

# Remembering the Historical Present

Harry Harootunian

History is always contemporary, that is to say political.

—ANTONIO GRAMSCI

## 1

The unbridgeable “pernicious chasm” of the present.

—GEORG LUKÁCS

Ever since 9/11 there has been a swelling chorus of opinion aimed at demonstrating how the destruction of the World Trade towers has constituted an event of world historical magnitude announcing the installation of a new time marked by a boundless present. As if transported by a time machine, Americans were instantly relocated within a new temporal architecture that declared the removal of an antecedent past from the present, history from its future. The nation was forcibly induced to embark upon an unprecedented, endless war against terror, and its citizens were persuaded to accept the imperative of living a new reality in a perennial present. Remarkably, this urgent appeal to a new time echoed Japanese pronouncements at the outset of World War II announcing the inauguration of total war and calling for the establishment of emergency measures as a condition of mobilizing the population to wage an endless war against the West in order to realize the promise of its world historical mission in the present. Not surprisingly, Richard Perle, shortly before the beginning of the current military invasion of Iraq, demanded the promulgation of a total war in the war against ter-

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

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rorism, qualifying it further as an infinite war. Underlying the claims of a new temporal tectonics, shifting time plates to set the present adrift, was the presumption that a consequential eventfulness had occurred, which exceeded the framework of received forms of marking time. **With this eventful divide, the present was both severed from its historical past and indefinitely deprived of a future from which it once derived expectation.** But the wish to live in an endless present committed solely to waging war with an unseen and unknown enemy—a wish that would now define the coordinates of daily life (and rein in its dangerous political excess)—was not only overstated by those who seized upon the immediate political opportunities supplied by the attack on the twin towers but actually misrecognized the history of the present we were all already living. If any axial event marked the turn in time it was undoubtedly the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent end of the cold war, even though this episode was the culmination of a process long in the making.

In fact, the assault on the temporal order was magnified by a course of history that had been signaled by the fall of the Wall and the disappearance of the communist idea lived by actually existing socialism and conveyed by the future of revolution.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the simultaneous manifestation of multiple fundamentalisms in the aftermath has put into immediate question the status of our received forms of temporalization by upsetting the relationship between history and the tripartite division of past, present, and future. The seemingly sudden collapse of the Berlin Wall and the appearance of movements fueled by a potent mixture of modernity and archaisms have inaugurated the removal of a conception of the future, or at least its indefinite deferral, that had once been summoned to shape the experience of the present and the expectations toward which it ceaselessly moved. Once socialism collapsed, forfeiting the promise of a better future, new fundamentalisms and nativisms driven by an adherence to mixed messages turned to ambiguous traditions in order to respond to the misfortunes of

1. See François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2003), pp. 12–13; hereafter abbreviated *RH*.

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the present and acknowledge the bankruptcy of a future that had once offered it the perspective of anticipation.

Yet we know that this particular reflex had already been promoted in precisely those regions of the world that had remained peripheral to the industrializing West—Euro-America—and had either been incorporated into the world market or colonized by it, reflecting not only the clash of different regimes of temporality but more importantly the permanent status of the unevenness capitalism had inflicted on them. In these areas, the promise of the future—progress—appeared with the ravages perpetrated by capitalism. The encounter reveals an interesting symmetry between these earlier attempts by Asians and Africans to withstand and overcome the misfortunes of the present and the movement of more recent fundamentalisms. Both embodied the same mix of archaic impulses (however “invented”) grafted onto modern practices.<sup>2</sup> **The apparent difference today is the withdrawal of a foreseeable future as a perspective for figuring the aspirations of the present.** But what the implied repetition suggests is the persistent identity of a different accenting of temporality usually effaced by both capital and the dominant narrative form of history, especially with regards to its nineteenth-century vocation to vocalize the achievement of the nation-state and what has been called modernity.<sup>3</sup> What has constantly been suppressed and kept from view everywhere is the persisting figure of Gramsci’s Southern Question and both its challenge to a dominant historical

2. During the nineteenth century and the time of great imperial expansions to Africa and Asia, the encounter between representatives personifying capital and the demands of the world market—and the local population involuntarily brought into the market’s widening orbit and who stood in its way—often resulted in explosive and violent collisions. New forms then were syncretized with received practices and beliefs to contest the invader and the threat of expropriation. These “fundamentalisms” were place-specific, to be sure, exemplified by the Taipings and Boxers in China, the Jinturen in Japan, the Sepoys in India, the Mahadists in the Sudan, and so on. They embodied a mix of inherited and new beliefs—often invested in new military technologies. Their messages, reflecting place and culture, invariably converged on the shared desire for a different temporality, a new present.

3. It is important to recognize that national time and the time of capital are different, even though the distinction is rarely acknowledged in historical practice. National time, with a punctual calendar of commemorative days, holidays, and so forth, is externalized in the conduct of linear time and moves inexorably to the end of each year to be repeated endlessly every new year (in Japan there is still strict adherence to the imperatives of the imperial year). But the time of capital is more complex; it presents a smooth, unbroken surface that resembles national time, yet it also works to unify immense temporal irregularities—uneven time—in the sphere of production, circulation, and distribution—thus totalizing the various temporal processes resulting from the division of labor. If national time abstracts experience into a “single spatial consciousness,” as Hyun Ok Park proposes, providing a necessary homogenous and “tranhistorical” “container,” housing the diachronic temporal processes of capital, capitalist time situates the global at the level of the everyday and local, unsettling and segregating it into heterogeneous units (Hyun Ok Park, *Two Dreams in One Bed: Empire, Social Life, and the Origins of the North Korean Revolution* [Durham, N.C., 2005], pp. 38, 39).

culture and its conception of progressive time driven by an anticipated future. Because of the strategy that established a normative path to the realization of “modernity,” exemplified by Euro-America, much of the world was cast in its shadow, destined to endless delay and the distant prospect of catch-up. In an earlier time, the model of transformation was the nation-state, signifying the final conquest of time. But, in more recent history, the example of the nation-state has been supplemented and even overtaken by strategies demanding political and economic development.

If the future has been emptied of its promise of progress, its evacuation from the experience of the present has led to contemporary appeals to a new temporal regime pronouncing the advent of presentism. The removal of futural expectation was a necessary consequence of the end of the cold war and the competing developmental trajectories that had propelled it. Yet the perspective associated with the cold war derived more from a particular conception of modernity, which had successfully and faithfully displaced its relationship to capitalism and imperial expansion by identifying its purpose with the promise of progress in one form or another. The recent demands for democratization must be seen simply as an exhausted echo of this historic displacement, disclosing a narrative that has played out its productivity and whose worn and frayed image finds itself reflected in attempts to position the temporality of the present as endless duration now that it no longer needs to rely on its relationship to a past and a future. What this representation had managed to veil was a collision of temporalities. An exported world-standard time demanded by capital and its overseas expansion—a new imperialization of time—clashed with diverse local times and modes of existence as it established a world market and instigated colonial expropriation. This is not to say that the spectacle of divided or mixed temporalities did not already exist in the industrial heartlands of Euro-America but only that expansion provided the occasion to map the instance of unevenness, as denoted in classifications of “delay” and “arrest,” onto the hinterlands. One of the more successful conjurations performed by modern industrialized societies has been to conceal the unevenness within their own precincts and its accompanying, mixed, and often “discordant temporalities” regulating the rhythms of life, making it appear as a problem stigmatizing the nonmodern.<sup>4</sup> Yet we know that capitalism has always been suffused with remainders of other, prior modes of production and that the incidence of what Marx described as formal subsumption—the partial subordination of labor to capital—would continue to coexist with the process

4. See Daniel Bensaïd, *La Discordance des temps* (Paris, 1995).

of real subsumption and the final achievement of the commodity form, until the last instance.

In this sense, the production and reproduction of unevenness in ever new registers was a condition of capitalism's "law" of accumulation. It is tragically ironic that in the wake of the catastrophe inflicted on New Orleans and the American Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 the media immediately discovered the existence of a Third World within the midst of the United States and confronted all of the signs of unevenness once reserved for the world outside Euro-America. In no time at all, an act of nature was able to easily rip off the veneer of the present to reveal an enduring and deep-seated historic unevenness—the image of the Southern Question in the American South and elsewhere—instead of the homogenous time associated with both capital and the nation form.<sup>5</sup> It is this specter—in the figure of noncontemporaneous contemporaneity—that has come back to haunt the present in the incarnate form of explosive fundamentalisms fusing the archaic and the modern, the past and the present, recalling for us a historical *déjà vu* and welding together different modes of existence aimed at overcoming the unevenness of lives endlessly reproduced.

More importantly, the articulation of these ambiguous mixtures of modern and archaic, new and old, here and there, contemporary and nativist has always been present to remind us of the perseverance of a temporal refraction distinguished by noncontemporaneous contemporaneity. It is in this sense that the Southern Question has become a lasting historical trope for the coexistence of different temporal regimes and their referents. The progress vouched for by a conception of modernity (and even belatedly capitalist ideology in its offer to raise all societies to the same level) would, it was believed, overcome uneven rhythms and fill in the distance created by lag and delay. The guarantee of the future required the effacement from memory of the miseries and difference engendered in the present. But when theorization of modernity fastened onto progress and rationality, as was

5. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), p. 30. In his now celebrated account (and sympathetic defense) of nationalism, Anderson points to the emergence of a modern conception of simultaneity, which he equates with the "homogenous, empty time" envisaged by Walter Benjamin. In this identification, both "transverse" and "cross-time" no longer refer to the prior medieval figure of "fulfillment" but instead to "temporal coincidence" managed by clock and calendar. Anderson attributes this transformation to the development of print capitalism—newspapers and novels—especially their serialization, which provided the "technical means for 're-presenting' the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation" (*ibid.*). People who don't know each other are linked together in a temporal simultaneity made possible by reading daily newspapers or novels. While Anderson is undoubtedly correct that the nation depends upon a conception of simultaneity to homogenize the population, he is proposing an ideological construction designed to overlook precisely the multiple times that people in any large city must daily negotiate and that will keep them divided, a condition national time simply cannot overcome at the level of everyday life.

eventually played out in a discourse on modernization during the cold war, the outline of unevenness was blurred by scientific and technological criteria. In its classic formulation by Ernst Bloch, the configuration of the non-contemporaneous contemporary signified consequential political effects associating unevenness with fascism in the Germany of the early 1930s, where, he observed, the coexistence of different times reflected the disjuncture between the new and the traditional (city and countryside) and what he described as a subjective “muffled non-desire for the Now, . . . an impoverished centre” “‘spiritually’ missed.”<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Reinhart Koselleck later sought to transmute the figure into a neutral category belonging to a scheme of “differential classification of historical sequences . . . contained in the same naturalistic chronology.”<sup>7</sup> Both believed, for different reasons, that unevenness was a temporary lull that eventually would disappear under altered historical conditions (revolutionary utopianism or Enlightenment progress), whether spurred by political modernization or economic development. Koselleck’s desire to neutralize the temporal refraction came at the price of remaining silent on the nature of the natural chronology that housed the mixed temporalities (see *FP*, p. 84). Neither, of course, could see further than the frontiers of European society or a temporalization founded on progressive development, even though Bloch’s appeal to seizing the day resembled Walter Benjamin’s messianic temporal secession, which could be enacted anywhere.

The surfacing of fundamentalisms in our time, echoing a long and often suppressed history of struggle, represents not so much a rupture from the received order of time but rather a repressed revenant. Its reappearance reminds us of a historical perspective joined to the present that has **always provided the stage for a constant enactment of the past in the present. What the current conjunctures disclose is a configuration Edmund Husserl once thought of as a “thickened” present,**<sup>8</sup> a present filled with traces of different moments and temporalities, weighted with sediments. He referred to the **“comet’s tail” of retentions that manage to maintain their identity long after the inaugurating event has passed.**<sup>9</sup> Husserl also used the example of how

6. Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley, 1990), p. 108.

7. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 94; hereafter abbreviated *FP*.

8. Quoted in Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 82. According to Kern, both William James and Josiah Royce referred to the same phenomenon as a “specious present,” whose length or limits of expansion varies and whose “thickness varies in different circumstances.” Both, moreover, were responding to David Hume’s perception of time constituted of different segments that aggregate into longer durations (*ibid.*, p. 83).

9. Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, trans. John Barnett Brough, ed. Rudolf Bernet, vol. 4 of *Edmund Husserl: Collected Works* (Dordrecht, 1991),

notes of a musical score are succeeded but still remain. It should be recalled that Husserl's conception of time consciousness was yoked to the category of lifeworld; unlike the everyday, it does not take into consideration the empirical world and history so that one may examine a time such as it first appears to consciousness, "an immanent time in the course of consciousness," what has been described as that which is most subjective in subjectivity.<sup>10</sup> Phenomenology, driven by its own scientific aspirations, aimed to avoid becoming simply a variant of introspection, as such. It sought, therefore, to steer clear from descriptions of lived time as it was given so as to clarify the essential character of a consciousness of time, reaching "finally the one infinite objective time in which all things and events—bodies and their physical properties, psyches and their psychic states—have their definite temporal positions, which we can determine by means of a chronometer" (*PIC*, p. 7; *PIZ*, p. 7). As for preobjective time, it is a "flow of the modifications of the past" and a continuing gushing forth of the now (*PIC*, p. 74; *PIZ*, pp. 71–72), a flux of lived experiences where originary impressions succeed each other, each constrained by its horizon of empty protentions (futures) and the retentions they drag along like the tail of a comet. In this process, the original quality of primary memories are degraded, obscured, blurred. But, by the same token, there appear rememorations—"reproductions of ancient perceptions and expectations open to the perceptions to come" (see *PIC*, pp. 33–36; *PIZ*, pp. 33–34).<sup>11</sup> In this way, the present in its bracketed form is open to the flux of consciousness, and its corresponding thickness is marked by the continued mingling of retentions and protentions. If, however, this picture of the present is realigned with empirical life (history itself) so that the abstracted lifeworld is replaced by a lived everyday constantly shaped by the movements of the body interacting with its world and liberated from the imprisonment of internal consciousness—in short, worldliness and reflexivity—one can then imagine a model of the present thick with different practices from other modes of production, mixed temporal regimes declaring their affiliation with different times now passed but still retained with their corresponding political demands. In any case, a rematerialization of this Husserlian scheme brings us close to the world of capital and its underlying temporalities crowding to break through the surface façade of the nation form's homogeneous time. Here, we have a reidentification of the thickness of the historical present with the earlier figure of the noncontemporaneous contemporary. More-

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p. 37, hereafter abbreviated *PIC*; see Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, vol. 10 of *Husserliana* (The Hague, 1966), p. 35, hereafter abbreviated *PIZ*.

10. Quoted in Krzysztof Pomian, *L'Ordre du temps* (Paris, 1984), p. 337.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

over, the process of rematerializing the lifeworld into everyday life had already begun in the wake of World War I and the Russian Revolution throughout the industrializing world of Euro-America and Japan and its colonies.<sup>12</sup> This transformation (what Tosaka Jun deemed the “quotidianization of philosophy”)<sup>13</sup> in the interwar period tried to rethink the relationship of politics and culture in mass industrial societies, especially their segregation, and position the category of the everyday as the site of their reunion and as a critique of high culture and state political economy.

## 2. “History Itself” or “Our” Modernity

The historical movements that reflected the regime of mixed temporalities invariably envisaged a different relationship between experience and expectation. When such movements and groups experience misfortune, for example, they must define the present by historicizing and temporalizing the asymmetrical interplay of the past and the current situation. In this regard, history is not only the locus of uneven rhythms, the collision of co-existing temporalities and difference, as Samir Amin once proposed; it is also the scene where the ghosts of the past come daily with the living (a little like the cohabitation of dead and living labor), in a habitus of a haunted house. This observation recalls both the initial separation of memory and history and the effort to clearly differentiate their respective domains precisely because of the messiness of always colliding temporalities. Significantly, historiography—that is, national history and narrative—invariably socializes the domain of the uncanny and makes it familiar through the construction of what has been called “‘historical’ memory.”<sup>14</sup> For Koselleck, who designated the distinctively modern in terms of historical time, “experience is present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered.” Similarly, expectation also occurs in the today and signals the “future made present” (*FP*, p. 272). Clearly, it is oriented toward a not yet, toward a realm of nonexperience, an unrealized though reachable horizon. The horizon of expectation comes from the future and provides the direction toward which experience in the present must necessarily move, without, at the same time, imprisoning movement in a preestablished route, even though the direction has already been prefigured by a conception of

12. See John Roberts, *Philosophizing the Everyday: Revolutionary Praxis and the Fate of Cultural Theory* (London, 2006), pp. 16–58.

13. Tosaka Jun, *Tosaka Jun Zenshu* [Complete Works of Tosaka Jun], ed. pub., 5 vols. (Tokyo, 1966–1979), 4:182.

14. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, 2004), p. 393; hereafter abbreviated *MHF*. See Maurice Halbwachs, *Le Mémoire collective*, ed. Gerard Namier and Marie Jaisson (Paris, 1997), pp. 97–142.



progress whose realization remains untranscendable. It is important to recognize how this temporal order leads to comparison and the figuration of the noncontemporaneous contemporary as a sign of retarded achievement exemplified as delay, arrest, and catch up. It is equally important to recall Koselleck's commitment to what he called a "naturalistic chronology" and the accompanying developmentalist narrative in which he has embedded it.

In many ways Koselleck's conception of historical practice as the distinct marker of "new time"—modernity—was produced by an intense philosophical discussion throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Much of this discussion was driven by new scientific discoveries, theorizations of time, and the perception that modern society, constituted by a combination of capitalism and technology, was increasingly being directed by quantitative and objective forms of measurement and the regime of calendar and clock time. The major participants in this discussion, which Heidegger described as a "reckoning with time," were Bergson, who probably inaugurated it by internalizing the flux of time and envisaging the possibility of coexisting mixed temporalities; Husserl, who explored further the internal recesses of psychological time and provided a dematerialized version of the lived everyday in an abstracted lifeworld; Simmel, who explicitly linked the new urban metropolis to the psychological interiorization of the state of time; Lukács, whose critique politicized a philosophy devoted to the exemplar of science and objective and quantitative measurement; and others who would not have always wanted to be classified with each other even though they shared an interest in addressing some common themes. But what seemed to hold this discussion together was the effort to rescue qualitative time and to evaluate the status of immediate experience. In many cases, this move led to an internalization, a dematerialization and dehistoricization of time, as well as, on the one hand, a distancing from the external world of clock and calendar and on the other hand important attempts to reconfigure the relationship between quantitative and qualitative time. It meant also upholding the proposition that things occur not simply in time, as such, but *through* it, thereby opening up the possibility of shifting from measurement and perspectivalism to agency, actualization, and aspectivism.<sup>15</sup> Wherever both capital and science succeeded in implanting their exemplars, there appeared the temporal precinct of what Koselleck called "our time" (*neueste Zeit*) (*FP*, p. 246) and Hans Robert Jauss named

15. See Malcolm Bull, *Seeing Things Hidden: Apocalypse, Vision, and Totality* (London, 1994), p. 184. According to Bull, this shift from perspective to aspect has consequently produced a pervasive antivisualism among a wide spectrum of philosophers from Lukács to Rorty.

“our’ modernity” (*MHF*, p. 306), which in marginalized societies like Japan (the world outside the industrial centers of Euro-America in the interwar period) played out in dramatic contest against the mixed temporalities that were still being lived. What this reckoning of time accomplished was an interiorization of time, moving it toward the solitary and sovereign subject. It actually displaced and diminished awareness of the persistence of coexisting temporalities being lived by exporting the image of dissonant rhythms to the periphery, where it became a sign of a rift between modernity and nonmodernity. While this particular discussion unfolded during the interwar period as a result of world historical eventfulness to subsequently produce a growing conviction in the autonomy of the present from past and future, variously called presentism and modernism, it was fundamentally a European reflex inscribed mostly in the claims of art; it worked to reinforce the historical perspective Koselleck associated with modernity and its developmental narrative. It was only with the cold war and its outcome that a conception of modernity founded on a temporal and temporalizing structure was put into question; what hitherto had remained unseen was unveiled: the figure of the noncontemporaneous contemporary and its perspective, the historical present.

According to Koselleck, the temporal structure of modern time, “our time,” appeared when the present was opened to both past and future through the agency of progress, which produced an asymmetry between experience and expectation. Historical time was henceforth contained and excluded by the enlargement of experience and expansion of the horizon of expectation engendered by progress and driven by the tension between them (see *FP*, p. 244). History became its own time, what Hegel (and later Koselleck) named “history itself” or history in general (*Geschichte Selber*) (*FP*, p. 246). But a category of “internal time”—even more than “our time”—presupposed and incorporated a complex discussion on the status of temporality and the philosophic assault on quantitative time. This assault was directed by the search for truer, qualitative time, seeking a perspective removed from the external world of things to counter the aptitude of a new objective science (*FP*, p. 247). It should be remembered that this assault from a distance was as much an attack on the capitalist commitment to quantitative, measurable, abstract time—demanded by exchange and paradigmatically expressed in the calculation of surplus value and labor time—as it was on breakthroughs in the physical sciences in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Koselleck’s own later attempt to conceptualize modernity was, as will become evident, yet another attempt to recover subjective—internal or psychological—time’s agency within the spatial envelope of the nation-state as the condition of returning history back to a

timeless hermeneutics, wherein narrative time and space were indistinguishable.

For Koselleck, the new time of modernity corresponded to history itself. It was founded on the claim of history's time because there exists only a single history. Modernity, now a write-over of capitalism, constitutes a global historic phenomenon proclaiming the advent of new time. This new time, which becomes our time or our modernity, reflects a distancing of expectation with respect to all prior experience up to the present, a widening that opens up the promise of "progress" and thus a temporalizing process of history itself that leads to increasing perfection or, with capitalism, even development everywhere. In Koselleck's account, according to Paul Ricoeur, especially in his employment of the master category of the "*collective singular*," referring to both the "makeability of history" and its encompassing capacity for unifying all singularities (*MHF*, pp. 299, 298), it is possible to see the silhouette of capitalism's relentless desire to transform plural histories into a single one or, as recently renamed by Fredric Jameson, even a "singular modernity."<sup>16</sup> Hence, experiencing history is now to be realized in a space assigned to it—modernity, whose omnitemporality links together the past that has occurred, the future yet to come, and the present as it is being lived, demarcating the modern from all of its antecedents. Under such conditions, history is more spatial than temporal, fixed by the structure of narrative dedicated to recounting the completed story of the nation (see *MHF*, pp. 298–300). This new space of experience is accompanied by the affirmation of expectation, which, in time, becomes more complex. But it is particularly true when the space of history's horizon in this hermeneutic appears as the nation-state—the location of experience Koselleck must uphold as the sign of the modern. With Koselleck's account of modernity as history itself, it is precisely the space of the modern that embodies the past, the anticipated future, and the lived present. The all-encompassing history authorized by modernity is the history of humanity. Yet this enlarging and encompassing space of history—the collective singular—resembles more the trajectory of capitalism, the name Koselleck never dares to mention, and the nation-state, its enthusiastic political partner that enables expansion. We know that the very plurality that it claims to have unified is actually undermined by the special histories (and coexisting mixed temporalities) that have steadily resisted its assimilating ambition, "chip[ping it] away" (*MHF*, p. 306).

In fact, it is this very confrontation between the claims of the collective

16. See Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (New York, 2002).

singular, initiated by the expansion of capital (and its proxy, the nation-state), and received special histories lived by peoples encountered along its route that brings into the immanent time of modernity the forceful contact of a history that has its own unique, internal time with countries like Japan and the colonized world outside of Euro-America. The opening up of the globe and especially the creation of a world market often brought diverse cultures into violent clash in a synchronous drama that inevitably was re-coded in a diachronic narrative upholding a chronologically uniform time ranging from barbaric to civilized and insisting on authorizing discrete comparisons. While it was in the context of this expanding world market that forms of unevenness were first perceived—then later described as non-contemporaneous contemporaneity—it was undoubtedly Marx who first called attention to the uneven development of material production and the coexistence of a dominant mode of production and surviving prior modes that often appear in “stunted form, or even travestied,” which thus “assign rank and influence to the others.”<sup>17</sup> And it is this contest between these prior modes of production and a universalizing world history (personified by the world market) appointed to unify and incorporate the plural special histories that is subsequently put into play by discussions in prewar Japan and elsewhere throughout the colonized and semicolonized worlds of the interwar period. Capital’s desire to reduce this plurality to a singular space of experience undermines itself because the space already bears the mark of difference, owing to its association with the nation-state. But to say this is not to invite the possibility of an alternative modernity. As Ricoeur observed: “The paradox is great: history is proclaimed to be a world phenomenon by historian-patriots” (*MHF*, p. 301). But what Ricoeur insists on labeling as paradox was effectively a contradiction that, it needs saying, applies equally to those persisting attempts to identify an alternative that might rid us of the invidious binary of original and copy but lose their advantage by fixing their found objects in space. Moreover, Ricoeur’s paradox is hobbled by his own refusal to engage the status of historical time, which in his text is invariably reduced to the structural and spatial constraints of narrative. The time of narrative is always the present, even though narrative time is a divided chronology that structures the unfolding of a story as an accomplished and completed achievement. Like Koselleck, on whom he has written brilliantly, Ricoeur must cling closely to a singular linear time of clock and calendar that marks the course of all national narratives. In this practice, the actual encounter with time itself—things happening through

17. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (1939; New York, 1973), pp. 105–6.

time, not simply in it—is avoided and resembles capitalism’s own claim to timelessness as a tactic to divert the prospect of change and the risk of becoming merely a historical moment now passed.

If, as Koselleck has envisaged, history was elevated as the subject of its own absolute self-knowledge—history itself a unified history of humanity, imperially gathering up all special histories into the unifying realm of the collective singular—it was also empowered by what Ricoeur calls a “hidden form of the same claim” that could act against its untenable status as self-knowledge and singular time (*MHF*, p. 305). **The historical present, now established as the perspective for all temporal formations, is centered as an absolute.** Once the collective singular is discredited in its impossible universalizing mission to singularize the history of humanity, it turns to the singular historical moment, which is the now of the historical present. Even today, it insists on the developmental imperative and its familiar claim of a totalizing history; the “vocables of world history” and the imposition of odious comparisons promote programs of catching up with the parade of the historical present attained by modern Euro-America (*MHF*, p. 305). The here and now is henceforth distinguished from times past, to be sure, but also from those different temporalities that exist immanently in the modern present but are hidden from it, as in the there and the then, since it is our time that provides both perspective and tribunal. **The here and now of actual experience, our modernity, is our history, our time, and never theirs.** The distancing of expectation from past experiences thus becomes the condition of asserting the difference of our self-valorizing and self-referring modernity and its superiority over both its antecedents and others. But the decision to shift the concept of modernity to the register of an absolute historical present eventually required misrecognizing the apparent contradiction that our time and place is characterized by its unique difference from others. Moreover, the change of index directs attention instead to generalizing the values our modernity embodies and promoting the conceit that they must now be defended, as we have seen with recent regularity in appeals to the notion of the clash of civilizations (see *MHF*, p. 311). Here, in any case, is the model of comparability that has sanctioned seeing the coexistence of other times with the present and demanding their assimilation which has meant becoming modern, that is, capitalistic and democratic (a linkage that before World War II was seen as impossible and unnatural). Societies could hope to realize this goal, whose promise came from the future as an expectation made present, if they satisfied the requisite conditions and followed a normative experience, if they conformed to our modernity. But the criterion for such inclusion is clearly provided by capitalism, whose ideological figure of time is chronologically unitary and present (as Simmel foresaw),

synchronic and spiral, even as it struggles to exceed the constraints imposed by the nation form and an already achieved national time. But the practice of capitalism produced different temporalities in the various operations of production, circulation and distribution. In any case, it was the choice between “our modernity” or theirs that the Japanese made in the interwar period, a choice that, not surprisingly, was a call to overcome the former. And this prefigured what later would be full-scale dissent throughout the Third World and former colonial domains.

### 3. No Future

If a particular conception of the future proves no longer capable of exercising its pull on the present, the spell cast by the phrases “our modernity,” and “history itself” is finally broken and the present is released from playing the role of shaping experience according to expectations promising the achievement of progressive perfectibility. I am not suggesting, as contemporary endists do, that the temporality of the future, as such, has been evicted from our historical horizon or has been realized, thus putting an end to history. While there have been appeals to a triumphal end of history after the cold war and dire predictions of a present that now portends ecological disaster, not to mention the fraudulent promise to end the threat of terrorism itself, presentism is not the same as the simple present any more than an indeterminate and unknowable future is synonymous with futurism. Yet too often these temporal dimensions have been misrecognized, out of ambition, desire, and menace, in an effort to invest with meaning, purpose, and even direction the outcomes of the present and future. The most familiar marker of the experience upheld by presentism and futurism has invariably pointed to either an achieved or completed modernity (as well as its “alternative”) or the aspiration of a utopia yet to come. In some instances, abrupt changes opened upon a future filled with either possibility or peril and destruction. Too often such demands, whatever the political motivation, have aimed at overcoming a present both dominated by the processes of capitalism, as Marx demonstrated, and by its “rhythms” and “symmetries,” as described by Georg Simmel. With fascism, it is well to recall, there was an inordinate promise to save capitalism from itself and from liberalism, whereas communism sought to rid capitalism entirely from historical society.

What Simmel was to point to at the turn of the century in *The Philosophy of Money*, his important cultural supplement to Marx’s *Capital*, was the establishment of a cultural formation no longer constrained by enforcing periodicity in order to satisfy individual emotions and wants. It was now possible, at any given moment, to buy anything for money. Such a culture was able to overcome the limits set by space and time and thus the need to delineate definite periods compelling the determination of a framework for

action. In Simmel's reckoning, all that was necessary, under the circumstances of this vision of a lived, endless present, was the will and capacity of the individual to act upon objective conditions. For those who possess the means to carry out this desire, the present will always appear as indistinguishable from the future; for others, the present can only mean uncertainty and offer hope for a better future. Moreover, it was the absence of periodicity demanded by capitalism that rendered invisible the coexistence of multiple temporalities in the present and their claims on both the past and future. Yet Simmel never explained the historical conditions that might account for the interruption of a concern for periodicity in the present; he had decided in advance to remain silent on the formation of capitalist society. Moreover, he was looking at the absence of periodicity from the perspective of consumption and consumers, not production, workers, and wages, which would have demanded instituting a framework determined by temporal markers. The sudden manifestation or awareness of the importance of periodicity would in fact reflect the punctual, cyclical crises produced by capitalist accumulation itself, as it would undermine the capacity to buy anything, anytime, especially for those whose future was always the day after. In this regard, the manifestation or awareness of the demand for periodicity at certain moments would signify a symptom of critical instability in the system and the unwanted reinstatement of a framework for determining rhythms of time, a framework pointing to a resolution in the future. But from the standpoint of production the diverse operation of capitalism's processes demanded a framework that recognized a periodicity constituted by uneven temporalities.

I am proposing then a conception of the future that is simply unknowable in advance. The future that we have long understood and embraced is not the ineluctable result of a given historical evolution, the necessary and foreseeable product of "natural" laws of social transformation, the inevitable fruit of economic, scientific, technological progress—or, worse still, the prolongation, under more and more perfected forms, of the same, of what already exists, of an actually existing modernity and its realized economic and social structures. In this model, experience turns back to a historical present, which now remains open to a history made in the present founded on the fashioning of expectations based on an unforeseen future. Here, the present moment signifies a form of expectation that can only know possibilities supplied by the past, inasmuch as the "actual-now," which can never be for itself alone, remains the focal point of "retentions," even as it retains its "point-like" status.<sup>18</sup> In this view, the historical present

18. Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Suddenness: On the Moment of Aesthetic Appearance*, trans. Ruth Crowley (1981; New York, 1994), pp. 23, 30.



comes close to resembling what Hannah Arendt once identified as an “odd in-between period which sometimes inserts itself into historical time when not only the later historians but the actors and witnesses, the living themselves, become aware of an interval in time which is altogether determined by things that are no longer and by things that are not yet.”<sup>19</sup> Arendt was echoing Chateaubriand’s plaint that had called attention to the dilemma, as phrased by François Hartog, of living between the “impossibility of the past” and the “impossibility of the future” (*RH*, p. 118). Marxists, on their part, saw in these “intervals” the figure of a transition between what once had been and what was about to be born, a form of temporality rather than simply Arendt’s indeterminate dead zone of no time. But Arendt managed to acknowledge the mingling of “waves of the future” and the “forces of the past,” the former driving the present back into the past and the latter pressing it forward. Hence, for Arendt and those who live in this interval, time never flows successively but rather starts and stops and is broken in the middle, where she stands. If the interval in Arendt’s meditations falls short of becoming the present and is only a time gap in which the formation of struggle makes “a stand against past and future,” it still offers a powerful beginning for temporalizing the present.<sup>20</sup> It is, in fact, the temporality of the present, Lukács’s “pernicious chasm,” that confronts not only the past (and the lure of an unknowable future) but also the multiple temporalities constituting the names of the past that inhabit it.

It is important to recognize that the historical present as a global unity already marks the coequality and immanence of the noncontemporaneous contemporary moment. A historical present filled with mixed temporalities has always been a condition of capitalist modernization, even as its copresent uncanniness was suppressed by both the authority of the future perfect and the expectations of progress that vowed to raise all societies to the same level. The effect was to displace the uncanny temporal figure to the world outside of Euro-America and put its societies under the sign of underdevelopment, which announced comparative lack. The force of the collective singular lay in singularizing all plural histories capital encountered along its way and in assimilating them to its exemplar. This return to a perspective of the historical present might allow us to rewind the narrative of acculturation that has reinforced the externality of clock and calendar time to disclose the texture of the uncanniness of mixed temporalities it had smoothed out and straightened.<sup>21</sup> What seems promising about the opening

19. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1961), p. 9.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

21. See Takeuchi Yoshimi, “Asia as Method,” *What Is Modernity? Writings of Takeuchi Yoshimi*, trans. and ed. Richard Calichman (New York, 2004), pp. 149–65. Takeuchi’s essay is prescient in



supplied by the present is the specularity of unevenness, which both constitutes its sign and defines its relationship to the industrial societies of Euro-America, and its capacity to now become the mirror of our own nature. Specifically, this experience among so-called late developers actually made available to the “enfeebled center” of Euro-America both the recognition of the temporal immanence of the marginally uneven and the spectacle of its existence in our own backyard.<sup>22</sup>

Throughout much of the twentieth century there has been a consistent oscillation between an impulse to define the present in terms of the future, leading to what has been called presentism, and attempts to envisage new regimes of qualitative time that would enable a reconsideration of how the past constantly intervenes in the present. But this particular narrative was only preparatory to staging the contest of different, competing futures that fueled cold war ideologies and was removed as a solution to the present when that struggle ended. As Koselleck has reminded us, the modern regime of history appeared at the moment the idea of the exemplar and its imitation disappeared to make place for what now did not repeat itself (see *FP*, pp. 19–38). If at first greater privilege was accorded to the status of the future than the present, the schema was reversed to make way for an endless present (presentism) or a triumphal endism, which often came down to the same thing. The cultural inflection of this presentism was modernism as a broad signifier. Under the imperative of the new time, history made itself the name of the future—the future perfect, with people like Marinetti heralding the new regime of temporalization, announcing that it was now urgently necessary to liberate Italy from the “gangrene of professors, archaeologists, antiquarians. . . . The splendor of the world enriches itself with a new beauty—the beauty of speed” (quoted in *RH*, p. 120). Perceptively and presciently, Marinetti envisaged modernity as speed and velocity and anticipated the later enthusiasm of Chinese and Japanese in the 1920s, who fastened onto buzzwords like *speed* as the appropriate description of their modernizing experience. Speed seemed to defy time and space and even demanded a new form of their alignment. In this way, the present was made to embody the future by means of accelerated velocity. In time the future eventually ceded its place to the terrain of the present, announcing the advent of presentism. Benjamin famously fixed on the present—now

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that he saw the discursive role of Orientalism two decades before Said. See also Kosaka Masaaki et al., *Sekaishitteki tachiba to Nippon* [Japan and Its World Historical Position] (Tokyo, 1943) for an early and penetratingly philosophic valorization of the present and the necessity to recognize the coexistence of different plural histories capable of challenging the claims of a collective singular.

22. Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington, Ind., 1992), p. 155.

time (*Jetztzeit*)—as the moment filled with explosive possibilities, the appointed moment for messianic cessation, and Franz Rosenzweig differentiated “the today, which is only a footbridge toward tomorrow” from “an other day which is the springboard to eternity” (quoted in *RH*, p. 122).

The presentism implicit in the modernist program proposed a progressive devaluation of the past and all that came before it to guarantee a definitive separation from the present’s antecedents. Similarly, it is important to recognize in this modernist project the ideological desire to conceal and displace the very historical unevenness marking its present; at any rate, that unevenness, it was believed, would eventually be eliminated. The early decades of the century, and especially the interwar conjuncture, were crowded with manifestoes arrayed against the past (its slowness) in the name of the immediacy of art and life, often summoning the instant, the sudden, and the simultaneous to attest to the temporality of the present. Whereas these declarations reflected artistic and literary impulses, all inflecting modernism itself, they nevertheless managed to match more substantial and materialized intimations associated with capital, which thinkers like Simmel had already described as portents of an endless present. There is, in any case, a good deal of evidence to authorize the image of a temporal dominant of the present already weighted with the future and the rejection of the past. Paul Valéry, despite his harsh dismissal of history, found it necessary to propose a mode of relating between past and present such that the former would no longer pretend to offer the latter lessons. Sartre, still as a novelist, acknowledged that there was only the “present, and nothing other than the present.” After the war, in the first issue of *Les Temps modernes*, he advised that writing for contemporaries meant looking at the world *not* through the optic of the future but with the “eyes of flesh,” “with our true, perishable eyes” (quoted in *RH*, pp. 123, 124). During the early months of the war in the Pacific, Japanese writers and scholars met to discuss the meaning of the conflict for the overcoming of the modern, Westernized present by something distinctly Japanese, while philosophers from Kyoto, at the same time, saw in the present a moment brimming over with world historical significance.

What surely appears to have occurred in this period was a fusion of future and present that, under altered historical conditions, would turn present against future and the force of its expectations to demand its eventual eviction. In spite of these intrawar announcements of a pervasive presentism, first metabolizing the future and then severing its relationship to it, it was not until the postwar period that the issue was joined in the political world. To be sure, Claude Lévi-Strauss lamented the passing of older, traditional societies and the bankruptcy of a future assuring endless progress. Un-

doubtedly, implicit in this critique was a sentiment that advised a forgetting of the future, which merely formed the flipside of a contemporaneous Japanese recommendation of the early 1960s to forget the Enlightenment. By the 1960s this idea had become a worldwide political slogan and defined the necessary condition to return to the present—marking the progressive invasion of the future's horizon by a contemporary society committed to greater consumption and the global extension of the commodity relation. But, before the future—by which I am referring to anticipation—was vacated from the present, it was necessary to complete the itinerary of narrative expectation traveled by the cold war. Despite either a cultural dissatisfaction with assurance of endless progress in the future or a valorization of an already fulfilled present in Euro-America, the cold war hurdled both by furnishing contending scripts avowing progressive fulfillment in a struggle to win the hearts and minds of the nonaligned. Different narratives pledged to make the future better than the present. As we look back upon that period stretching from war's end to the fall of the Berlin Wall, traversing a momentous process of decolonizing—the formation of new postcolonial nation-states in Asia and Africa, regional wars outside of Euro-America aiming to sustain the “unity” of the West, unscheduled but periodic genocides, and more—it is possible to recognize that competing versions of modernization were at stake. What yoked capitalist and Marxian versions together was the allure of a better future, the fantasy destiny of the future perfect toward which the present was being asked to direct its energies; there is of course a difference between revolution and evolution, but perhaps in retrospect not as great as it once was made to seem. If the heady moment of the 1960s revolutionary and utopian fervor dissolved into the 1970s slogan No Future, this dissolution also signified the severe shrinkage of the revolutionary idea, unscheduled global economic crises, the inexorable ascent of mass unemployment, and the exhausted productivity of the social welfare state—all erected on the solidary conviction that tomorrow will be better than today.

But there also came into view an accompanying rhythm of responses to these failures, both cynical and desperate, that were convinced of the certainty of an impoverished present. The cold war drama became increasingly emptied of its commitment to a brighter future for all—the permanent removal of unevenness—and dissipated into an insane game of military expenditure founded on the model of potlatch, ultimately beggaring the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Wall closed down a conception of a future capable of providing the necessary expectations to induce the present to work for its completion. For Euro-America, especially the United States, the end of the cold war inspired a noisy triumphalism expressed in forms

of endism that merely parroted earlier declarations of the end of ideology, a satisfaction that the moment of *kairos*—self-realization—had been reached; for others the present meant returning to a scene of ceaseless misery and misfortune and recruiting all available resources from the past. The removal of a scripted, illusory future, coincident with economic transformation everywhere motored by a muscular neoliberal doxa, meant restructuring, limitless privatization, interminable downsizing, outsourcing, endless appropriation by dispossession, and the transformation of the everyday into a day-to-day temporality, a time without any future, so to speak. Here, too, we begin to see the appeal to a past as a reservoir of possibilities and for resolving the misfortunes of an endless present, even in societies of advanced capitalism. For “people without a future,” as Pierre Bourdieu named them in France (but he could have been describing any industrial society), “time seems to be annihilated” because “the work salary is the support, if not the principle, of the majority of interests, expectations, exigencies, hopes and investments in the present, as well as the future or the past that (they) imply” (quoted in *RH*, p. 126). In the world outside Euro-America, once targeted for a modernizing makeover, the present scarcely exceeded the past or the future. But after the cold war all seemed to have declared a closure on the present and insisted on the placement of a pervasive presentism, heavy and desperate, recalling what T. S. Eliot once described (at another time) as a “provincialism . . . of time,” not of space, “one for which the world is the property solely of the living, a property in which the dead hold no shares.”<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Thickening the Present

What this “provincialism . . . of time” or what temporal narrowing has opened up is the time of the present as the locus of noncontemporaneous contemporaneity. This is not Arendt’s gap, as such, but the constant concourse of mixed temporalities mingling and coexisting with each other—the historical uncanny that has always remained in the shadow of capital and “our” modernity. Nor is it the end of a historical process, but the recognition that the “intimate structuring of Western culture . . . had collapsed on our heads” and with it, in particular, the concept of modern history founded on the conceit of process and progress that, for Arendt, still constituted an experience of disoriented time (quoted in *RH*, p. 15).<sup>24</sup>

The current return to a historical present teeming with competing tem-

23. T. S. Eliot, “What Is a Classic?” *On Poetry and Poets* (London, 1957), p. 69.

24. This passage, which doesn’t appear in the 1975 English edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, is quoted from the French translation. But see Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, pp. 41–90.

poralities from the past recalls both repetitions from other times and places and what perceiving them meant for social theory. Specifically, this recognition refers to those attempts envisaged by people like Tosaka and Maurice Halbwachs before World War II who sought to account for the spectacle of mixed temporalities in the present. Both, it is important to acknowledge, discounted the veracity of history's claims to a true time and proposed conceptions of temporality they believed to be emanating from the historical process itself (as they conceived it). The consequence of Halbwachs's and Tosaka's interventions was to deprivilege state archives and thus shifted the order of the Hegelian allegory symbolizing the conflict between Chronos, the god of Time, and Zeus, the god of politics who created state and hearth. In this struggle, Chronos, who inevitably devours his own, engulfing all in his passage, is ultimately dominated by Zeus, who creates the state, which in turn conquers time. Just as important is the state's capacity to transform in history all that Mnemosyne—the goddess of memory—had been able to collect after the rampaging passage of time.<sup>25</sup> It is also worth mentioning that while Halbwachs codified the separation of history from memory and upheld the claims of the latter over the former (that is to say, the claims of time over space) the effort to rematerialize time—yet retain its qualitative character—by freeing it from an interiorized, psychological consciousness was not attempted in Europe or America, but Japan. Tosaka's critique of what he called "borrowed time,"<sup>26</sup> referring to history's reliance on conceptions of time from other disciplines—the physical sciences, but especially the inner time consciousness of phenomenology and even mythology—and his identification of the everyday (especially as lived by the worker) revealed the real source of historical time, the "mystery of its secret."<sup>27</sup> Just as this move dismissed phenomenological and scientific time it also discounted the claims of national or imperial time to structure the narratives of historical practice. In many ways, Tosaka identified the everyday with the commodity form and the necessity to grasp what lay hidden behind its surface in order to bring to view the historical uncanny. For Tosaka, "work never waits," and while each day is marked by routine there is always tomorrow, which embodies a remainder yet to come and thus a reminder of heterogeneity, sparing the everyday from abstraction. What

25. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1975), p. 145; see also Enzo Traverso, *Le Passé, modes d'emploi: Histoire, mémoire, politique* (Paris, 2005), p. 24. There is an interesting parallel of the Hegelian allegory in the decision of the Meiji state during the late-nineteenth-century transformation of Japanese society to align its authority with the sun goddess—state foundation—rather than her brother, who created community.

26. Tosaka, *Tosaka Jun Zenshu*, 4:96.

27. *Ibid.*, 4:101.

Halbwachs recommended, with his observations on collective memory and the contretemps they represented, was the reinstatement of the historical uncanny, what had been written over by a familiarizing strategy of the socialization of national history, “essentially a narrative taught within the framework of the nation” (*MHF*, p. 394).<sup>28</sup> In this pedagogy, history became (as it still appears to be) mainly external and dead, without witness or being actually experienced. This feeling of externality is reinforced by the presentation of events within a calendrical framework. According to Halbwachs, the discovery of historical memory reflects a process of acculturation aimed at reaffirming the regime of external time and relocating a people within the familiarizing narrative of the nation, more about amnesia than remembering, having the intended effect of smothering the uncanniness associated with collective memory. Halbwachs complained that historical time was artificial because it conformed to the external constraints of the calendar and clock, a dead time that introduced cuts and slices absent from forms of collective memoration.<sup>29</sup> History differs from memory in its presumption of a singular, universal time (history itself) rather than coexisting multiple times that correspond to the memories of different temporalizations proper to each group.<sup>30</sup> The artificiality of the historical thus contrasts sharply with a transtemporal memory, which mixes the past experiences with those of the immediate now being lived. If history is concerned with change, with breaks that actually shorten time, memory cultivates resemblance to insure the continuous passage of past into present. “There are, in effect,” he wrote, “several collective memories. . . . [whereas] history is one and it can be said of it that there is only one history.” Historical practice invariably flattens out time in the interest of putting the ensemble of facts on the same plane. “The historical world,” he observed, “is like an ocean into which all the partial histories flow.”<sup>31</sup> Convinced that pasts continue as living vestiges and traces in the present, Halbwachs advised historians to turn away from their preoccupation with the past and make the historical present their vocation.

If, for Halbwachs, history delegitimizes the “lived (*vécu*) past,” it is possible to observe a similar impulse occurring elsewhere, namely, Japan, where Yanagita Kunio produced a history (*Meiji Taishoshi: Sesohen*) on the model of an immense tableau comprised of past and present customs mingling

28. See also Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, p. 101.

29. See *ibid.*, pp. 101, 144–54. It might be pointed out, in this connection, that in *Capital* Marx made the following, remarkable observation: “We are concerned here only with the broad and general characteristics, for epochs in the history of society are no more separated from each other by strict and abstract lines of demarcation than are geological epochs” (Marx, *Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1 of *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes [Harmondsworth, 1990], p. 492).

30. See Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, pp. 135, 137.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–36.

together in 1920s Tokyo and actually envisaged history's vocation as recording the cohabitation of different customs reflecting mixed temporalities in the present. In Peru at around the same time, Jose Carlos Mariátegui was reflecting on the intersection of historical times coexisting in conflict within a developmental framework and with the figure of unevenness that clearly signified the noncontemporaneity of the contemporaneous.<sup>32</sup> And in our time this fixation on the historical present as the punctual point of mixed temporalities has appeared more frequently, throughout the world, as evidenced by Chinua Achebe's novelization of the conflict produced by clashing times in eastern Nigeria (*The Arrow of God*)—the visualization of temporal islands where contacts and collisions have taken place and have launched the production and spread of cultural *métissage*—and even Achille Mbembe's formulation of the entanglements of time employed to explain the postcolony. In fact, there are innumerable examples of the noncontemporaneous contemporary that can be recruited from the domains of literature, cinema, and, obviously, sociology, an immense literature analyzing the conflicts of tradition and modernity that, especially in the great cities of the world, take place between immigrant parents and their children, among the claims and practices of diasporic peoples in the heart of modern metropolitan life, and within virtual pockets of a transplanted Third World. Also, movements like the Zapatistas in Chiapas have managed to balance the cyclical time of the indigenous community with a political project of liberation inscribed in a Marxian narrative of modernity (though free of progressivist mythologies) at the same time that they inhabit the perennial present of the contemporary world and the global dominant they are combating. What these perspectives offer is a model of the historical present that constitutes a global historical phenomenon in which the temporality of noncontemporaneous contemporaneity is accompanied by the expansion of capital and its continuing reproduction in new registers, even though its appearance has been displaced into what Koselleck called a "naturalistic chronology" of ordinary time. What we might still attempt to do in this current conjuncture to offset this historicizing reflex is to begin the difficult labor of creating a discourse on modernity that speaks to the world, one centered principally in understanding the history of our present as the unity of uneven temporalizations differentiating global geopolitical space, rather than merely affirming or cheering on a globalizing project that sees the world only as the true space of the commodity relation. By this I mean re-

32. See John Kraniauskas, "Laughing at Americanism: Benjamin, Mariátegui, Chaplin," in *Walter Benjamin: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Peter Osborne, 3 vols. (London, 2005), 3:368–77.

turning to a position that might enable us to give shape to a proper ontology of the present in such a way as to rethink the relationship of time and space as a primary condition for both historicization and comparison. Such an ontology must be sensitive to or accountable for the durational present (rather than a merely punctual one), to mixed temporalizations, and to the role played by contemporary political struggles rather than merely the primacy of spatial configurations. But any effort to begin this enormous task of imagining how to fuse an understanding of and an acting upon the historical present requires at the same time that we seek to rescue the “world-time” of multiple temporalities from the “levelling off” of significance and the shearing of the “nows” into a simple succession.<sup>33</sup>

33. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, 1962), p. 474.