitutes Foucault’s most appreciative estimation of the influence of Foucault’s relation to Marx. In this lecture not only does Foucault explicitly link the rise of capitalism with disciplinary power, a statement which can be found throughout Foucault’s work, but more importantly, and uncharacteristically, he locates in Marx’s work a complex thought of power. This final statement stands in sharp contrast to statements made in *The History of Sexuality* and *Power/Knowledge* in which Foucault argues that Marx, and more importantly, Marxism remains trapped in a “sovereign” concept of power in which power is viewed as something that can be possessed rather than a relation.

¹⁸ In the first edition of *Lire le Capital* Althusser expanded upon the extent to which this idea of *Darstellung* necessarily intersected with the problems of representation, and aesthetic representation through a comparison/etymology of the terms *Darstellung* and *Vorstellung*. As Althusser writes: “In *Vorstellung*, one certainly has to do with a position, but one which is presented *out front*, which thus supposes something which is kept *behind* this pre-position, something which is *represented* by that which is kept out in front [represented] by its emissary : the *Vorstellung*. In *Darstellung* on the contrary, there is nothing *behind* : the very thing is there, ‘da’ presented in the position of presence. “ (Althusser and Balibar 1965 646) For this point regarding the significance of the concept of structure/*Darstellung* and its history in Althusser’s thought I am indebted to Michael Sprinker *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism*, whose translation of the passage from Althusser I have relied upon here, (291) and Warren Montag “Althusser’s Nominalism: Structure and Singularity”.

¹⁹ Althusser in his contribution seems to refer to this relation as that between the regional mode of production and the global mode of production. (Althusser and Balibar 1975 397) In a sense giving the term mode of production, at the global level, a larger more inclusive sense that goes beyond the economic proper, which would seem to be a regional mode of production. It is this distinction that would justify Fredric Jameson’s claim that: “ If therefore one wishes to characterize Althusser’s Marxism as a structuralism, one must complete the characterization with the essential provision that it is a structuralism for which only *one* structure exists: namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole” (36)

²⁰ Marx considers the difference between a somewhat sporadic commodity production, excess goods sold to the market, and the commodity as general form of all production in an unpublished chapter of *Capital* (1977 953).

²¹Of course it is possible to argue that this second “moment” or strategy was always at work in the first, and thus that the entire self-presentation of the “reconstruction” was an attempt to contend with certain political and ideological adversaries. “For whatever may have been claimed, when [Althusser] enjoined us to ‘read *Capital*,’ it was not in order to restore some hypothetical purity of Marxism, but precisely in order to try to uncover the traces of the ideological class struggle of which Marx’s text was itself a site, at the very moment and in the very forms in which Marx established the concepts that made it possible to theorize this struggle for the first time.” (Lecourt,170)

²² The opening paragraph of Lukacs’ “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” reads as a definition of Althusser’s concept of expressive causality. “For at this stage in the history of mankind there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of commodity-structure.” (83)

²³ It is precisely this aspect of Marxism, its anthropology of labor, that Foucault rejects. “So I don’t think that we can accept the traditional Marxist analysis, which assumes that, labor being man’s concrete essence, the capitalist system is what transforms that labor into profit, into hyperprofit [*sur-profit*] or surplus value. The fact is, capitalism penetrates much more deeply into our existence. That system, as it was established in the nineteenth century, was obliged to elaborate a set of political techniques, techniques of power, by which people’s bodies and their time

would become labor power and labor time so as to be effectively used and thereby transformed into hyperprofit. But in order for there to be hyperprofit, there had to be an infra-power [*sous-pouvoir*]. A web of microscopic, capillary political power had to be established at the level of man's very existence, attaching men to the production apparatus, while making them into agents of production, into workers." (Foucault 2000 86). Here once again the juxtaposition of Foucault and Althusser is useful: whereas the former's relationship to Marx vacillates from appreciation to dismissal, the latter recognizes the vacillation internal to Marx's text.

²⁴ The following quote from Balibar would seem to be instructive here, provided that one keeps in mind that for Balibar (and Althusser) "ideology" is nothing other than the material production of subjectivity. "I even think that we can describe what such a schema would ideally consist of. It would not be the sum of a "base" and a "superstructure," working like a complement or supplement of historicity, but rather the combination of two "bases" of explanation or two determinations both incompatible and indissociable: the *mode of subjection* and the *mode of production* (or, more generally, the ideological mode and the generalized economic mode). Both are material, although in the opposite sense. To name these different senses of the materiality of subjection and production, the traditional terms *imaginary* and *reality* suggest themselves. One can adopt them, provided that one keep in mind that in any historical conjuncture, the effects of the imaginary can only appear through and by means of the real, and the effects of the real through and by means of the imaginary; in other words, the structural law of causality in history is the *detour through and by means of the other scene*. Let us say, parodying Marx, that economy has no more a "history of its own" than does ideology, since each has its history only through the other that is the efficient cause of its own effects." (1995b 160)