

INSURGENT UNIVERSALITY



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INSURGENT UNIVERSALITY

An Alternative Legacy of Modernity

MASSIMILIANO TOMBA

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PREFACE

Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity embodies Heretical Thought, and not just because Massimiliano Tomba is a heretic himself. He advances a heretical body of work that challenges Hegel, Kant, and early Marx in addition the library of political theorists and scholars they influenced. He shows how we must bring in from the margins of the modern canon of political theory a group of passionate early advocates for the commons as an alternative to making private property sacrosanct. By so doing, Tomba presents readers with a highly original notion of universality, one that advances through insurgencies that interrupt the nation-state by undermining state sovereignty. These insurgencies are not the libertarian fantasy of “a mass of atomized individuals” banging down the doors of the state. Instead, by participating in the social sphere outside the reach of the state, they have erected a “rich multiplicity of institutions.” In questioning whether individuals are organized or housed within colliding social spheres, Tomba advances an inherently democratic argument that they are, and can continue to be organized within social institutions that precede political and economic institutions.¹

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To create a sweeping argument that privileges society, and recognizes a global capacity for democratization, not advancing self-interested individuals, individualism, or the state, Tomba jettisons the idea that time is an arrow—rejecting “linear development” and opting for a “historical multiverse” instead of a “uni-verse.” He breaks free from the 17th-century Enlightenment notion of *terra nullius*, on which European colonialists relied to deny Indigenous peoples the right to stay on their land, and from the assumption that this arrangement was the inevitable consequence of developments in European societies.

The English and Scottish Enlightenment principle that the state should protect private property as an individual right was not foreordained, not an “anthropological constant that is reproduced in every human grouping at different levels of development.” Universalizing the idea that private property was a necessary component of civilization gave European colonialists the means to strip Indigenous peoples of their lands—and modern-day scholars the means to strip alternative views, old and new, from their reading lists.

Tomba focuses on how John Locke rejected the common possession of lands, calling Indigenous peoples “uncivil” and “wild.” Yet more than forty years before Locke’s *Second Treatise*, Gerrard Winstanley published *A Declaration from the Poor Oppressed People of England* that challenged what he called “Particular Propriety.” Winstanley, an English Protestant religious reformer, founded the Diggers (or the True Levellers), who protested enclosures by occupying public lands that had been privatized.

Tomba wants us to read, for instance, this line-by-line:

The power of enclosing land and owning property was brought into the creation by your ancestors by the sword; which first did murder their fellow creatures, men, and after plunder or steal away their land, and left this land successively to you, their children. . . .And therefore, though you did not kill or thieve,

yet you hold that cursed thing in your hand by the power of the sword; and so you justify the wicked deeds of your fathers . . .

Winstanley, like Jacques Roux and François-Noël Babeuf, has been peremptorily excluded from the modern political theory canon.

Tomba asks us to read these heretical thinkers closely because they dispute the idea that property is an individual right, like freedom and equality. From peasants to sans-culottes, Communards, and Zapatistas, he writes, Indigenous peoples have “experimented with democracy as a practice that concerns taking care of both the community and the land they worked.” Looking back to the medieval era, the idea of the commons existed under the Teutons, the Romans, and the Celts. There is no reason that land must be private, or that power must be “monopolized by the state.”

Specific moments within history effect change, but these moments are not necessarily sequential. Ideas zig-zag or ping-pong over time. The Dark Ages did not promise the Enlightenment; it was only during the Enlightenment that we could congratulate ourselves about the light coming on. Not pursuing “the arrow” allows Tomba to give us alternative trajectories, and to him the years 1793, 1871, 1918, and 1994 provide instructive case studies.

For example, the idea of the commons reappeared during the French Revolution with the publication of *The Manifesto of the Enragés* and *The Manifesto of the Equals*. And in contemporary society we have seen this type of insurgent universality among the Zapatistas in the Mexican region of Chiapas, as well as at Standing Rock in the United States and Canada:

Chiapas, the Zapatista insurgency, is not for peasants’ ownership of the land; it stands against its individualization and for common possession, democratically regulated in the forms of local self-government.

In this [system], the relation between the land and those who use it is not one of unilateral exploitation but of mutual

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assistance: “The concept of property is redefined as usufruct on the part of human generations, which use the land as *boni patres familias* [good family fathers]. Not only does this concept denote an attitude towards common land, but it is spatially and temporally broadened: no subject, individual or collective, even the entire humanity, that is of one’s own epoch, is “owner of the earth.”

If we start with the priority of the territory, not of its occupant, the network of property relations changes profoundly, becoming defined and delimited. The individual subject ceases to be at the center of these relationships, replaced by “the connective fabric and . . . the groups that an individual was part of.” In similar fashion, Europe ceases to be considered the center of the world, and a single linear, teleological narrative no longer defines our understanding.

Tomba’s book corrects notions not just of ownership, democracy, and natural rights but of causality, linearity, and individuality. He connects such seemingly disparate histories that Hegel, Kant, and, later, Marx “missed,” such as the Russian *obshchina*, the Paris Commune, and the Andean *ayllu*, all with erudition, wit, passion, and boundless imagination. *Insurgent Universality* alters our way of thinking about insurgency and democracy, and thus makes an outstanding addition to the Heretical Thought series at Oxford University Press.

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The maturation of this book profited from my long stays in the United States. At times, to refresh one's thoughts, there is nothing better than to move your life into a new environment and let yourself go through a change of space and times. *Insurgent Universality* benefited from conversations with many new and old friends and with colleagues of the New and Old Worlds. Special thanks go to all my friends at the Advanced Research Collaborative and the Committee on Globalization and Social Change at The Graduate Center, CUNY. I cannot mention everyone, but everyone gets my collective thanks. I do want to distinguish those with whom I have continued a rich and long dialogue, like Susan Buck-Morss, Duncan Faherty, Uday Mehta, Julie Skurski, and Gary Wilder. I have been fortunate to draw on conversations with all of them, and I am very grateful for their comments on parts of my book. Uday has become an indispensable interlocutor, and I am sure he will find pieces of our common conversation in this book.

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INTRODUCTION

Decolonizing Modern History

To treat the past (better: what has been) in accordance with a method that is no longer historical but political.

— WALTER BENJAMIN¹

IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, ONE of the many revolutionaries who has been removed from the dominant historiography compared all human history to a huge river bounded by two dikes: on one side, that of the guardians of the state and conservation; on the other, that of the reformists with their faith in progress. The two groups, on opposite sides of the river, hurl insults at each other, but they fully agree that the river should remain in its channel. Sometimes, however, the river floods over the dikes and “jumps” onto an unexpected trajectory. It engulfs the banks and gives the landscape a new physiognomy. Insurgent universality can be compared to this river when the practice of democracy exceeds the constitutional shell of the state.

In *Insurgent Universality*, I reinterpret the history of some revolutionary events through those collective endeavors that are the declarations, manifestos, and constitutions. As any activist well knows, writing a manifesto, declaration, or political document is always a collective endeavor. There are different drafts, sentences cut out and paragraphs added. A declaration is a battlefield on which different positions temporarily converge. For each of them, there correspond not only proper names of people but also, and

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above all, social forces. The author of a declaration, if and when one can speak of a single author, is only the pen in which tensions, conflicts, agreements, and disagreements converge.

When I discuss the French Revolution, it is not through the writings of Robespierre or Saint-Just that I reinterpret it. In the same way, when I discuss the Russian Revolution, the names of the great leaders and their writings remain in the background. Building an alternative canon of modernity, as an appendix to an *Alternative Legacy*, requires a double move. The first move requires abandoning the privileged point of view of both great theorists and leaders, but not to substitute them with other leaders or figures marginalized by the dominant historiography. Rather, and this is the second move, it is about considering the practice of insurgents as theory in action that goes to constitute the collective ink with which the political documents of an insurgency are written. Insurgent universality is mainly anonymous, because when democracy is real, its practice does not need great personalities or leaders.

The universality that I call insurgent is an experiment with time, space, and politics. If one casts off the dogma of the philosophy of universal history, the enormous political and economic material that constitutes the present ceases to be organized in terms of advanced, backward, or residual forms. It instead becomes an interweaving of temporalities that recombine in the moment of an insurgency. As happened in Russia, with the rural commune when populists and Socialist Revolutionaries tried to combine the forms of local self-government and collective ownership of the peasant communities with the workers' councils. As was the case during the Paris Commune, when the Communards referred to medieval forms of local self-government to reconfigure them in a socialist sense. As it is the case in Chiapas, where the Zapatistas recall the true spirit of the 1917 Constitution and the self-government of indigenous communities. These experiments must be investigated not in the abstract but, rather, by digging through the temporal layers of existent historical material. Universality is not a mere

problem of scale but also of relationships and bridges between temporalities that can be both coeval and dislocated in other historical layers.

CHRONOTONES

One can date the beginning of modernity with the capitalist era (sixteenth century) or with the birth of the modern state (seventeenth century), or even with the industrial revolutions of the late eighteenth century. In any case, in accordance with self-representation of modern (Western) history, these events would catapult Europe into a vanguard position in world history, on the tip of the vector of a unilinear conception of historical time. What we call “modernity” corresponds to a certain conception of history, or rather to its singularization, which in the German language took place in the late eighteenth century and coincided with the semantic change of the word *Geschichte* that changed from the plural “histories” to the collective singular “history.” The latter is the prerequisite of the modern Western idea of universal history (*allgemeine Weltgeschichte*).²

This term is anything but neutral. The prefix *Welt* does not simply mean “world”; it has a strong unifying and ordering significance. Universal history is presented as a line along which events take place from the origins to the present, and the universal historian works backward toward the origins in order to find the meaning of those events.³ When Hegel made use of the concept of universal history, he placed the modern state at the tip of the historical-temporal arrow and worked backward, ordering every age in relation to the modern Western conception of freedom. From Hegel’s perspective, teleological directionality was bound to the past more than to the future. Teleology served to justify the historical trajectory that led to a certain configuration of the Western modernity. It was the Hegelian-Fichtean philosopher August Cieszkowski who would project teleology toward the future.⁴ In

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both cases, the teleology of history is based on the assumption that historical time is an arrow, against which it would be possible to lay out qualitative differences in quantitative terms. Thus, non-state political forms become pre-state and non-capitalist economic forms become pre-capitalist. In this way, the enormous range of possibilities offered by the countless non-capitalist forms is subsumed in the definition of backward or pre-capitalist forms as if their future were enclosed in that “pre”: becoming capitalist forms. In the historiographical approach I propose here, I intend to keep open the potentiality that those forms hold as alternative trajectories of modernity.

The dominant Western representation of historical time presumes a certain conception of time and space as metahistoric universals valid everywhere that enable comparison. It was Kant who elevated space and time to “pure” forms of intuition, preceding any experience and able to order each experience into coherent representations. This time, as a condition of possibility of any representation, “cannot be made representable to us except under the image of a line, insofar as we draw it.”⁵ Indeed, Gottfried Herder rebelled against this absolute conception of time, strictly stating, in contrast to Kant, that “every changing thing has in itself the measure of its own time. . . . There are not two things in the world that have the same measure of time. The beat of my pulse, the course or the sequence of my thoughts are not the measure of time for others; the course of a stream, the growth of a tree are not the measure of time for all streams, trees and plants. . . . Therefore, (we can say with a daring but nevertheless exact expression) there exists an infinite multiplicity of temporalities in the universe at the same time; the time that we imagine to be the measure of everything is only a proportion made up of our thoughts, . . . an illusion.”⁶ For us, it is not a question of choosing, in a more or less arbitrary manner, Herder’s *Metakritik* instead of Kant’s *Kritik* but, rather, asking ourselves what conception of time is appropriate to our present and the duties of politics today.

Reinhart Koselleck and, before him, Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Karl Marx in his later days pluralized historical temporalities. For Koselleck, historical research is “not of one historical time, but rather of many forms of time superimposed one upon the other.”⁷ Koselleck, by paying attention to the simultaneity of multiple historical times, observed that the spatializing metaphor has the advantage of pluralizing the concept of time: “temporal strata” (*Zeitschichten*) refer, as in the geological model, to multiple layers of time (*Zeitebenen*) of different lengths and from different places, but which are nonetheless simultaneously present and active.⁸ According to Koselleck, “history contains many differentiable strata, each changing faster or slower, anyhow each of them with different paces of change.”⁹ But these different paces of change (*Veränderungsgeschwindigkeiten*) still refer to a historical temporality against which one can measure the greater or lesser speed of the changes. Instead, what I want to address is the art of pluralizing the historical times in such a way as to transform a quantitative difference (the speed of the change) into a qualitative difference (temporality).

In the 1950s, looking at anti-colonial struggles, Ernst Bloch developed an idea, counter to the unilinearity of historical time, of a “broad, flexible and thoroughly dynamic ‘multiverse.’ . . . A unilinear model must be found obsolete if justice is to be done to the considerable amount of non-European material. It is no longer possible to work without curves in the series; without a new and complex time-manifold (the problem of ‘Riemannian time’).”¹⁰ Walter Benjamin introduced the idea of the “differential of time.” What the dominant historiography considers deviations, which “disturb the main line of inquiry,” are for Benjamin the basis of his conception of history.¹¹ According to Benjamin, the task of the real historical materialist is not just about explaining the past, reconstructing it from its dark side, but also turning it into something incomplete.¹² From this perspective, it is about working with the roads not taken, or repressed, which, from the past, can shed

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light on the possibilities that were left unfinished but remain vital to re-imagine our present.

Finally, Marx, in his later years and in dialogue with the Russian populists, devised a geological conception of history in which different layers overlap. In a letter to Vera Zasulich, Marx writes that it would be a mistake to consider the different forms of “primitive” communities as belonging to the same historical stratum: “as in geological formations, these historical forms contain a whole series of primary, secondary, tertiary types, etc.”¹³ In this new vision, as Marx learned from Nikolay Chernyshevsky, historical jumps were possible and Russia did not have to go through the process of capital accumulation that had taken place in Europe. On the contrary, as we will see in chapter 4, the Russian agrarian commune could have been the basis for new collective forms of land ownership.¹⁴ In the 1860s, Marx had already investigated the relationship between industrial capital and archaic and new forms of social relations. He observed that the capitalist mode of production incessantly encounters preexisting forms and it “encounters them as antecedents, but not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life process.”¹⁵ The result of this encounter, as Harry Harootunian points out, gives rise to “a heterogeneous mix rather than the destruction of one made by another.”¹⁶ This “heterogeneous mix” of temporalities, in which archaic forms co-exist and overlap with new forms, gives rise to social and political conflicts, whose outcomes are not predefined by any law of history. These unpredictable results are demarcated by the political struggle for the orientation of new historical trajectories.

In the examples given, the modern conception of universal history is rearticulated into a plurality of historical temporalities interwoven and in friction with each other. A new conception of history as multiverse requires a different conception of time, which I develop in these pages by including myself in the tradition that goes from Benjamin and Bloch to latter-day Marx. There is need for an elastic time, as Ernst Bloch suggested, borrowing the idea of space conceived by mathematician Bernhard Riemann;

or, borrowing another concept from mathematics, a topological time, thus as a circle drawn on a handkerchief, then crumpled and wrinkled, and in which the distance between points becomes variable and the past can overlap the present.¹⁷ In other words, there is no longer need for a time that is absolute and Newtonian. Rather, a time that, just as in relativistic physics is bent by gravity, so too, in history is bent by the density of events.

There exists a chronological time that always goes by the same, without quality and indifferent to any qualitative change. Its absolutism leads one to say that if a civilization has remained “backward” it is because it has used its time poorly. But there is no such thing as having used time well or poorly. Time is used in different ways, and this qualitative difference impresses upon time a rhythm and a direction: a *temporality*. Global, social, and political space must be interpreted as entirely temporalized: there are different rhythms, speeds, and legacies that run parallel, intersect, and conflict when one temporality imposes itself as dominant and tries to synchronize the others. These conflicts act as prisms that refract the white light of universal history in the colors of the different temporalities.

The pluralization of historical temporalities responds today to the need to understand and intervene in a globalized world that requires, beside provincializing Europe,¹⁸ also overcoming the provincialism of time, “one for which,” wrote T. S. Eliot, “history is merely the chronicle of human devices which have served their turn and been scrapped, one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares.”¹⁹ In order to de-provincialize time, one needs to reconfigure the discourse on history. The modern conception of history, and the historical time that underlies it, has become untenable today, for several reasons. First, the singularization of the concept of history is ideological, since it processes historical ruptures, absorbing them in the historical continuum or transforming them into deviations with respect to the normative trajectory of modernity based on the state, private property, and the capitalist mode of production.

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In light of this concept of history, Tocqueville and the young Hegelians could only draw a single line that went from the Ancien Régime to the French Revolution to Napoleon, the meaning of which was an enormous process of concentration of power in the new state machine.²⁰ The same conception of history could also lead to reading the Terror, or anything that spills over from a supposed normative-liberal course of Western history, as *déravage* or, as in Benedetto Croce's interpretation of fascism, a historical "parenthesis."²¹ Second, the singularization of history in universal history is intrinsically Eurocentric and colonial. It puts European civilization at the top of the historical-temporal vector, judging the enormous variety of non-European political and economic forms as pre-capitalist or premodern. This conception of history allowed for John Stuart Mill's colonial liberalism, which, by operating in the disjuncture between universalism and its actualization, considers despotism the appropriate political form for backward states of society populated by "nonage" races.²² The concept of universalism, not unlike other "isms" such as nationalism, liberalism, and even socialism, operates as a temporalized and temporalizing arrow concept. Modern political concepts are presented as universal, operating as temporal vectors that, as bearers of a unifying need, produce historical-temporal differentiations and gradations of historical time that become stages along the arrow of unilinear historical time.

The modern conception of history has produced the image of history as an inevitable development passing through necessary phases. Thus, on the one hand, there arose, on opposing political sides, the image of the "underdeveloped" or "developing" countries, heading toward the unequivocal development model of free-market economics and a liberal democratic state. On the other hand, the same conception of history gave rise to an image of economic development in phases, so that the transition to socialism should have required passage through the capitalist mode of production and the development of its intrinsic contradictions. Movements for decolonization reacted against this conception of

history. In a letter of October 24, 1956, that Aimé Césaire wrote to Maurice Thorez, at that time the secretary of the French Communist Party, Césaire denounced the paternalism of the Communist Party members: “their inveterate assimilationism; their unconscious chauvinism; their fairly simplistic faith, which they share with bourgeois Europeans, in the omnilateral superiority of the West; their belief that evolution as it took place in Europe is the only evolution possible, the only kind desirable, the kind the whole world must undergo.”²³ Finally, denouncing the “emaciated universalism” that suppresses the multiplicity of particular and alternative paths of development, Césaire presented an alternative vision of universalism based on a solidarity that respects the particulars.²⁴ With that letter, Césaire announced his resignation from the party.

There is a third reason that makes the modern conception of historical time untenable. Empty and homogenous time is purely abstract, but it has real effects. It is the time of capital or, more precisely, it is the time of socially necessary labor that, through the world’s stock markets, marks the rhythm of the production of commodities in the world market. Its real effects can be observed in the differentiation of levels of exploitation around the globe. What I want to emphasize is the co-presence of trajectories not synchronized by the dominant temporality of socially necessary labor time and the nation-state.²⁵ If the former imposes the rhythm, discipline, and intensity of labor time regulated in the competition between capitals, the latter synchronizes the different local temporalities with the homogeneous time of the juridical-administrative machine of the nation-state. The synchronization of temporalities characterized by rhythms of life and different cultural and juridical traditions generates friction that the nation-state constantly tries to neutralize by channeling, with greater or lesser amounts of violence, into the normative trajectory of the nation-state, the regime of private property, and capitalist production. Indeed, the empty and homogenous time works in the violent processes of construction and reproduction of national homogeneity. It regulates the

disciplining of a nation through the regulation of the rhythms of life, from school to retirement, from work to national holidays.

It is not a matter of contrasting the traditional temporality of the communitarian forms to that of the nation-state and the capitalist mode of production. This opposition remains abstract or romantic. Rather, it is a matter of working in the tension between temporalities, where they flow over each other like different geological layers, increasing temperature and pressure to bring about metamorphic phenomena of an entire society. Continuing this geological metaphor, one could speak of subduction phenomena in which metamorphic rocks are formed and, in our case, new and unprecedented configurations of preexisting juridical, political, and economic material are generated.²⁶ Indeed, these new forms, as we shall see, are not the result of a *creatio ex nihilo*. They are generated in a field of forces full of conflict, where anachronistic elements are reconfigured in an original way. Such is the case of the medieval institution of the imperative mandate that reemerges in the experience of the *Sans-culottes* during the French Revolution (chapter 2), the Communards in 1871 (chapter 3), the soviets in the Russian Revolution (chapter 4), and the workers' councils of the twentieth century. The same experience, reactivated by the forms of self-government of the indigenous communities, reemerges in the Zapatistas' politics (chapter 5). The point is to examine the *chronotones*, from the Greek *chronos*, or "time," and *tonos*, or "tension"—that is, the friction generated by the sliding of different temporal layers.

RECONFIGURING THE PAST

My distinction between temporalities may bring to mind Chakrabarty's between History₁ and History₂ in his famous book *Provincializing Europe*. In fact, I owe Chakrabarty for the way he provincialized Europe and its conceptual self-representation. But what I intend to do is to pluralize the sometimes monolithic

concept of Europe emerging from Chakrabarty's representation. Chakrabarty overlooks the field of possibility that opens up in the tension between temporalities. Showing European modernity as being crisscrossed by multiple conflicting temporalities allows me to raise the question of multiple possible bridges between European and non-European trajectories. In this way, the universal is not only placed on the abstract level of what Chakrabarty calls H_1 , limiting H_2 in its particularity, but is also expressed in conflicts between different temporalities and, as in the cases we are examining, it builds unexpected bridges between alternative trajectories of modernity. For me, it is not a question of choosing between the dominant temporality of socially necessary labor or the nation-state and local temporalities anchored in traditional relationships. Rather, it is about considering the tension between those different temporalities as a field of possibility open to different political outcomes. It is in this tension that politics exposes itself to the risk of change and becomes truly political.

Abandoning universal history, because it is heavily compromised with the history of colonialism, remains a halfway-carried-out plan if Europe is not de-colonized as well, showing the multiplicity of alternative trajectories that the dominant historiography has deleted or placed in parentheses. Social and political change should be thought about and practiced in the tension of different temporalities and not as the goal of an inevitable historical development along the line of an empty and homogenous concept of time. Using an image of Benjamin's, revolutionary action coincides with the possibility of opening a "distinct chamber of the past,"²⁷ in which there is a future encapsulated and a past attempt at liberation to be redeemed. There are no waiting rooms in history but, rather, rooms that have remained closed and can be reopened. These rooms are the countless attempts at liberation tried repeatedly by the oppressed, but which were always interrupted by the violence of the ruling classes.

Opening these rooms is the task of politics. But we need an appropriate historiography for this task. The question of an

ontological access to the past has been posed in different ways.²⁸ Leopold von Ranke's dream aspired to a position of objective neutrality toward the past—a dream that was shattered when Johann Gustav Droysen posed the question of the placement and the inevitable partiality of the historian. Subsequently, the linguistic turn, meaning the past as constituted by language, denied that there is something like historical objectivity. In essence, it denied the very existence of the past as an object, the reality of which is not given and cannot be given outside its textual representation. This perspective can easily lead to a multiplication of points of view and historical narratives where no single way of writing history is more realistic than any other. If one questions the assumption of the reality of the past, it is easy to break it up into a plurality of historical constructions that can be narrated from the perspective of a growing multiplicity of subjective points of view. Each point of view shows the ghostly side that is concealed in another perspective. In this way, the perspectives tend to potentially multiply indefinitely in what Hayden White called “the ghostly ballet of alternative ‘meaning,’” but where there is no privileged position.²⁹ Koselleck puts a limit on this relativism of the points of view by stating that a historical event cannot be arbitrarily set up, since the “sources provide control over what might not be stated,” though without prescribing what may be said.³⁰

Paradoxically, the evaporation of “the past” into a multiplicity of points of view is the other side of the aproblematic assumption of the objectivity of the past when one seeks to capture it through the bombardment of big data. In both cases, a privileged point of view on reality is lacking and this qualitative loss is compensated by multiplying perspectives or data. There is a different way. We know that the historian, choosing a specific narrative strategy, determines emplotment and argument of the construction of the past and, therefore, can never be said to be neutral toward the past.³¹ The point is to assume and develop the theoretical and political implication of this partiality. Benjamin provides a good starting point in his Thesis XII on the concept of history: “the

subject of historical knowledge is the struggling, oppressed class itself.³² Benjamin's Thesis XII, to be read as the ideal continuation of Marx's famous Thesis XI on Feuerbach,³³ opens up a crucial question: the incompleteness of the past.³⁴ It is from this assumption that we must start. The incompleteness does not concern only sources and archives. Nor does it concern the partiality of the point of view, which can never grasp history in its entirety. Nor is it a question of writing hypothetical or counterfactual histories. It is the past that presents itself as an arsenal of futures that have been blocked and that are allowed to reemerge by the subjects actually acting in the field of history, and not by the spectator or the historian.

It is not about presenting coherent interpretations of the many ways the past might or could not have been. It is the agency of insurgents in precise historical events that opens up ways that have remained blocked or repressed. In other words, it is not the historian but, rather, the insurgents who cite the past and make current that which might have been, transforming it into a critical arsenal for the historian and the present. The critical historian takes the insurgents' side and, with them, traces history not along the main course of a river but, instead, through the many underground rivers of a karst landscape. Concretely, as I show in chapter 2, it was the *Sans-culottes* who during the French Revolution reactivated the forms of local self-government and the imperative mandate from the political and juridical arsenal of the Ancien Régime; the Communards who cited 1793 and the medieval communal institutions to complete, in 1871, what was interrupted by the Terror and the nation-state (chapter 3); the Russian revolutionaries who referred to the tradition of *mir* and the Paris Commune to finish the work carried out there (chapter 4); and today the Zapatistas who cite the work of Emilio Zapata and the spirit of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 to complete the communal experiment of the peasants of Morelos, which took place from 1913 to 1917 (chapter 5).³⁵ The examples could go on. By borrowing the language of the Zapatistas,³⁶ the members of Occupy

shared the same experiment in democracy and self-government with the Communards.

It is the historical approach of the Communards, the Zapatistas, and the Russian revolutionaries that teaches us how to look at the past as incomplete. What they practice recombines historical times by extracting from the past futures that have been blocked and which are alternatives to the present. These historians in action show us an image of history where the past flows alongside the present as a different layer of a geological conformation. The task of critical historiography is twofold: to show how, in a given insurgency, anachronistic institutions are *reactivated* in a new configuration of the present; and to show how that reactivation makes it possible to trace an *alternative legacy of modernity*.

Those historical events, together with numerous other events, show us that there is no preordained historical trajectory that leads from the Middle Ages to the nation-state and the capitalist mode of production. In fact, teleology is not just faith in a preordained historical end. Teleology is above all the idea that history can be explained *ex post facto* as the development of certain principles through specific historical stages. For Hegel, it was the “progress of the consciousness of freedom,” a perpetual progress through historical-geographical stages, according to which there would be “the Orientals, who knew only that One is free, then that of the Greek and Roman world, which knew that Some are free, and finally, our own knowledge that All men as such are free, and that man is by nature free.”³⁷ The last stage is that of the nation-state, represented by the principles that emerged during the French Revolution. But Hegel overlooked the numerous revolutions within the revolution. In their practices and in their *Declarations*, the women, the slaves of Haiti, and the poor objected that the concept of “man” did not represent them. However, they did not claim inclusion in the order of national citizenship. This is how things are presented from the point of view of the teleological narration of the modern state and its juridical universalism. Women, the poor, and slaves have instead acted as the excess of the term “man” with

respect to the law and to every essentialist definition of the human. In their praxis, the concept of “homme” has become a political operator capable of disordering the existing order.

What is at stake is not the problem of those excluded subjects and their stories but, rather, the tension generated when those political practices came into conflict with the juridical, political, and economic trajectory of the dominant modernity characterized by the nation-state, the capitalist mode of production, and private property. Western modernity has elevated these concepts to its own principles and enclosed them in the shell of the abstract subject of law. But freedom and equality are, above all, political practices that have emerged in the countless insurgencies that have undermined the existing order, opening it up to different outcomes. One could say, to simplify things, that when the servants rebelled against the authority of corporations, their purpose was not to become wage workers, formally free to sell their labor power. That is what became of them in the modern state and in the capitalist mode of production.

INSURGENCY: THE FACT OF UNIVERSALITY

In the second section of his book *The Contest of the Faculties*, Kant poses a crucial question for modernity and modern history: “Is humankind continually improving?”³⁸ Kant rejects the metaphysical option that bases three distinct conceptions of history on three respective anthropological conceptions: (a) from a pessimistic conception of man there would follow a *regressive* conception of the history of humanity, which Kant also calls terroristic; (b) from a way of looking at human nature as disposed to good, there would follow a progressive conception; and last, (c) from a conception of human nature that equally divides good and evil in the individual, there would follow a stalemate, which Kant calls “abderitism.”³⁹ Kant also rejects the empirical hypothesis that would infer from

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the progress made so far by humanity a kind of law that would also guarantee progress for the future.

From these anti-metaphysical assumptions, Kant reformulates the whole question, asking himself about the possibility of a history a priori—that is, a history in which “the one divining the events himself brings about and arranges the events that he announces in advance.”⁴⁰ For Kant, the human being is neither good nor bad, but is able to act freely. This does not mean that man always acts as a free being, but only that he can act freely and therefore, to be truly human, must also do so. The human being and the progress of humanity are practical tasks, not metaphysical laws of history. It is here that Kant makes his first exceptional juncture: theoretical philosophy meets a historical event and begins to speak its language. The same Kantian prose becomes lyrical:

This event does not consist for instance in important deeds or misdeeds of human beings whereby what was great is made small among human beings or what was small made great, and, as if by magic, old and splendid states disappear and in their place others arise as if from the depths of the earth. No, nothing of the sort. . . . The revolution of a spirited people that we have witnessed in our times may succeed or fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that any reasonable person, if he could hope, undertaking it a second time, to carry it out successfully, would nonetheless never decide to perform the experiment at such a cost. —Nevertheless, in the hearts of all its spectators (who themselves are not involved in the show), I assert, this revolution meets with a degree of participation in wish that borders on enthusiasm, a participation the expression of which is itself associated with danger. This participation can thus have no other cause than a moral capacity in the human race.⁴¹

The Kantian point of view is that of the spectator not directly involved in the revolution, but still ready to take the risk of making a partisan choice—that is to say, public participation in the ideas of

the revolution. It is here that Kant makes his second juncture: he takes a partiality (*Parteilichkeit*) for the universality (*Allgemeinheit*) that that event, as a timely manifestation in history, represents the idea of freedom. The enthusiasm is enthusiasm for the universal, which is embodied in a certain historical event. Here freedom coincides politically with the right of a people to give themselves the constitution that they consider good. Nothing can be the same as before: the French Revolution expresses, for Kant, this republican principle that does not coincide with a certain constitutional architecture but, rather, with a way of thinking of and carrying out popular sovereignty—this new powerful concept that modernity has simultaneously freed and tried to put to rest.⁴² One could say that modernity is still struggling with popular sovereignty and equality and, more importantly, with the articulation of these two concepts in an appropriate institutional framework. Kant is credited with having brought the universal into history and to have thought of it in the form of a new beginning. But at the same time, he has tamed it by laying it on the progressive course of universal history.

Kant has the merit of not judging the French Revolution from the point of view of its success or failure. For Kant, the revolution is not a military matter. Rather, the revolution is examined from the point of view of the field of possible experiences that it opens up in the present. However, this field of possibilities can and must now be spatially and temporally extended, not only repositioning the spectator's point of view but also assuming the "partiality" of the agents in the historical event and their ability to recombine historical times to make what is apparently archaic the most present and an anticipation of the not-yet.

It is possible to subject the Kantian gesture in the face of the French Revolution to a double shift in perspective. That is what I seek to do in looking at Paris from the Haitian Revolution and at the trajectory of the political and economic forms introduced there by the Bossale communities instead of at Toussaint Louverture.⁴³ The Haitian Revolution allows us to reconsider the conception of

universal history and universalism.⁴⁴ The question that I intend to explore, and which constitutes the first change of perspective, is: What happens if instead of the event chosen by Kant, the revolution in Paris, we take as a starting point the revolution in Haiti? During the French Revolution, the uprisings of the slaves of Santo Domingo in 1791 and 1793 imposed the abolition of slavery by the colonies: “The French Republic wants all *men* without distinction of color to be free and equal.”⁴⁵ In this way, the term “man” becomes the vector of a new universality. The Haitian Revolution realized the French Revolution by realizing its universality and postulating the full emancipation and citizenship of the African American slaves.⁴⁶ Article 3 of the Constitution of Haiti (1801) ratifies this new universality: “There cannot exist slaves on this territory, servitude is therein forever abolished. All men are born, live and die *free* and French.”⁴⁷ It was not the ideals of the Enlightenment that placed the colonial question and the abolition of slavery on the order of the day but, rather, the uprisings of slaves that dictated a new political agenda and a new rhythm toward universal emancipation. This is the *fact of universality* that surpasses Kant’s “Fact of Reason,” a new universal that takes shape in the concrete “here” of Haitian territory, rearticulates the content of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, which, in principle in 1789, still referred only to white male landowners.⁴⁸ The new universality, which I have called “insurgent,” encounters the uprising of women and the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen of 1791, which in essence declares the existing French Constitution null and void; it encounters the peasant insurgency for defending rural communities as a third dimension between individuals and nation;⁴⁹ finally, it encounters the uprisings of the *Enragés* and the *Sans-culottes* who, in their assemblies, impose imperative mandates and the limitation of property rights. This universality is possible because the revolution combines the political and social dimensions. At stake there is not only the right of a people to give themselves the constitution that they consider best for themselves but also the disordering of a social order considered unjust, in that

it reproduces the imbalances of power and the inequalities that republican politics would claim to have eliminated from the sphere of law.

The revolutionary rupture, which takes place in the uprisings of Paris and Haiti, is what constitutes insurgent universality: a whole order of property ownership in addition to gender and race relations is called into question and rendered open to new possible configurations. By suspending the present order and all means of belonging, anyone can be on the side of the insurgents, thereby running the risk of not belonging to one's own privileges.

New possible trajectories are tested, reactivating anachronistic temporalities and associative and community forms that are reconfigured into new institutions.⁵⁰ When the *Sans-culottes* and the Communards referred to medieval institutions and the Ancien Régime, they practiced, through their assemblies, a plurality of authority that challenged the monopoly of state power; they practiced a political citizenship whose universality was given by participation in the forms of local self-government, and not by the privilege of birth; they practiced a limitation and reconfiguration of the right to property; finally, they practiced a differentiation in the concepts of freedom and equality. The history of the long tradition of these insurgent institutions has yet to be written.

In the history of the French Revolution, these alternative political trajectories, which expressed different ways of using power, were violently synchronized by the dominant conception of the modern representative state and national sovereignty. This is the way in which the revolution is incorporated into universal history, reading *ex post* its progressive character in the path toward building the modern state and universal freedom. From this perspective, every step, from 1789 to the Napoleonic civil code, proves to be necessary with respect to the defeated anachronistic paths. Conservative historian François Furet deliberately ignored women and slaves in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, which he drafted together with Mona Ozouf.⁵¹ Similarly, progressive historian Albert Soboul defined the popular movement of the

Sans-culottes as “characterized by the pre-capitalist mentality . . . , a mentality that was essentially the same as that of the peasantry who were bitterly defending their common-land rights against the onslaught of capitalist agricultural methods.”⁵² Be it on either of opposing political and historiographical positions, in both cases there is an idea of universal history that either expunges alternative trajectories as deviations from a presumed normative course of modernity or characterizes them as backward—expressions of a “pre-capitalist mentality” with respect to a development of history that must pass through the destruction of community practices to give rise to the progress of capitalist agriculture with all its new contradictions. Instead, from our perspective, the mentality of the *Sans-culottes* was not pre-capitalist but, rather, represented another temporality and tried to give a different orientation to the process of modernization.

The Haitian Revolution challenged the universalism of the Declaration of 1789 because it challenged the Western categories that made the political action of the slaves unthinkable.⁵³ The universalism of the Declaration was taken from a political and legal level to a social level.⁵⁴ The universality practiced by these insurgents was of a different nature with respect to the universalism of 1789 and built a bridge between Haiti and the uprisings of women and the poor in Paris during 1792–93. The political agenda in 1793 had been updated by those subjects who did not claim recognition by, or inclusion in, an unjust order, but practiced the dis-belonging to that order by opening up new political and social configurations. These subjects took the floor and acted politically in their assemblies without seeking permission from the state. Indeed, the progressive inclusion of individuals in the realm of civil rights is not alien to the functioning of the modern state. However, what goes beyond this state logic is the collective agency of subjects that question social relations of domination, which are played at the level of gender, race and class. These relations are often hidden by formal juridical equality. Insurgent universality distinguishes itself from universalism through a different way of

practicing politics, which is characterized by the exercise of power starting from communities, associations, assemblies, councils, and groups. Its range is neither the nation, nor the world, nor humanity. For this reason, its trajectory avoids both the conception of the universal as potentiality and the polemical conception of universalism.

The first universalism works as a temporalizing concept in which different populations have different roles to play in the development of universal history and, finally, they are configured as different stages toward the final goal of a universal civilization. This potential universalism has justified gradualism, according to which some populations may not yet be ready to enjoy the fruits of Western freedom. The polemical universalism is based on a common element (religion, nation, class) that is hypostatized in order to overcome and orient internal differences against another universal (another religion, nation, class). This universalism is political in the measure in which it is polemical. It remains reactive and its logic remains binary. Indeed, it always depends dialectically on an alterity toward which it must be possible to trace juxtapositions. Insurgent universality, instead, has freed itself from this obsession with totality, unity, binary opposition, and with -isms.

The universality that I call insurgent has to do with the democratic excess that dis-orders an existing order and gives rise not to chaos, like the theories of the social contract prescribe, but to a new institutional fabric. The democratic excess is such that it goes beyond the constitutional armor of the representative state and calls into play a plurality of powers to which citizens have access, not through the funnel of national citizenship but in daily political practice. This abandons the grounds of the politics of recognition; it does not ask for inclusion but, rather, practices a universal political citizenship that exceeds the limits of legal citizenship and calls into question the forms of dominion, not only in the political sphere but also in the social order. It is here that the deviation between 1789 and 1793 can be seen.

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The discussion at the French Convention acknowledged this new level of universality, as shown by Guyomar's intervention: "Let us liberate ourselves rather from the prejudice of sex, just as we have freed ourselves from the prejudice against the color of Negroes."⁵⁵ In Paris just as in Haiti, women played an important role in the revolution.⁵⁶ And for having dis-ordered the natural order of society—that is to say, the patriarchal system which attributed only to white male landowners the ability to act politically in the public sphere—they were stigmatized as even more violent than men.⁵⁷ The irruption of this new insurgent universality also shook landowner relationships that were being delineated, starting from the new conception of individual private property. In Paris, the *Enragés* questioned the absolute right of property, claiming a maximum for prices and property so as to limit its concentration in a few hands; in Haiti, the insurgents put into practice redistributive measures that were defining a new system of property ownership. The cultivators limited the property rights of the owner through their work and use of the land. We can gather the owners' feelings through their complaints collected by Descourtilz: "We are masters of our property without being able to use it."⁵⁸ It was not the ownership of the property being called into question. Rather, the individual right of property was limited by the actual use of land by the cultivators. Something similar was happening in France, where the *Sans-culottes* considered the landowner a custodian (*dépositaire*) of goods belonging to the people, and by reconfiguring forms of the old regime, they subjected the property to popular control in view of the common good.⁵⁹ This was one of the possibilities opened up by the revolution in the tension between the temporality of the nascent nation-state and that of the local forms of self-government and collective use of property.

The revolution in Paris between 1792 and 1793 was divided between an individualistic conception of rights and the state based on the representation of the nation, and an articulation of clubs, sections, and districts that practiced freedom in institutional forms, which disseminated an imperative mandate over

sovereignty in multiple assemblies. But the possibility of a plurality of authority was crushed. In Paris, Robespierre and the Terror made a clean sweep of the claims of the *Sans-culottes*. In Haiti, Toussaint laid the foundation for building the state on the model of the French state, and steered the plantation system toward the world market. This undertaking to standardize the course of dominant modernity was crowned, in France, by the Napoleonic Code Civil of 1804; in Haiti, by the Declaration of Independence of 1804 and the coronation of Jean-Jacques Dessalines as emperor. Haiti was thus aligned with the principle of the modern state with which the principles of national sovereignty and primitive accumulation of capital were put into practice. As we will see in chapter 2, the communitarian, egalitarian, nonindividualistic Bossale alternative had been suppressed, just as the sectional alternative of imperative mandates and the limitation of the absolute right of property had been suppressed in France.

There needs to be a second change in perspective, beyond a geographical shift, in the temporalities of the French Revolution. Kant works with a singular and singularizing concept of universal history, which is imposed as normative for all humanity that gradually has to channel itself into the course of modernity initiated by Europe. Kant, and Hegel after him, read the French Revolution through a conception of history that acts like a reverse optical prism. It merges a multiplicity of colors to bring out the white light of the progress of humanity. For this reason, we have to go beyond Kant, because in his modern Western conception of history the different histories are channeled into the evolutionary course shown by the event of the French Revolution, which becomes, by its universalism, *the event* that can show humankind's tendency toward progress. The different histories and temporalities of the revolution, or better, the *revolutions*, which passed through the revolution both in Europe and outside Europe, become streams whose measure of time is dictated by the river of universal history. However, the *dérappages* indicate possible trajectories of modernity and original reconfigurations of juridical and political material

inherited from different historical layers. In order to see these trajectories, one should abandon the perspective of the spectator and embrace the ways in which the insurgents, in their practices, experiment with different times and cite the past.

The Kantian prism must be inverted in order to refract the light of progress into the different colors of the French Revolution, from the infrared of what-has-been to the ultraviolet of not-yet. To do this, however, it is not enough to go digging in the archives of forgotten histories. It is not enough to tell the history of those who were defeated and left without a voice. In essence, a bottom-up historiographical model is not enough, just as it is not enough to pluralize histories in a multiplicity of narratives. One has to work with the chronotones and trajectories that deviate from the dominant and normative course of modern history that we call modernity and pay attention to how the actors of an insurgency have reconfigured the relationships between the times. The difference between residue and anachronism is essential. The former is always at a crossroads: either it catches up and gets in sync with universal history, or it is crushed. Instead, the anachronism represents another possibility. The friction and tension between different trajectories can give rise to new configurations of political and economic modernity. But the condition for the possibility to travel along other trajectories is given by a new transcendental, in which time is plural.⁶⁰ And space is not homogeneous but, rather, streaked and temporalized by different temporalities.

TOWARD AN ALTERNATIVE LEGACY OF MODERNITY

The difference between the modern state and the alternative of insurgent universality can be represented by drawing upon an image suggested by Sieyès in his writings of 1789. Sieyès writes: “I imagine the law as if it is at the center of an immense globe. Every citizen, without exception, is at an equal distance from it on the

circumference the globe, and each individual occupies an equal place. Everyone depends equally upon the law; everyone offers it his liberty and property to protect. This is what I mean by the common rights of citizens (*les droits communs de citoyens*), insofar as it is this that makes them all resemble one another. These private individuals all have dealings with one another. They make their arrangements and engagements with each other, always under the common safeguard of the law.⁶¹ If equality is given by the equidistance from the center—that is, from the law and state power—the circumference may be more or less extensive, depending on the degree of universalism of the globe. But a circumference remains and, therefore, a dividing line between an outside and an inside remains. The space between the periphery and the center is wasteland because, according to Sieyès, the intermediate bodies have no reason to exist, as they would be a nation within the nation.

The difference between this image and insurgent universality can be represented as the difference between an entrenched center and a porous plurality characterized by units that are not subsumed into an omni-comprehensive unity. The plurality of powers redefines the semantics of universality, which is such because, unlike any national identity, it is not circumscribed by borders. The plurality of powers, with many centers but without circumference, denotes an alternative political trajectory to that of the modern political form based on the concept of unity and totality. The model is relational, a net-like shape, and not an area delimited by boundaries. If the state circumference described by Sieyès delimits a homogeneous space defined by the nation, the plurality of powers is open to a multiplication of relations in an uncircumscribed space. These units are not synchronized by a central power to the rhythm of the nation, the law, and the market but, rather, express different temporalities. This is why the paradigm of universality is both temporal and political at the same time.

An alternative political trajectory begins not by changing the measurements of the circumference described by Sieyès but, instead, with another idea of politics, which is not caged in a political

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form. In the experiences of insurgent universality, the plurality and autonomy of units can lead to their independence, or even to conflict. But this, rather than being feared and considered an element to be neutralized, must be understood as a dimension of politics. Alongside the dominant trajectory of Western modernity, there are other trajectories that disseminate sovereignty into units, constituted, in the history that we have reconstructed through the insurgent universality, of sections, departments, and districts. These alternative temporalities, which could appear as “a return of the archaic,”⁶² reactivate existing structures in a new form rather than synchronizing them to the dogma of indivisible national sovereignty. Wherever these alternative traditions of modernity have been expressed, they have always articulated themselves in autonomous institutional forms and strained the dominant trajectory of modernity characterized by the dual primitive accumulation of political state power and capital. That alternative legacy would go as far as the Paris Commune, the soviets,⁶³ and the local authorities in the Zapatista experiment. By reactivating archaic institutions as democratic counterthrusts to statism, insurgent universality also builds historical bridges for an alternative legacy of modernity. In this way, the archaic ceases to be simply past and becomes a trail marker of possible futures—as long as we do not let the tremendous energy that springs from what-has-been fall into the hands of new reactionaries.

In European history, next to the trajectory of private property and the modern state, along whose course there arise the names of Hobbes, Cromwell, and Le Chapelier, there still runs the alternative legacy of the commons and the collective associations. The names that represent them are less known, as are generally the names of the defeated. In England, the Diggers with Gerrard Winstanley reactivated the original communion of goods and the right of the commons against the system of enclosures and the incipient system of private property;⁶⁴ in Germany, Thomas Müntzer evoked the original communion of goods to defend common property and agrarian communism,⁶⁵ also claimed in the Manifesto of the

German peasants in 1525, called the “Twelve Articles.”⁶⁶ In France, Jacques Roux, in his Manifesto of the Enragés, denounced the absolute right of property in the name of the natural right to life and the concentration of wealth in the name of republican equality.⁶⁷ The defense of communitarian forms of life and collective possession took strength by reactivating the communist tradition of early Christianity.

These insurgencies allow me to open the past to its incompleteness, showing possibilities and alternative legacies. From a historiographical point of view, it is a question of breaking the dominion of the present over the past. My historical framework shows a modernity crossed by multiple temporalities as diverse rhythms and forms of life that conflict with each other, but that also intersect and overlap. In this historic-temporal multiverse, anachronistic temporalities cease to be remnants of the past, and huge masses of legal and political material, considered archaic within the unilinear conception of time, instead open up new possibilities for reconfiguring the present. Countless alternative temporalities not only stratify European history but also show possible bridges with the countless non-European temporalities. Thus, the anachronisms cease to be seen as a delay to be synchronized in accordance with a supposed tendency of modernity, and instead become full of energy, able to reorient modernity and construct new possibilities for a different communal life.

In this sense, the bridge between the Bossale communities and the *Sans-culottes* of Paris is instructive of a different way of looking at history. The insurgent universality of the *Sans-culottes* tried to put a limit on a modernity without measure through a maximum amount of property; it sought to limit the National Assembly’s representative power through the restoration of the imperative mandate within the framework of a plurality of powers. Against an attempt to concentrate the entire political power in the hands of the government and establish the work of large-scale plantations for the world market, the Bossale communities reactivated community forms of balance able to set a measure and a limit to

production and power. Their languages were different, but hardly untranslatable. Although the art of translation requires knowledge of the grammar of historical times, the anachronism can disclose possible futures.

There is a link between translatability and universality. In his notes on translation, Gramsci meant translation not only between languages but also between different paradigms and cultures.⁶⁸ The difference between social practices, cultures, and languages, in Gramsci's perspective, was to be understood as an articulation of different answers to fundamentally common historical problems. Translation, like politics, has the task of holding together theory and practice, and this would be possible only by identifying the common question to which a culture or social practice is the answer. At this point we must ask ourselves: what is our common problem?

Today, in an era when universalism risks becoming an empty shell, the concept of democracy risks becoming a procedure on the verge of devouring itself, and capitalism's creative destruction seems to be more and truly destructive, the alternative legacy of insurgent universality shows us another possibility for politics, economics, and property relations. Insurgent universality is an experiment with the democratic excess of the plurality of powers. It is the incompleteness of this experiment—not the experiment in itself—that is shared. This is the meaning of the beautiful image given to us by the Zapatistas in their 1996 Fourth Declaration: "The world we want is one where many worlds fit." Insurgent universality begins with this plurality of worlds, authority, and forms of self-government; it begins with equal access to politics in the form of assemblies and groups; it begins with the Communard's universalization of politics and property; it begins with the council's experiment in the democratic excess. Insurgent universality shows to what extent democracy and private property are compatible with each other—and to what extent they are incompatible.

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What emerges in insurgent universality, when the temporality of the state is interrupted, is not a wasteland but, rather, a society rich in groupings and associations that are entrusted with forms of self-government, as appeared in the French Revolution, in the Paris Commune, in the Russian Revolution, and in the Zapatista communities, as well as in countless other times and places.

NOTES

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13. Karl Marx, *Drafts of the Letter to Vera Zasulich*, trans. Barrie Selmann, in *Marx and Engels Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 24:358.
14. Marx, *Drafts of the Letter to Vera Zasulich*, 367–68. See Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 159–86.
15. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000), 3:468.
16. Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 206.
17. Michel Serres with Bruno Latour, *Conversations on Science, Culture, and Time*, trans. Roxanne Lapidus (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 60. Serres says: “If you take a handkerchief and spread it out in order to iron it, you can see in it certain fixed distances and proximities. If you sketch a circle in one area, you can mark out nearby points and measure far-off distances. Then take the same handkerchief and crumple it, by

putting it in your pocket. Two distant points suddenly are close, even superimposed. If, further, you tear it in certain places, two points that were close can become very distant. This science of nearness and rifts is called topology, while the science of stable and well-defined distances is called metrical geometry.”

18. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000).
19. T. S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1945), 30.
20. Bruno Bauer, *Geschichte Deutschlands und der französischen Revolution unter der Herrschaft Napoleons* (Charlottenburg: E. Bauer, 1846), 2:253 and 255; Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the Revolution*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Anchor, 1983).
21. François Furet and Denis Richet, *La révolution française* (Paris: Hachette, 1986), 9. Benedetto Croce, *Scritti e discorsi politici, 1943–1947* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1993).
22. J. S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 13; J. S. Mill, “Considerations on Representative Government,” in *The Collected Works* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1977), 19:335–36. Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
23. Aimé Césaire, “Letter to Maurice Thorez,” trans. Chike Jeffers, *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 149.
24. Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2015).
25. Tomba, *Marx’s Temporalities*, 144.
26. I want to thank Prof. Simav Bargu for the beautiful conversation we had in France and his explanation of the geological phenomenon of subduction.
27. Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 402: XVII A.
28. See Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

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29. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 281.
30. Koselleck, *Futures Past*, 111.
31. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
32. Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” 394.
33. “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it,” quoted in Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin, 1992), 423.
34. Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 471: N 8,1.
35. Adolfo Gilly, *The Mexican Revolution* (New York: New Press, 2005), 268–73.
36. Rebecca Manski, of Occupy Wall Street, acknowledged the Zapatista influence after visiting Oventic. She said: “As soon as I arrived I saw that many of the principles, language, themes and ways of organizing Occupy Wall Street had been taken straight from Zapatista philosophy.” See Duncan Tucker, “Are Mexico’s Zapatista Rebels Still Relevant?,” *Al-Jazeera*, January 1, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/01/are-mexico-zapatista-rebels-still-relevant-20141183731812643.html>.
37. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 54–55.
38. Immanuel Kant, *The Contest of the Faculties*, in *Toward the Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, ed. Pauline Kleingeld, trans. David L. Colclasure (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 150: Ak 7:79.
39. Kant, *Contest of the Faculties*, 152: K 7:81.
40. Kant, *Contest of the Faculties*, 150: K 7:79.
41. Kant, *Contest of the Faculties*, 155: K 7:85 (translation modified).
42. Richard Tuck, *The Sleeping Sovereign: The Invention of Modern Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
43. The Bossales were former slaves born in Africa who constituted the majority of the population of Santo Domingo. Gérard Barthélemy, *L’univers rural Haïtien: Le pays en dehors* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1990).

44. As Susan Buck-Morss observed, the Haitian Revolution “rather than giving multiple, distinct cultures equal due, whereby people are recognized as part of humanity indirectly through the mediation of collective cultural identities, human universality emerges in the historical event at the point of rupture. It is in the discontinuities of history that people whose culture has been strained to the breaking point give expression to a humanity that goes beyond cultural limits.” Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 133.
45. Léger-Félicité Sonthonax, *Proclamation au nom de la République* (1793), in *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*, ed. David Geggus (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014), 107.
46. Eduardo Grüner, *La oscuridad y las luces: Capitalismo, cultura y revolución* (Buenos Aires: Edhasa, 2010), 34.
47. Haitian Constitution of 1801, Art. 3, in Toussaint L’Ouverture, *The Haitian Revolution*, ed. Nick Nesbitt (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 46. On the degree of universality of Art. 3, see Sibylle Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 266–71.
48. Nick Nesbitt, “Alter-Rights: Haiti and the Singularization of Universal Human Rights, 1804–2004,” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 93–108.
49. Jorge Sánchez Morales, *La Revolución rural francesa: Libertad, igualdad y comunidad* (1789–1793) (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2017).
50. Here, and in the rest of this book, I assume the definition of “institution” provided by Santi Romano: “A revolutionary society or a criminal association do not constitute law from the viewpoint of the State that they try to subvert, or whose laws they violate, just as a schismatic sect is considered antilegalistic by the Church; but this does not imply that in the above case there are not institutions, organizations, and orders which, taken per se and intrinsically considered, are legal.” Santi Romano, *Lordinamento Giuridico. Studi sul Concetto, le Fonti e i Caratteri del Diritto* (Pisa: Tipografia Editrice Cav. Mariotti, 1917), 42.

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51. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, eds., *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1989).
52. Albert Soboul, *The French Revolution 1789–1799*, trans. Alan Forrest and Colin Jones (New York: Vintage, 1975), 332.
53. Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1997), 70–107. See also Dale Tomich, “Thinking the ‘Unthinkable’: Victor Schoelcher and Haiti,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 31, no. 3 (2008): 401–31.
54. Adom Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-Colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution,” *Political Theory* 44, no. 6 (2016): 821–45; Nick Nesbitt, *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2008).
55. Pierre Guyomar, “Discussion of Citizenship Under the Proposed New Constitution (April 29, 1793),” in *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (New York: St. Martin’s, 1996), 133–34.
56. Alice Mazzotti, “Madri di Haiti tra schiavitù e rivoluzione (Saint-Domingue XVII-XIX secolo),” *Annali di Ca’ Foscari* 48, nos. 1–2 (2008): 175–203.
57. Geggus, *Haitian Revolution*, 92.
58. Geggus, *Haitian Revolution*, 159.
59. William H. Sewell, *Work & Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 109, 138.
60. Achille Mbembe writes, in his *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 9–15: the “time of African existence is neither a linear time nor a simple sequence in which each moment effaces, annuls, and replaces those that preceded it, to the point where a single age exists within society.” Instead of this,

the peculiar “historicity” of African societies, their own *raison d’être* and their relation to solely themselves, are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualized outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized. From a narrow methodological standpoint, this

means that, from the fifteenth century, there is no longer a “distinctive historicity” of these societies, one not embedded in times and rhythms heavily conditioned by European domination.

61. Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, “What Is the Third Estate?” in *Political Writings*, ed. Michael Sonescher (Indianapolis, IN, and Cambridge, MA: Hackett, 2003), 156.
62. Lucien Jaume, *Le discours jacobin et la démocratie* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 318.
63. Pierre-Henri Zaidman, *Le mandat impératif de la Révolution française à la Commune de Paris* (Paris: Éditions du monde libertaire, 2008); Oskar Anweiler, *The Soviets: The Russian Workers, Peasants and Soldiers Councils, 1905–1921* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).
64. Joan Thirsk, “Enclosing and Engrossing,” in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, ed. Joan Thirsk and H. P. R. Finberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 4:200.
65. Günther Rudolph, “Thomas Müntzer Sozialökonomische Konzeption und das Traditionsbewusstseins der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 23 (1975): 562.
66. Peter Blickle, *Die Revolution von 1525* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 321–27.
67. Jacques Roux, “Manifesto of the Enragés” (June 25, 1793), in *Social and Political Thought of the French Revolution, 1788–1797: An Anthology of Original Texts*, ed. Marc Allan Goldstein (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 211.
68. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), 2:Q 11, V.

Chapter 2

1. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 138.
2. Bruno Bauer, *Die Judenfrage* (Braunschweig: Druck und Verlag von Friedrich Otto, 1843), 19. See Massimiliano Tomba, “Exclusiveness and Political Universalism in Bruno Bauer,” in *The New Hegelians: Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School*, ed. Douglas Moggach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 91–13.

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