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Beyond the Intimations of Mortality: Chakrabarty, Anthropocene, and the Politics of the (Im)Possible

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The simple possibility that things might proceed otherwise... is sufficient to change the whole experience of practice and, by the same token, its logic.¹

The simple possibility that things might proceed otherwise is something in which there is depressingly little belief at present.²

In the concluding remarks of his *Representing Capital*, Fredric Jameson invokes a set of oppositions, delineated by Louis Althusser, between domination and exploitation. He notes that the mode of production is organized by the relations of production, or the structure of exploitation and domination is the effect of this structure, the means through which exploitation — the capitalist mode of production — reproduces itself. Jameson proceeds to develop this into an analytical and interpretive strategy, suggesting that an emphasis on exploitation is a socialist — utopian — program, while a focus on domination is a democratic one, a “program and language only too easily coopted by the capitalist state.” Through this he outlines an analytical strategy suggesting a possible change “in theory and in practice.”³ Jameson’s comments provide an important intervention in resituating the question of “exploitation” at the heart of critique, especially for engaging with social processes engendered by the capitalist mode of production. This is especially relevant for thinking about, and against, the contemporary turn to the post- and non-human in the academe that posits a non-hierarchical world, and is incurious about either capitalist exploitation, or transformative politics.

In this essay, drawing on Jameson’s “reading” strategy, I critically interrogate Dipesh Chakrabarty’s essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” which is symptomatic of this apolitical thrust of the post-/non-human. Chakrabarty situates the crisis of climate change as a function of the Anthropocene, that is, a human-dominated geological epoch. He contends that this has resulted in the collapse of the distinction

between natural and human history, which, in turn, qualifies notions of modernity, globalization, and human freedom. Stressing the need to put global histories of capital in conversation with the species history of humans, Chakrabarty probes the limits of historical understanding in his essay. I argue that Chakrabarty, despite his claim, resists the collapse between natural and human histories and, more crucially, between nature and history. Positing the historical materialist thesis of the production of nature — the reciprocal transformation of man and nature mediated through the labor process — against the idea of the Anthropocene, I posit the latter as representation of alienation, and alienated labor, from the perspective of capital. I read the climate crisis, not as an effect of domination but as the exploitation of external nature and human beings in contemporary capitalism. Subsequently, I examine Chakrabarty's anti-utopian politics of strategic fatalism, arguing it is a continuation of the politics of despair from *Provincializing Europe*. Finally, I read his idea of the emergent “negative universal history” against the grain, and argue that it, despite his assertions, gestures towards an (im)possible utopian — and planetary — future, and consciousness.

That “Thing” Called Labor

In his essay, Chakrabarty tells us the age of the Anthropocene — the era where human beings have become geological agents — attributes “to us a force on the same scale as that released at other times when there has been a mass extinction of species.”⁴ He notes:

There was no point in human history when humans were not biological agents. But we can become geological agents only historically and collectively... when we have reached numbers and invented technologies that are on a scale large enough to have an impact on the planet itself.⁵

This assertion presents certain conceptual difficulties. Foremost, we need to remind ourselves that external nature does not present itself to us separated out into biology and geology. Those categories are human disciplinary formations that allow us, through the use of human reason, to examine, understand, and command external nature. To speak of human beings as biological or geological agents is, then, to turn socially constructed distinctions into natural ones.

Further, Chakrabarty tells us that anthropogenic explanations of climate change have *collapsed* the distinction between human history and natural history.⁶ Drawing on the work of Alfred Crosby Jr., he notes that environmental history “has much to do with biology and geography but hardly ever imagined human impact on the planet on a geological scale. It was... as vision of man ‘as a prisoner of climate’... not of man as a maker of it.”⁷ It must be pointed out that this question has been taken up extensively by scholars, across disciplines, within the critical tradition of historical materialism. Taking up Marx's speculations on the production of nature that are scattered across

his oeuvre, they — this includes, but is not limited to, Theodore Adorno, Raymond Williams, Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Neil Smith — have expanded upon and extended Marx's observations to produce some of the most significant critical analyses of humans' productive, and reciprocal, relationship with their environments.⁸ Chakrabarty notes that "Croce and Collingwood would... enfold human history and nature, to the extent that the latter could be said to have history, into purposive human action."⁹ This omits a crucial, dialectical, aspect of the historical materialist exposition of the production of nature thesis: that we transform external nature with our labor, and in so doing transform ourselves. Marx's comment is instructive in this regard:

Labour is... a process in which both man and nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates and controls the material re-actions between himself and Nature. He opposes himself to Nature as one of her forces, setting in motion... the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.¹⁰

It provides a useful gloss to Chakrabarty's assertion that the distinction between human and natural history has collapsed. Indeed, it suggests we need to think not just about the two *histories* but the broader question of humans' relation to nature. If human beings are agents in the transformation of nature, we need to think about, necessarily, the question of the human production of nature, that is, the historicity of nature itself.

But let us examine Chakrabarty's contention about the *collapse* of human and natural history closely. Despite his assertions of a collapse, he nevertheless weighs in on the side of natural history, and a rather absolute conception of external nature. Take, for instance, his comment about the agricultural revolution. He writes that it was

*not just an expression of human inventiveness... [but was] made possible by certain changes in the... atmosphere, a certain stability of the climate... things over which human beings had no control... Without this 'extraordinary' 'fluke' of nature... our industrial-agricultural way of life would not have been possible.*¹¹

Chakrabarty tells us that external nature structures the *origin* of the agrarian way of life. How are we to understand his comment, "not just human inventiveness"? "Human inventiveness" here appears to stand in for human labor, and the above extract can be usefully read in light of Marx's explanation of use value in *Capital*:

Use-values... are combinations of two elements — matter and labour. If we take away the useful labour... a material substratum is always left, which is furnished by Nature without the help of man. The latter can only work as Nature does, that is by changing the form of matter... in this work... he is constantly helped by natural forces.¹²

However, it is not enough to simply think about the *origin* of agriculture but conceptualize it as an evolving social practice with consequences for the natural world. This is crucial, as the development of agriculture has transformed the *space* of our planet. One can only gesture in passing towards this long history: the clearing of forests across the world as human beings moved from a nomadic-pastoral to a settled agrarian life; the development of irrigation and farming techniques that transformed the shape of the land and founded civilizations; the emergence of urban centers and the attendant distinction between the country and the city; of local, trans-regional and global trade which have transformed the world materially. In addition, agriculture has also transformed external nature across the globe. Think, for instance, of the development of new varieties of agricultural products through the centuries, ranging from new strains of food grains, vegetables, and fruit, all the way to toxic BT cotton and pesticides.

An acknowledgement of these historical facts illuminates Chakrabarty's comment about the collapse of natural history and human history in a new way. By situating labor at the heart of this collapse — as the mediating category between humans and nature — I am suggesting that we think of nature not as something that is simply “out there” that determines our existence, but acknowledge that human beings actively shape the evolving, reciprocal, and historically conditioned, human-nature interaction. It is for precisely this reason that Raymond Williams notes that “the idea of nature contains, though unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history.”¹³

To think of labor is also to think about the conditions under which it is expended, and for what purpose. Human beings work on external nature to produce the means for satisfying their needs and, collectively, produce their material life. In so doing, however, human beings also transform themselves. This structures the production of consciousness, which is a natural and historical product of productive human activity. In addition, as human beings produce their material life, their productive labor begins to be differentiated. This division of labor produces “a systematic division of social experiences upon which human nature is constantly shaped and reshaped” leading to the development of classes in society.¹⁴

One of the divisions of labor which develops alongside production is “the division between manual and mental labor... [which] opens up... new vistas for the human production of consciousness.”¹⁵ In this regard, it is salutary to remind ourselves that natural history is profoundly social, predicated on labor, physical and mental, of human beings.¹⁶ The disciplines of geology, archaeology, and paleontology are

themselves significantly labor-intensive, requiring people to materially intervene in the physical landscape to constitute their “archives.” Moreover, paleontology and archaeology are historical narrativizations of our past, emerging as disciplines in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They are structured by their conditions of possibilities, namely, mercantile, industrial, and colonial capital over past centuries, and to a large extent by the military-industrial complex in the present moment. I want to make clear that I am not here gesturing towards a non-committal relativism regarding knowledge production but simply underlining that these disciplinary formations are social products.

The social division of labor, moreover, shapes definite forms of social organization that lead, through various mutations, to the contemporary capitalist mode of production.¹⁷ One of the key features of this historical trajectory is the transformation of the production process, into production for exchange rather than direct use. Under capitalism, production is governed by the rule of “accumulation for accumulation’s sake,” which becomes a socially imposed necessity. This has key consequences for the production of nature. As Neil Smith notes:

Under dictate from the accumulation process, capitalism as a mode of production must expand continuously if it is to survive... nature becomes a *universal means of production* in the sense that it not only provides the subjects, objects, and instruments of production, but is also in its totality an appendage to the production process... Under capitalism the appropriation of nature and its transformation into means of production occur for the first time at a world scale.¹⁸

Smith here is articulating the advent of capitalist modernity — singular and uneven — that structures our contemporary moment in decisive ways. It bears repeating that the modernity we know is capitalist, linked as it is to the emergence, expansion, and deepening of the capitalist relations of production; the global hegemony of capitalism as a mode of production; and the consequent restructuring of social relations and external nature across the globe in profoundly uneven ways.¹⁹ In other words, modernity is not something that “happens — or even... happens *first* — in the ‘the West’... to which others [the ‘Rest’] can subsequently gain access.”²⁰ On the contrary, such a conception understands our world as, simultaneously, *one and unequal*, that is, a singular world that is hierarchically structured and experienced. The advantage of such a formulation is that it *pluralizes the category of difference* through the inscription of *hierarchy*, rescuing it from ahistorical essentialism. Moreover, it allows us to think of the global south and the minority world of the global north dialectically; and of capital, without losing sight of its conditions of possibility, human beings as vectors of labor-power; and make sense of the uneven spatio-temporalities across scales. In short, it re-inscribes the question of exploitation at the heart of the critical enterprise.

The crisis of climate change should therefore be understood, not simply as humans transforming nature to the detriment of themselves, but a consequence of capital's relentless drive to expand; its systemic compulsion to accumulate for its own sake; and in so doing inflecting the productive process in a way that exploits nature, external nature and human beings, without any sense of consequence for either, until it takes the form of a global crisis.²¹ I am suggesting here, then, that the climate crisis is a crisis of capital: it is brought about by capital, and, insofar as it intimates human extinction, poses a barrier to its relentless drive to accumulate.

What does this do to our understanding of the Anthropocene? Examined from this vantage, the notion of the Anthropocene appears to be a representation of labor, the mediating category between humans and external nature, and the pre-eminent commodity in the capitalist mode of production. By equating labor to a geological force — an unthinking physical force, unmoored from its societal context — these theorists provide a fetishized representation of it.²² Further, this dehumanization of labor also dehumanizes human beings, reducing them to the level of mere matter, obfuscating social hierarchies.²³ The category of the Anthropocene, then, conceptualizes and represents living labor (and the human subject) from the perspective of capital, as an object or thing. It is the representational form of alienation, and alienated labor. To think of labor as a thing or matter is then to disavow questions of exploitation, positing a sense of domination in its stead. Such a move also, necessarily, denies the possibility of a politics of utopian social transformation. I will now examine the figuration of politics in Chakrabarty's essay.

The (Im)Possible Figure of Politics

To think about transformative politics is to think of possible futures in relation to the present. We need to then assess how the present is delineated in Chakrabarty. He writes that the Anthropocene requires us to put global histories of capital in conversation with the species history of humans. This is necessary because “only a critique of capital is not sufficient for addressing questions relating to human history once the crisis of climate change has been acknowledged.”²⁴ Chakrabarty justifies this claim by championing historical contingency, noting that it shaped “the transition from wood to coal... [just as] Coincidences and historical accidents... litter the stories of the ‘discovery’ of oil, of the oil tycoons, and of the automobile industry.”²⁵

The world that Chakrabarty delineates for us, then, is a world that is structured by contingency alone. This underlined by his use of evocative descriptors for human action. He tells us that “human beings have *tumbled* into being a geological agent.”²⁶ Likewise we are told that there is nothing “inherent to the human species that has pushed us... into the Anthropocene. We have *stumbled* into it.”²⁷ And again, in speaking of the industrial way of life, he writes: “we have *slid* into a state of things.”²⁸ He also tells us that the human choice of fuels (“the transition from wood to coal”) and, eventually, fossil fuels (“the ‘discovery’ of oil, of the oil tycoons, and of the automobile

industry”), were contingent decisions.

Several issues need to be highlighted here, all consequences of this view of a contingent world. First, such an exposition of history does away with human beings as purposive agents. Second, by making no distinction in the move from wood to coal to fossil fuels, it undermines any sense of historical periodization. Take his reduction, for instance, of the history of the automobile industry to coincidences and historical accidents. Its long history — which straddles Henry Ford and his Model T, Fordism, the working-class movements, the outsourcing of automobile manufacturing to Asian countries, and the decline of Detroit as an urban space — is presented as the function of an extraordinary fluke. It severely undermines any question of historicity and transformation, let alone questions of justice, environmental or otherwise. The consequence of this is telling: in effect, we are presented with a social world without social cause or social consequence.

And it is precisely for this reason that Chakrabarty can characterize climate change as “an *unintended* consequence of human actions and shows, only through scientific analysis, the effects of our *actions as a species*... [where] there are no lifeboats... for the rich and privileged... [as shown by] the drought in Australia or... fires in the wealthy neighborhoods of California.”²⁹ He is careful in delineating his understanding of the term “species,” noting that it is “the name of a placeholder for an emergent, new universal history of humans that flashes up in the moment of the danger that is climate change.”³⁰ While it is undoubtedly accurate that the crisis affects everyone, it is also true that it affects different classes of people, in our one and unequal world, differentially. There are indeed “no lifeboats for the rich and privileged” in the context of the climate crisis. However, it is nevertheless also true that “lifeboats” have very different resonances for the Syrian refugees negotiating the Mediterranean Sea to seek refuge in Europe and, say, the President of the United States of America. Furthermore, to speak of climate change as an “unintended consequence” in the age of the Anthropocene is to also disavow questions of accountability and, simultaneously, socialize culpability. In other words, global warming is the result of our action as a *species*, where no distinction is made between Volkswagen cars emitting nitrogen dioxide and the Bangladeshi housewife cooking her meal using firewood.

But let us consider how he engages the idea of “species” a little more closely. Chakrabarty tells us that the category of species is a “placeholder of an *emergent, new history* of humans that flashes up in the moment of... climate change” — it does not precede but is activated by the climate crisis. Yet, in speaking of the constitutive dimension of the crisis, he nevertheless descends into an awkward circularity, and presentism, in suggesting that the climate crisis is the “effects of our actions as a *species*.” Let me rephrase the problematic for the sake of greater clarity. In Chakrabarty’s formulation, the climate crisis calls into being a social whole (species) which he, simultaneously, claims is also the source of the crisis, an untenable proposition by his own logic. How are we to understand this paradoxical claim, which locates the

constitution of the crisis on to a category (“species”) that emerges *ex post facto*? This paradox can be understood as pointing towards the absent category of labor — more specifically, the social (and international) division of labor — that constitutes the exploitative class character of the capitalist mode of production, which, as a spectral presence, haunts Chakrabarty’s theorizations.³¹

Let me now turn to the explicit references to human freedom and politics in Chakrabarty’s essay. He writes that idea of the Anthropocene “severely qualifies humanist histories of Modernity/Globalization,” which is linked to another qualification that is equally, if not more, important: regarding human freedom. He writes: “Is the Anthropocene a critique of the narratives of freedom? Is the geological agency of humans the price we pay for the pursuit of freedom? *In some ways, yes.*”³² While Chakrabarty suggests that “any way out of our current predicament cannot but refer to the idea of deploying reason in global, collective life,” he is nevertheless swift in undercutting this possibility:

There is one consideration though that qualifies this optimism about the role of reason and that has to do with the most common shape that freedom takes in human societies: politics. *Politics has never been based on reason alone. And politics in the age of the masses and in a world already complicated by sharp inequalities between and inside nations is something no one can control.*³³

This is supported by his citation of Mark Maslin’s “gloomy thoughts”: “It is unlikely that global politics will solve global warming... [because it] requires nations and regions to plan for the next 50 years, something that most societies are unable to do... we must prepare for the worst and adapt.”³⁴

Some of the claims of this passage about politics bear noting: it is *not* a function of reason alone, and, in our contemporary moment of intense global inequalities, is beyond human control. Not only does this formulation seem incurious about the historical constitution of the “sharp inequalities between and inside nations,” it also delinks politics from any utopian project of social transformation — the ability to imagine, and actualize, better and just futures — gesturing instead towards a pessimism of the intellect that trumps, quite decisively, the optimism of the will. Crucially, by stressing human *inability* to think and act in a utopian manner, Chakrabarty implicitly suggests a unidirectional future where human destiny is marked by the impending telos of human extinction, what one commentator has called “a collective, planetary, being-toward-death.”³⁵ In short, it removes the dialectical armature of history, reworking the “barbarism or socialism” thesis of Left-Hegelian thought into a strategic fatalism where human beings can only “prepare for the worst and adapt.”

Chakrabarty’s notion of politics in this essay — which I am calling a strategic fatalism — is a continuation of his ideas that he inaugurated in *Provincializing Europe*.

Readers will recall that in that text he proposes a two-fold conception of history — the two histories of capital, to be precise — characterized by him as History 1 (H-1) and History 2 (H-2). H-1 is the logic internal to capital itself — the past posited by capital as its own precondition. Chakrabarty understands H-1 as the driving force of capital, one that shapes its own universal and necessary history. Besides H-1, he also discerns in Marx a delineation of others histories of capital, H-2s that capital encounters as antecedents that are not established by itself, or as forms of its own life-process. H-1, in Chakrabarty’s schema, must constantly attempt to destroy or subjugate these H-2s while, in turn, H-2s “inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital’s own logic.”³⁶ To put this another way, H-1 is that which produces notions of sameness across the globe as part of capital’s universalizing drive, while H-2 — which Chakrabarty invests with the *political* task of interrupting and resisting capital’s universalizing drive — remains the motor for the production of difference in our world, and signals the myriad ways of being in the world. The central problem with such a theorization, besides its inability to engage with how H-1 is implicated in the production of hierarchical difference, is its consequence for a transformative politics, of any kind. Chakrabarty locates politics in the arena of a counterfactual, possible past. Politics, then, becomes not a question of *what could be*, but *what might have been*. It moves the idea of transformative politics from imagining and shaping possible futures to the domain of contemplating possible pasts, a politics of despair. This anti-utopianism is restated as a strategic fatalism in his essay.

Furthermore, speaking of the parametric conditions of human existence, Chakrabarty states:

we cannot afford to destabilize conditions... that work like boundary parameters of human existence. These parameters are *independent* of capitalism or socialism... we have now ourselves become a geological agent *disturbing* these parametric conditions needed for our own existence.³⁷

Significantly, for him, these conditions “hold *irrespective* of our political choices.”³⁸ These claims require careful examination. On one hand, in what seems eerily similar to claims of environmental determinism, he claims that the parametric conditions of human existence are “independent of capitalism or socialism,” and hold “irrespective of our political choices.” I take the terms “capitalism” and “socialism” to be conceptual shorthand for different forms (and conceptions) of social organization of life, as well as different political choices. Restated, this statement posits that our existence and its limits are not determined (“independent of”; “irrespective”) by social being as lived, thought, and practised. Yet, Chakrabarty also claims the human beings are “disturbing” these parametric conditions, that is, these conditions are *historical*, structured and determined by human choices and actions. What we are presented with, then, is another paradoxical proposition — the performative contradiction, if

you will — that the parametric conditions of human existence are both determined and not determined by human action.

This illuminates in Chakrabarty an (im)possible figuration of practical politics. It acknowledges that in spite of itself the parametric conditions of our existence are historical and follow from the “collapse” of not just natural and human histories, but from the simultaneous historicization of nature and naturalization of history.³⁹ More pertinent to my point about politics, this paradox actually opens up the possibility of a transformative politics — a struggle over the historically constituted parametric conditions of our existence in the present for the sake of the future.

This figuration of an (im)possible politics is also evident in Chakrabarty’s delineation of a negative universal history. Moving away decisively from his earlier position (in *Provincializing Europe*) that condemned any form of unifying social temporality as totalizing and historicist, he now posits an emergent, universal, species-history of humanity: a “negative universal history.”⁴⁰ But this universal, he notes, is something we can never understand because

one *never* experiences being a concept... [we] may not experience ourselves as a geological agent... we appear to have become one at the level of species. And without that knowledge that *defies* historical understanding there is no making sense of the current [climate] crisis.⁴¹

Yet, such an easy and firm separation of percepts (experience) from concepts is incurious about history, and actual historical struggles. Chakrabarty himself lists a range of struggles from the past:

the struggle against slavery; the Russian and Chinese revolutions; the resistance to Nazism and Fascism; the decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s and the revolutions in Cuba and Vietnam; the evolution and explosion of the rights discourse; the fight for civil rights for African Americans, indigenous peoples, Indian *Dalits*...⁴²

These struggles for emancipation were — and continue to be — predicated on actual experiences of socially constructed notions of inferiority (concepts), and the deployment of reason in resistance against them to actualize a better and just future. When someone is lynched in India for eating a certain kind of meat, or shot dead in the United States for being of a certain skin color, they *do* indeed experience themselves as concepts. It is important, then, to restate that we become self-aware and constitute ourselves as subjects — experience ourselves as concepts — relationally, that is, in our relations with other human beings, in society. To be human, as Spivak notes, “is to be intended toward the other.”⁴³ Indeed, Chakrabarty’s scepticism is tenable if, and only if, we assume that the contemporary world is constituted by monadic individuals, a

difficult proposition to justify.

The crisis of climate change, by virtue of pointing us towards species-level extinction that is caused by a specific exploitative social organization of labor and productive forces, namely the capitalist mode of production, also gestures towards the planet as site of struggle, at a planetary scale; and gestures towards an emergent planetary consciousness, if only as a utopian possibility, a structure of feeling. Read from this vantage, the fundamentally anti-utopian proposition of a negative universal history that we supposedly can never know loses its inherent scepticism regarding human's capacity for reason. Instead, it challenges, and reinvigorates the human imagination, "responsible, responsive, answerable," to imagine the (im)possible planetary future of a better and just tomorrow.⁴⁴

Notes

1. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1980) 99.
2. Peter Osborne, "The Politics of Time," *Literature and The Contemporary: Fictions and Theories of the Present*, ed. Roger Luckhurst and Peter Marks. (New York: Routledge, 1999) 36.
3. Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011) 149-50.
4. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Thesis," *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009): 207.
5. Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" 206-07.
6. "The Climate of History" 201.
7. "The Climate of History" 206.
8. See Theodore Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History" in Robert Hullot Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodore Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press) 252-304; Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1973); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Malden: Blackwell, 1999); Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Culture, and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990). Also see Friedrich Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature*. https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/EngelsDialectics_of_Nature_part.pdf.
9. "The Climate of History" 203.
10. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, Volume 1: The Process of Capitalist Production* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 173.
11. "The Climate of History" 217-18, emphasis added.
12. Marx, *Capital* 50.
13. Williams, "Ideas of Nature" 67.
14. Smith, *Uneven Development* 57.
15. *Uneven Development* 62.
16. See, for my argument about coolie labor being the condition of possibility of colonial expedition of the Himalaya, Sandeep Banerjee, "'Not Altogether Unpicturesque': Samuel Bourne and the Landscaping of the Victorian Himalaya," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 42.3 (2014) 351-68.
17. On this, see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology: Part 1 and Selections from Parts 2 and 3* (New York: International Publishers, 1970).
18. *Uneven Development* 70.
19. See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002) and Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," *The Cultures of Globalization*, eds. Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 54-80.
20. Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015) 13.
21. For more on the question of crisis, see Jason Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation*

- of *Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015). Also see, Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).
22. For a different critique of the Anthropocene, also from a historical materialist vantage, see Daniel Cunha, "The Anthropocene as Fetishism," *Mediations* 28.2 (2015) 65-77. For a recent engagement with the Anthropocene from the perspective of the "production of nature" thesis, see Susan Millar and Don Mitchell, "The Tight Dialectic: Anthropocene and the Capitalist Production of Nature," *Antipode* 49.S1 (2017): 75-93.
 23. For a critique of Bruno Latour, see Crystal Bartolovich, "Is the post in posthuman the post in postmedieval?," *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 1.1-2 (2010) 19-31. Also see the section "Posthumanism as Imperialism" in Timothy Brennan, *Borrowed Light Volume I: Vico, Hegel, and the Colonies*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).
 24. "The Climate of History" 212.
 25. "The Climate of History" 216.
 26. "The Climate of History" 210, emphasis added.
 27. "The Climate of History" 217.
 28. "The Climate of History" 217.
 29. "The Climate of History" 221, emphasis added.
 30. "The Climate of History" 221-22.
 31. It is instructive to remind ourselves of Gayatri Spivak's critique of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze along the same lines. See Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds., Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1988) 271- 316.
 32. "The Climate of History" 210, my italics.
 33. "The Climate of History" 210-11, emphasis added.
 34. "The Climate of History" 211-12.
 35. Ian Baucom, "History 40: Postcolonial Method and Anthropocene Time," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 1.1 (2014) 140. See also Ian Baucom, "The Human Shore: Postcolonial Studies in an Age of Natural Science," *History of the Present*, 2.1 (2012) 1-13.
 36. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) 62-66.
 37. "The Climate of History" 218, emphasis added.
 38. "The Climate of History" 219, emphasis added.
 39. On this, see Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History" 252-260.
 40. "The Climate of History" 222. For his critique of historicism see *Provincializing Europe*.
 41. "The Climate of History" 220-21, emphasis added.
 42. "The Climate of History" 208.
 43. Gayatri C. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2003) 73.
 44. Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* 102.

