

This article gathers together some provisional materials for the construction of a Māori Mārx. I begin by following Marx's thought as he continually complexifies his understanding of the determinants of history in his search for the proper starting place for a materialist dialectics. I leave historical Marx at the close of his life, occupied with the passionate study of Indigenous modes of life. Returning his gaze, I read Marx from an Indigenous perspective, sketching some of the lineaments of a Māori Mārx for whom whakapapa is the central concept. From this perspective, I describe an Indigenous, comparative, and historical materialism, termed 'geometry of life', that seeks the consistency between modes of life and the modes of thinking that emanate within them. I close by suggesting that we must conceive of ourselves as part of the ensemble powers of a proletarian Papatūānuku if we are to conserve the earth and abolish capital.

## Māori Mārx: Some Provisional Materials

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The increasingly likely possibility of planetary ecological collapse makes an urgent demand on our present.<sup>1</sup> The task ahead has two aspects. On the one hand, we must dismantle the machinery of Papatūānuku's, and so our, domination and desecration. Capitalism is incompatible with our continuing to live on this planet. The second task, inseparable and simultaneous with the first, demands that we find new ways of living with each other and the earth. Capitalism renders the world into cheap nature (the earth as raw material, fuel, and dumping ground for the production process) and cheap labour (labour-power paid for at less than the cost of its reproduction) by devaluing both.<sup>2</sup> The more general field of work that goes into maintaining and reproducing workers for capital is externalised by the wage relation. Likewise, the human/nature distinction hides capitalism's parasitic reliance on Papatūānuku for its own functioning. These two moments are aspects of the same process. As Peter Linebaugh

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1 Authorship of this text is, of course, multiple. I would like to thank Miri Davidson, Jack Foster, Campbell Jones, Carl Mika, and an anonymous reviewer for their incredibly generous engagement with earlier versions of this text.

2 These terms are borrowed from Jason Moore, 'The Rise of Cheap Nature,' in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

has said, ‘reproduction precedes social production. Touch the women, touch the rock’.<sup>3</sup>

Capital’s ability to reproduce itself approaches a hard limit in the breakdown not just of the reproduction of workers but in the reproduction of life as a planetary system. Capitalists, spurred by the persistent anxiety of how to preserve class domination in a rapidly collapsing climate, make plans for apocalypse bunkers in Aotearoa New Zealand, or dream of infinite accumulation enabled through intergalactic expansion.<sup>4</sup> We might wish to make different plans and dream different dreams than those of the capitalists. A Māori Mārx—improvised, imagined, collective, ensemble—has a vital contribution to make towards this life-and-death struggle.

In the last few years of his life, Marx’s thought underwent a profound transformation, registered in his focus on the multiple modes of life expressed in non-Western and non-capitalist societies. Marx’s thinking in his final years can be seen as a more expansive arc, curling back alongside the preoccupations of his youth. Marx’s early writings from his time living in Paris from 1843 before his exile in 1845 express dazzling, exploratory, and expansive research and thinking textured by discontinuity and incompleteness. They were worked out with and against the German Idealism of Hegel and the materialism and philosophical anthropology of Feuerbach. The writings of this period also document Marx’s exuberant engagement with French political theory, especially that of utopian socialists such as Fourier and St Simon, as well as his first forays into British political economy. Where Marx returned later in his life to investigate the possible configurations of human existence, he did so not through the figure of the abstract human as derived from philosophical anthropology but through the empirical existence of Indigenous peoples. This work remains a radical open-endedness at the end of Marx’s life. Marx’s hearty engagement with peoples outside and other to his own thinking suggests that another radical

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3 Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

4 Anna-Maria Murtola, ‘How the Global Tech Elite Imagine the Future,’ *Economic and Social Research Aotearoa*, Report no. 11 (November 2018).

transformation of his thought was under way at the close of his life. One vital conclusion can be drawn from this, one often stubbornly refused by Marxisms of many stripes: Marx himself saw the need for his theory to undergo transformation through engagement with modes of life beyond those of Europe and conceptual frameworks beyond those of European construction.

My aim is not simply to try to simulate for Marx a textual engagement with te ao Māori, looking over his shoulder, as it were, as he tried to discern the lineaments of Māori modes of life and thought by reading early anthropological accounts. An attempt to revive only this Māori Marx would be akin to the rather kitsch act of drawing a moko on Marx's face. This might be useful to Marxism to an extent, providing insight into a terrain that Marx's thinking had entered into but never described. It would remain, however, a perspective limited by Marx's own position. But there is a second, more dimly lit, Māori Marx that observes the first from a different position. This figure is a Māori reading of Marx, something more difficult for me to construct: a conceptual matrix drawn from a number of Māori thinkers, supported by the fullness of my experience studying at wānanga, provides an initial orientation from which to develop this second reading.

Beyond whatever trajectory Marx's thought may have suggested, there are more pressing reasons for the construction of a Māori Marx. There is a certain violence of abstraction in the perspective that demands the spread of a homogenous Marxist logic around the globe, one that reflects the same violence inherent in the expansion of capitalism. At best, such a perspective sees other modes of life and modes of thought only as gaps to be sketched in to an existing schema. Instead, my conviction is that Marx's thought must undergo profound transformation through its encounters with what is beyond it. New concrete universals must be built up from the ground of our relational difference if we are to open out from the narrows of 'scientific socialism' and into the wider main of human emancipatory endeavour. We must open out, however, without falling into the wash of a deracinated, placeless thinking, abstracted from our practical cohabitation, from which we would then have to conjure a world beyond this one from thin air. We

must, then, think from the deep connections of the place in which we find ourselves and with the long thinking of this place to which Māori give voice. Tikanga Māori and mātauranga Māori are names for this thinking. As emanations of the long inhabitation of this place, they assert their own validity. Their engagement requires no justification. This is not to say that tikanga and mātauranga are vestiges of some static tradition; they are modes of thought that flow in to our present in a way that is vital, dynamic, and contemporary. They are not bracketed at the point of European arrival, as is the case with Pākehā memory that begins with the Nation.<sup>5</sup>

The question that remains, then, is why Marx? The real, historical arrival of capitalism and its ongoing clash and entanglement with te ao Māori refuses any purity of analytic position. By listening to Marx, we can learn to listen for the ructions and stresses of capitalism's operations so as better to inform the practical activity of demystifying our own relationships and perspectives. As capitalism insinuates itself into real contexts, embedding itself in the life-blood of other worlds, so the struggle in, against, and beyond it must think and act from these conjunctions.

Sir Tipene O'Regan, who has been called the architect of modern corporate Māoridom due to his role as the chair of Ngāi Tahu throughout the Treaty-settlement negotiations, said that 'mana and money sound very similar'.<sup>6</sup> My view is that O'Regan is fundamentally mistaken, and this mistake is reflected in the form of the corporate iwi. O'Regan's comparison is straightforward enough: in the old days, if you had a lot of mana you had a lot of power and prestige and an increased sphere of influence. These days, money stands in for mana and, indeed, for neoliberal Māori, mana motuhake appears as having money in the free market. My contention is that the concept that plays as central a role in te ao Māori as money does in the Pākehā world is not mana, but whakapapa. Marx describes money as a *nexus rerum*, the nodal point of connection between

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5 Stephen Turner, 'Settler Dreaming,' *Memory Connection* 1, no. 1 (2011): 114–26.

6 Colin James, 'Transition from Tradition to Modernity,' *Māori Law Review*, 12 June 2013, <https://maorilawreview.co.nz/2013/06/transition-from-tradition-to-modernity-colin-james/>

all things.<sup>7</sup> Whakapapa expresses a horizontal interrelation of all things, as well as their intergenerational layering. Money, likewise, signifies an entire system of relationships, the relationship of every commodity to every other commodity via the price at which they may be rendered equivalent for exchange. Money is the means by which commodities socialise. However, money blocks the experience of our congenial interrelation with our world, our whakapapa. Marx says as much in regard to the institution of monetised exchange in ancient Greece: '[monetary greed] is itself the community, and can tolerate none other standing above it'.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the corrosive effects of the infinite accumulation money suggests is possible, it is apparent that the narrowness of the commodity-perspective—the world as value and, above all, exchange value; relationality being between commodities—blocks a more generous experience of, and communion with, the world.

The attempt to envision a Māori Mārx is for me the process of attempting to gather together the strands across the worlds of my learning: the university and the wānanga, London and Pōrangahau. These worlds have been the historical subjects of contact, encounter, entanglement, and incomplete subsumption. In what follows, by no means definitive or complete, I describe some provisional materials for the construction of a Māori Mārx. Each name of this latter conjunction in no way signifies some unvariegated and consistent whole of thought to then be adhered to one another at points where their logics interlock: Māori 'plus' Marx. Instead, the attempt is to imagine a geometer, a meeting place capable of the connective and comparative geometry with which we might begin to discern the outline of a world free of the constraints of this one.

As far as I am aware, literature that explicitly attempts to think through Marx from a Māori perspective is scant. Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith's brilliant PhD thesis provides a Marxist, historical-materialist account of

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7 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 228.

8 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 223.

Māori protest between 1968 and 1995.<sup>9</sup> As Poata-Smith outlines, the emergence of militant worker organisations from the late-1960s such as *Tē Hōkoi*, an underground newspaper, and the associated Maori Organisation on Human Rights, allied as they were to the Pākehā Left and the trade unions, might constitute a practical example of Māori politics informed by Marxism. My project here is somewhat different. My aim is to try to transform Marx's thinking so that it might become more adequate to our context by thinking it through from the perspective of a constellation of Māori concepts.

## Marx and Māori

The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation. The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls, with which it forces the barbarians' intensely obstinate hatred of foreigners to capitulate. It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.<sup>10</sup>

Even undercut, as this passage is, by a more antagonistic counterpoint, there can be little doubt that the *Communist Manifesto* tacitly expresses a unilinear conception of historical development. Granted its polemical charge, in this text non-Western societies, in their irresistible capitulation to capitalism, are seen to fester in the prehistory of their eventual transition to 'civilisation'. The *Manifesto* largely accepted the stadial or four-stage theory

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9 Evan Te Ahu Poata-Smith, *The Political Economy of Māori Protest Politics, 1968–1995: A Marxist Analysis of the Roots of Māori Oppression and the Politics of Resistance* (PhD diss., University of Otago, 2002).

10 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London: Verso, 2012), 47.

of human development put forward by, among others, Adam Smith and the Physiocrats in the 1750s.<sup>11</sup> The stadial theory viewed history as structured according to a single ascendant ark: according to the mode by which a society produced its subsistence, societies progressed from hunter-gatherer, to shepherding, to agriculture, finally reaching their apex in commercial society. The *Manifesto* memorably added to this trajectory a fifth stage that Smith somehow forgot to mention: communism. As communism would emerge from the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production, colonisation, the *Manifesto* implies, serves the purpose of accelerating the progress of non-Western societies towards their inevitable future.

Marx's reading on non-Western and non-capitalist peoples deepened in the following decades. Kevin Anderson summarises Marx's vast yet neglected writings on these issues in his book *Marx at the Margins*.<sup>12</sup> The writings that provide the source material for Anderson's work are doubly marginal. On the one hand, they cover countries and peoples that, at the time of Marx's writing, remained on the margins of capitalism, whether at its frontiers (Ireland, the United States), partially incorporated through colonialism (India, Indonesia, Algeria), or still beyond its reach (Russia, China, Poland). On the other hand, the writings themselves are from Marx's journalism, letters, notes, and notebooks in which he excerpted and commented on texts as he read them. This apparent marginality when compared to his serious economic writings has been exaggerated by subsequent editorial decisions, with Engels's focus on readying the second and third volumes of *Capital* for publication and the motivations of heavy-handed Soviet editors under Stalin.<sup>13</sup> Through this expansive research on non-Western and non-capitalist societies—wherein he paid particular attention to the intersections of race, gender, and nation with capitalism—Marx continually complexified his conception of historical development,

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11 Ronald Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 68.

12 Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

13 For a useful account of the travails of these texts in their ongoing journey toward publication see Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 247–252.



developing a far less deterministic, more layered and multivalent schema, one that left open the question of possible trajectories of transformation. Marx would continue to rethink and rework the way he conceived of the relationships between the earth and its peoples, and between those peoples, for the remainder of his life. Indeed, in the last few years of his life, Marx was so profoundly opened up by his readings on Indigenous societies that his thinking would become fundamentally transformed.

The *Grundrisse*, a series of notebooks Marx kept between 1857 and 1858, marked an important shift in his conceptualisation of historical development. One of the key ways in which Marx complexified the stadial narrative was through the introduction of multiple geographical points of origin into his analysis, each subject to its own history of development. By the inclusion of ‘the Asiatic mode of production’, which could only be understood as following its own twists and turns, rather than following in Europe’s footsteps, Marx rethought the conception of a single path.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, at this stage, the *Grundrisse* still implies that no one comes to communism except through capitalism.

Though they each have different characteristics, for Marx, the earliest forms of social organisation are all communal. In an extended discussion of ‘precapitalist’ societies, Marx describes three different communal forms under the headings of Asiatic, Graeco-Roman, and Germanic. It seems, at least superficially, that Marx would agree with Karl Popper, Peter Munz, and Rawiri Te Maire Tau that Māori were a tribal people at a comparable stage in development as the tribal Greeks or Germans.<sup>15</sup> What is of interest, in the view of these latter authors, are factors that produce growth by dissolving the impediments to progress such as traditional beliefs and customs, thus enabling rationalisation. In this view, Ngāi Tahu are little different from

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14 Karl Marx, ‘1859 Preface,’ in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

15 Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies* (Routledge Classics: Routledge, 2011), 302; Peter Munz, ‘How the West was Won: Miracle or Natural Event?’ *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 21, no. 2 (1991), 253–76; Rawiri Te Maire Tau, ‘The Death of Knowledge: Ghosts on the Plains,’ *New Zealand Journal of History* 35, no. 2 (2001), 131–52.

the entrepreneurial Gauls, who turned their colonisation by the Romans into a business opportunity. Citing Munz, who himself is citing Popper, Tau makes the point that Māori are like the Indigenous inhabitants of Gaul and Germania who ‘were smart enough to seize the opportunities offered by Roman traders and Roman armies to enrich themselves and improve their standard of living’.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, it was the ‘relentless pursuit’ of these opportunities that ‘eroded indigenous loyalties, customs and traditions’.<sup>17</sup> The specificities of each culture are mostly irrelevant to these authors, being only so many examples of static, irrational dogmas that require ‘culture clash’ (read colonisation) to set them onto the path of rationalisation.

Marx, on the other hand, is interested in the way in which a ‘living and active humanity’ in unity ‘with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature’ becomes split in two: ‘a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital’.<sup>18</sup> Marx here comments on the historical process by which capitalism introduces a decisive cleft into a prior unity. It is through the violent processes of the clearance of direct producers from the land—enclosure, colonisation, extirpation, ‘so-called primitive-accumulation’—that the umbilical relationship between people and the land that nourishes them is broken.<sup>19</sup> In this vein, Raymond Williams was to note that the sharpening resolution between the terms ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ was a function of increasingly pervasive ‘real interaction’.<sup>20</sup> It is this break that sets the human against nature, the subject against the object, and enshrines the individual as a discrete unit. Free in a double sense (freed from the means of production and so free to sell their labour-power), formerly direct producers must buy their means of subsistence on the market. Their relationship to the earth is no longer mediated through the collective but instead through money; they

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16 Tau, ‘The Death of Knowledge,’ 143.

17 Tau, ‘The Death of Knowledge,’ 143.

18 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 489.

19 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 871.

20 Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1997), 83.

appear to each other as related through their private labours. Torn from the unity of their metabolic exchange with the earth, people stand in ‘dot-like isolation’.<sup>21</sup>

Marx’s discussion of the unity of human activity with nature and its subsequent separation takes place within a historical-materialist account of the origins and development of property in pre-capitalist societies. Marx suggests that, because living in unity with the earth is the normal condition of humanity, while the separation of that unity is a historical process, the former does not require explanation. However, he is forced to provide some account of the previously lived unity between humanity and nature in order to better understand the process of its subsequent division.

Marx defines ‘property’ in its prelapsarian state as belonging to a community, and belonging to a community as belonging to the land. Through this double belonging, individuals relate to the earth as their ‘inorganic body’. As Marx states: ‘Property therefore means belonging to a clan (community) (having subjective-objective existence in it); and, by means of the relation of this community to the land and soil, [relating] to earth as the individual’s inorganic body’.<sup>22</sup> Thus, prior to division, human beings’ relation to their natural conditions of production was as ‘natural presuppositions’ of the self, as the inorganic body of their subjectivity in which their subjectivity is realised: their ‘extended body’ (the earth).<sup>23</sup> This relationship is necessarily mediated by the community: ‘an isolated individual could no more have property in land and soil than he could speak’.<sup>24</sup> Existence in a situation such as this is characterised by a unity of subject and object, subjectively as ourselves and objectively as the land, which Marx terms ‘subjective-objective’ existence.<sup>25</sup>

Even couched, as it is, in the language internal to subsequent separation—‘property’, ‘subjective-objective’, ‘inorganic’—Marx’s under-

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21 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 485, 496.

22 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 492.

23 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 485, 492.

24 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 485.

25 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 492.

standing is astonishingly resonant with the basic contours of Māori conceptions of being tangata whenua. Whenua, meaning land and placenta, reflects the fact that we are born from the womb of Papatūānuku. Tangata whenua is a relationship of belonging to the earth as the earth. The closest comparable concept to ‘property’ in the sense that Marx is discussing it is that of mana whenua. Mana whenua, mana meaning sacred authority and power for action, has two aspects: mana in the land and mana over the land. Mana in the land is issued by way of the whakapapa from Ranginui and Papatūānuku to their children; that is, all of creation, including tangata whenua. Mana over the land comes, still through the connections of whakapapa, from the prowess of more recent ancestors. The former can be referred to as mana tupuna (ancestors), the latter as mana tangata (people).<sup>26</sup> These two aspects of mana are analogous with Marx’s conception of property in non-capitalist societies: the relationship to the earth as an extended body approximates mana tupuna; and the community that mediates the relationship of the individual to the earth approximates mana tangata. With regard to the latter, for Māori, an individual living in isolation was inconceivable.<sup>27</sup> So too for Marx, whose analysis rejected the central mystifications of bourgeois social relations that saw the individual as existing prior to the social, the fondness of political economists for ‘Robinson Crusoe stories’, as he termed it.<sup>28</sup> An important contrast, or maybe a clarification, is that Papatūānuku is far from inorganic, being a living biological system with her own agency and personality. Although not explicitly stated, Marx acknowledges as much in his description of humans as the subjectivity of the objective earth. Marx’s contention here resonates with Māori Marsden’s assertion of ‘humankind as the envelope of the noosphere—conscious awareness of Papatūānuku’.<sup>29</sup>

Acknowledging Marx’s insight into some of the general premises of

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26 Edward Taihakurei Durie, *Custom Law*, Treaty Research Series (Wellington: Treaty of Waitangi Research Unit, 1994), 14–18.

27 Durie, *Custom Law*, 10–14.

28 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 169–170; *Grundrisse*, 83.

29 Māori Marsden and Charles Te Ahukaramū Royal, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Otaki: Estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), 46.

an existence not divided by oppositions of use and exchange value, wage labour and capital, does not mean accepting the universal validity of his account. Marx's *Capital* is primarily, of course, a critique of European social relations achieved through a critique of the classical political economists who gave voice to those relations. However, a key contradiction that arises within capitalist social relations is the apparent naturalness, and therefore universality, of capitalist forms, a dynamic that conceals the historical particularity and contingency of those forms. A related problem vexes Marx throughout the *Grundrisse*. Here, Marx struggles over the correct starting point for a properly historical-materialist critique of political economy, perhaps failing to find a satisfactory answer.<sup>30</sup> Whereas Hegel began his *Science of Logic* from 'being-in-general' (pure being without any particular determinant or embodiment), for Marx this was an idealist starting point that emptied itself of all content.<sup>31</sup> Once emptied of all content, the category attains universality at the highest level of abstraction. The result is that the philosophers merely find their own categories everywhere they look.

Inverting Hegel's idealism, Marx initially suggests beginning with 'material production'.<sup>32</sup> Marx concludes, however, that the notion of 'production in general' abstracts from historical development and, although it brings out elements common to all production, it elides specificities and differences in its apparent unity. Ultimately, Marx finds, production in general is a category with which 'no real historical stage of production can be grasped'.<sup>33</sup> Marx poses two possible responses to this impasse: the first is to begin with 'living wholes', such as a given nation-state, and then, through analysis, to discover some 'determinant, abstract, general relations such as division of labour, money, value, etc'.<sup>34</sup> The second option works in the opposite direction, beginning with abstract, general relations and working on them to flesh out 'living wholes'. While Marx is certain that the

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30 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 81–109; see also Martin Nicolaus's forward to this edition, 35–38.

31 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 101.

32 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 83.

33 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 88.

34 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 100.

second option is the correct one, he is immediately troubled by the fact that simple, abstract, general relations have their own history. Each would first need to be accounted for, leading to a necessary regression to a historical point zero from which it would then be possible to begin. Marx counters that the correct place to begin is with a category that holds a particularly central position within the specific social formation or epoch to be studied. At the close of the introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx remains uncertain, fudging the answer by stating that the initial category must be central to a particular social formation but also ‘more or less’ common to all social formations.

## Commodity and Commune

Marx’s answer, as will become the famous departure point of *Capital*, is the simple commodity, divided and doubled as use/exchange value, the opposition from which Marx will dialectically unfurl the entire work. The commodity is Marx’s primary anthropological category of capitalist society. The contradiction at the seam of the commodity (use/exchange) is expressive of the contradictions of capitalism generally, a fragment of a hologram that reveals the entire image. Forgetting for a moment any judgements that order societies according to certain metrics, Marx enables a comparison between a society of reproduction in unity with the earth and a society organised around commodity production and exchange. Or, to modify his phrasing slightly, Marx enables an analysis of what becomes of Ranginui and Papatūānuku once subsumed within capitalist social relations.

He provides a beguiling response to this question towards the close of the third volume of *Capital*:

Capital-profit (or better still capital-interest), land-ground rent, labor-wages, this economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources, completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with

their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, who are at the same time social characters and mere things.<sup>35</sup>

Capital, arriving in Aotearoa with the nation-state and European law in tow, insinuates itself between Rangī and Papa and forces a nuptial with the earth. As its terrain for expansion, the ground of its reproduction, and the source of its raw materials, capital is lost without this unholy union. Following this ritual, the earth rises up in ghostly form. As a commodity, the earth is socialised as an apparition in the form of exchange value. Beneath the conjured apparition of the earth as exchange value, rendered inert through the severance of direct producers from the land, the earth becomes the object of ‘the right of the proprietors to exploit the earth’s surface, the bowels of the earth, the air and thereby the maintenance and development of life’.<sup>36</sup>

Such is the inverted world of the commodity, its fetish-like character, in which relations between people take on the fantastic form of social relations between things. However, from the perspective of the unity prior to the instantiation of capitalism, the distinction that makes possible the inversion of people and things is absent. Within that unity, there is a general sociality amongst all things in the world. The world has its very existence through that sociality, as is described by the concept of whakapapa. However, from the appearance of Papatūānuku as lifeless, inorganic matter, her ghost is called to dance while her body, including humans, is subjected to exploitation, spoilage, and degradation. In Marx’s words: ‘all progress in capitalistic agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the labourer, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time, is a progress towards ruining the lasting sources of that fertility’.<sup>37</sup> From a Māori perspective, however, the inversion that has human relations appear as social relations between things was, even prior

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35 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, volume III, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1981), 969.

36 Marx, *Capital*, vol. III, 909.

37 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 638.

to inversion, still only a partial view. Humans *and* things had always had social relations between and amongst themselves. Papatūānuku is a general field of sociality.

Marx began his account of capital with the commodity, containing as it does the kernel of capitalism's contradictions. Yet the commodity is a category specific to capitalism as it had developed in the West. In the last decade of his life, Marx became both increasingly hostile to colonialism and deeply engaged with, in Teodor Shanin's phrase, 'the very heterogeneity of structure and motion around the globe'.<sup>38</sup> The commodity could not provide the point of departure for the type of comparative analysis adequate to this heterogeneity. A thinker of process and motion, whose thought remained in process and motion for the entirety of his life, late Marx devoted himself to the understanding of non-Western and non-capitalist societies as part of his attempt to reformulate his approach. Testament to the fact that much of the Marxism that followed Marx carried nothing of the motion or vitality of his thought, some of the foremost interpreters of Marx in the period after his death considered the new direction Marx's thought took in the last few years of his life as a result of senility.<sup>39</sup> Why else would Marx abandon the serious scientific work of *Capital* in favour of reading about people who had to catch up to capitalism before they could dream of communism?

A major indication of the transformation Marx's thought underwent throughout this period is the letter he wrote in response to a question from Vera Zasulich, a young Russian revolutionary.<sup>40</sup> Two years before Marx died, Zasulich wrote to him in February 1881 seeking clarification on a question that she considered to be 'of life and death' import for the socialist struggle in Russia.<sup>41</sup> Zasulich asked whether the rural commune in Russia was, freed from domination by the state, capable of developing in a socialist

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38 Teodor Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and 'the Peripheries of Capitalism'* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 22.

39 Shanin, *Late Marx*, 19, 32.

40 Zasulich was in exile at the time of writing. No armchair revolutionary, she had shot the governor of St Petersburg as retribution for him flogging a prisoner: Shanin, *Late Marx*, 178.

41 Shanin, *Late Marx*, 98.



direction, or if it was destined to perish. If the former was the case then the ‘revolutionary socialist must devote all [their] strength to the liberation and development of the commune’.<sup>42</sup> But if the rural commune was an archaic dead-end, then all that was left to Russian revolutionaries:

was more or less ill founded calculations as to how many decades it will take for the Russian peasant’s land to pass into the hands of the bourgeoisie, and how many centuries it will take for capitalism in Russia to reach something like the level of development already attained in Western Europe.<sup>43</sup>

Marx spent three weeks working intensely on a response, producing four lengthy drafts before finally sending a shorter version. Marx was hardly unprepared for the question. According to Jenny Marx, in 1870 Marx had begun to teach himself Russian so that he could read Russian sources directly. In the years that followed, he had amassed a vast library of Russian books, taking voluminous notes on his reading. In his answer to Zaslulich, Marx was clear: his research had convinced him that ‘the [rural] commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia’.<sup>44</sup> Ironically, this was taken to be an entirely heretical stance from the perspective of Russian Marxists and the letter would not be published until it was discovered in 1924.<sup>45</sup>

In one of the drafts of the letter, Marx provided more detail: ‘Precisely because it is contemporaneous with capitalist production, the rural commune may appropriate for itself all the positive achievements and this without undergoing its frightful vicissitudes’.<sup>46</sup> Marx and Engels would confirm much the same sentiment in an 1882 preface to the second Russian edition of *The Communist Manifesto*, the last of Marx’s writings published during his lifetime. As is made clear in this preface, Marx had thoroughly transformed in his thinking any notions of unilinear evolutionary stages,

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42 Shanin, *Late Marx*, 98.

43 Vera Zaslulich, ‘A Letter to Marx (February/March 1881),’ in Shanin, *Late Marx*, 98–99.

44 Karl Marx, ‘The Reply to Zaslulich (8 March 1881),’ in Shanin, *Late Marx*, 124.

45 David Ryazanov, ‘The Discovery of the Drafts,’ in Shanin, *Late Marx*, 127–133.

46 Shanin, *Late Marx*, 105.

opening onto a far more heterogeneous field of possibilities in the relationships between different social forms.

At the time of his response, Marx's readings on non-Western and non-capitalist societies had greatly expanded. Marx's notebooks from between 1879 and 1882 run to some 300,000 words of excerpts and notations. Focusing mainly on works by anthropologists, Marx's research spans Indian history and village culture; Dutch colonialism and the village economy in Indonesia; gender and kinship patterns among Native Americans and in ancient Greece, Rome, and Ireland; and communal and private property in Algeria and Latin America.<sup>47</sup>

The literature on the notebooks from this period is slim, not least because of their polyglot texture, the multiple languages used even within single sentences, and their incompleteness. Lawrence Krader, who made about half of the materials available for the first time in 1972, surmised at the end of his lengthy introduction that the notebooks' 'incomplete form has nevertheless indicated the transition of Marx from the restriction of the abstract generic human to the empirical study of human societies'.<sup>48</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that E P Thompson had regarded Marx as, in these last years of his life, spiralling back to the concerns of his Paris youth,<sup>49</sup> where, in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, he had been absorbed by Hegel's discovery of 'the formation of the earth, its coming to be, as a process of self-generation'.<sup>50</sup>

Raya Dunayevskaya regarded the notebooks as 'epoch making', expressive of the radical open-endedness of Marx's thought, and providing a novel position from which to reinterpret his life's works. The Marx of

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47 Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 196; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe IV/27* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, forthcoming).

48 Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx: Studies of Morgan, Phear, Maine, Lubbock*, trans. and ed. with an intro. Lawrence Krader (Assen: Von Gorcum, 1974); Krader, 'Introduction,' in Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks*, 85.

49 E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory, or An Orrery of Errors* (London: Merlin Press, 1995), 220.

50 Karl Marx and Lucio Colletti, *Karl Marx: Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 356.

the notebooks was ‘returning to probe the origin of humanity, not for purposes of discovering new origins, but for perceiving new revolutionary forces, their reason, or as Marx called it, in emphasizing a sentence of Morgan, “powers of the mind”’.<sup>51</sup> While Dunayevskaya is no doubt correct that Marx gathered materials and perspectives to bear on the present, she introduces a more reductive teleology than is found in his own writing. She conflates Marx’s research into ancient society and contemporary non-Western societies as both being exemplary of previous stages in the historical development of the West.

As Krader suggests, the notebooks actually show the thoroughgoing anti-teleological charge of Marx’s thinking, as well as his refusal to apply an unmodified Darwinian evolutionary schema to human culture. In Krader’s words, Marx’s criticism was of ‘evolution made over into evolutionism, a doctrine comforting and comfortable to the sustainers of the given civilisation as the telos of evolutionary progress’.<sup>52</sup> Marx noted how these doctrines reconstructed the past so that the mores of a particular society became the end-result of an evolutionary process and so could serve as the justification for the domination and exploitation of other peoples. The heterogeneous themes of the notebooks are no accident. Marx’s intense focus was on Indigenous societies, with particular emphasis on the relations between men and women in egalitarian societies, the changes over time within societies, colonialism, and technological advances in agriculture. As we know from Marx’s response to Zasulich, these insights had a vital bearing on the struggle of Marx’s present.

The most voluminous notes are found in Marx’s reading of the anthropologist Henry Morgan’s work on Native Americans. Marx painstakingly excerpted such details as the animals from which each clan descended, the precise description of certain rituals, and the Indigenous words for things. Likewise, Marx was enthralled by the democratic practices of the Iroquois and the power and participation of women within

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51 Raya Dunayevskaya, *Women’s Liberation and the Dialectics of Revolution: Reaching for the Future* (Wayne State University Press, 1996), 221.

52 Krader, ‘Introduction,’ 84.

those practices. A particularly fine formulation of the way in which Marx's thought was transformed by his textual encounter with Indigenous peoples is given by Franklin Rosemont; Marx came to understand:

the true complexity of 'primitive' societies as well as their grandeur, their essential superiority, in real human terms, to the degraded civilization founded on the fetishism of commodities. In a note written just after his conspectus of Morgan we find Marx arguing that 'primitive communities had incomparably greater vitality than the Semitic, Greek, Roman and a fortiori the modern capitalist societies.' Thus Marx had come to realize that, measured according to the 'wealth of subjective human sensuality,' as he had expressed it in the 1844 manuscripts, Iroquois society stood much higher than any of the societies 'poisoned by the pestilential breath of civilization.' Even more important, Morgan's lively account of the Iroquois gave him a vivid awareness of the actuality of indigenous peoples, and perhaps even a glimpse of the then-undreamed of possibility that such peoples could make their own contributions to the global struggle for human emancipation.<sup>53</sup>

In the next section, I return to this fundamental opening at the close of Marx's thought, thinking Marx from the perspective of this transformation. This is accomplished in combination with a provisional attempt to read Marx from the perspective of a Māori conceptual orientation. This seems to me the process Marx started, in whatever limited, one-sided way he could, through his own readings on Indigenous societies.

## Māori Mārx

The first point to note in a comparison between Marx's style of thinking and a Māori style of thought, other than the asymmetry of a comparison between a person and a people, is a shared pattern described by the spiral.

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53 Franklin Rosemont, 'Karl Marx and the Iroquois,' in *Arsenal: Surrealist Subversion*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Black Swan Press, 1989), 201–213.

To take a visual example, the curled tendrils of the koru fern—the word meaning a fold, loop, or coil—so important to Māori thought, also works as a diagram of Marx’s dialectical mode of presentation.<sup>54</sup>



**Figure 1.** Koru fern - image by Huriana Kopeke-Te Aho, 2019

Both Hegelian and Marxian conceptions of the dialectic, and the concept of whakapapa, all express a thinking of and in movement. That is, a relational thinking of process, cycle, and development wherein the relation is prior to the terms constituted by that relation. Although Hegel chose the figure of the circle, always multiple and in movement, as his diagram of the dialectic, it is hard not to detect the curls of the koru in his descriptions:

But universal movement as concrete is a series of manifestations (*Gestaltungen*) of the Spirit. This series should not be pictured as a straight line but as a circle, a return into itself. This circle has as its circumference a large number of circles; *one* development is always a movement passing

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54 The relationship between Hegel’s dialectic and the Māori notion of wānanga (study) has been noted by Ruakere Hond, ‘The Concept of Wānanga at Parihaka,’ in *Parihaka: The Art of Passive Resistance*, eds. Te Miringa Hohaia, Gregory O’Brian, and Lara Strongman (New Zealand: Victoria University Press, 2001), 82.

through many developments; the totality of this series is a succession of developments curving back on itself; and each particular development is a stage of the whole. Although there is progress in development, it does not go forward into (abstract) infinity but rather turns back into itself.<sup>55</sup>

Working from the other direction, it is equally hard not to be struck by the dialectical nature of Māori Marsden's account of the whakapapa of creation:

The genealogy of creation occurs in stages in which one order, after it has reached its culmination, takes a giant leap forward to be succeeded by a radical departure resulting in the introduction of a new stage. That process is illustrated by the stages, void—root foundations—energy-consciousness—spirit—form—a new space/time continuum—Ranginui and Papatūānuku.<sup>56</sup>

The dialectical character of the Māori account of creation does not end with Ranginui and Papatūānuku. In fact, it is odd that in Tau's account of Māori thought as lacking critical distance, leading to its confinement in mirror thinking, he does not mention the Māori Enlightenment.<sup>57</sup> As one common account has it, the first children of Rangi and Papa became frustrated at living in the darkness of their parents' tight embrace. After much dialogue and debate, they resolved to split their parents apart, allowing light to enter the world. Tane, the atua of the forest and knowledge, one of whose forms is the mighty Kauri tree, inverted himself, placing his feet against the sky and his shoulders against the earth, thus separating his parents. This is the way that Te Ao Mārama (the world of light, the realm of being) was born from Te Pō (the night, the realm of becoming). The

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55 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Idea of Philosophy with a New Translation of Hegel's Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, ed. Quentin Lauer (New York: Fordham University Press, 1971), 80. Marx's figure of the dialectic is the ellipse: see Thomas Weston, 'Marx on the Dialectics of Elliptical Motion,' *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 4 (2012): 3–38.

56 Marsden, *Woven Universe*, 45.

57 An enlightenment fundamentally different from its European counterpart. Tau, 'The Death of Knowledge.'

etymology of the term ‘dialectic’ is from the Greek ‘*dia*’, meaning split in two, and ‘*logos*’, meaning reason; hence: debate, decision, reasoning by splitting in two. Tane’s division of his parents after ferocious debate is the dialectical act *par excellence*.

From the perspective of the shared dialectical texture or spiral rhythms of both modes of thinking—Māori and Marx—I propose to pick up the thread of the multiplication and delinearisation of trajectories of development within societies and between them. In a compelling series of articles entitled ‘Once Were Communists’, the Pākehā Marxist and trade unionist Terry Coggan recounts an anecdote from his youth:

At a public meeting in the 1970s, I heard Maori rights activist Syd Jackson say that Europeans came to Aotearoa (New Zealand) with a culture that was ‘materially superior’ but ‘spiritually inferior’ to that of the indigenous Maori people they encountered. As a newly minted Marxist, I knew that by material and spiritual culture he meant the economic base, the legal and political superstructure, and the forms of social consciousness particular to each society, even if I wasn’t sure how value judgments like ‘inferior’ or ‘superior’ belonged with such a scientific analysis.<sup>58</sup>

There is undoubtedly something valuable in the distinction drawn by Jackson in describing the difference between Māori and Pākehā at the moment of encounter, although some might find ‘spirit’ too Hegelian a category for a materialist dialectics. For Marx, the totality of the relations of production constitutes the economic base; or, as he puts it, they constitute ‘the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness’.<sup>59</sup> The conception Marx outlines in the passage just cited has regularly been taken up by Marxists as a strict economic determinism, one that Engels would later rail against for rendering Marx’s

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58 Terry Coggan, ‘Once Were Communists – Part One: The First Communism,’ *A Communist at Large*, 6 December 2014, <https://convincingreasons.wordpress.com/2014/12/06/once-were-communists-part-one-the-first-communism/>

59 Marx, ‘1859 Preface,’ *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.

proposition ‘meaningless, abstract, absurd’.<sup>60</sup> Coggan, at the time of the anecdote a ‘newly minted Marxist’, is too quick to map Jackson’s terms onto a cruder reading of base and superstructure. Nonetheless, the anecdote opens up the question of the multiple registers of progress and the values whereby development along these axes might be evaluated.

Historical materialism, where it remains beholden to a rigid schema according to which the economic base determines all superstructural elements, eclipses its own imagination. If the forces of production are the only agency through which social forms evolve, then emancipation starts to look like a technological problem. And perhaps it is, but not the technology of a lifeless materialism that thinks of matter as inert and technology as solely a matter of objects. Technological objects, whether handheld gadgets or global infrastructure, are, of course, thoroughly social. But acknowledging this does not necessarily free us from the idea that technology is simply a matter of objects, a narrow perspective that monopolises our imaginations. If the model of base and superstructure is wound down into a more complex, differential unity comprising multiple agencies, then the other aspect of technology is able to step into the light: namely, the techniques of sociality as they are imagined and elaborated in thought and in practice. Techniques of sociality are all those technologies that mediate and enable difference without needing to tame it, their level of advancement being decided by the degree to which they secure and increase *both* independence and interdependence.

Early Pākehā colonists noted the radically democratic and egalitarian aspects of Māori society in comparison to that of Europeans.<sup>61</sup> Many agreed with the sentiments of Francis Dart Fenton when he observed, in 1857, that:

No system of government that the world ever saw can be more democratic than that of the Maoris. The chief alone has no power. The whole tribe

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60 Friedrich Engels, ‘Engels to J. Bloch In Berlin, London, September 21, 1890,’ *New Internationalist* 1, no.3 (1934): 81–85.

61 On this point, see Vincent O’Malley, *The Meeting Place: Māori and Pākehā Encounters, 1642–1840* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2014), 197.



deliberate on every subject, not only politically on such as are of public interest, but even judicially they hold their 'komitis' on every private quarrel. In ordinary times the vox populi determines every matter, both internal and external. The system is a pure pantocracy, and no individual enjoys influence or exercises power, unless it originates with the mass and is expressly or tacitly conferred by them.<sup>62</sup>

Likewise, the process of pōwhiri of manuhiri onto a marae continues to provide a rich expression of the advanced social technology of tikanga in handling difference in ways that do not come at the expense of autonomy. In contrast, the record of the earliest European arrivals, when read from a perspective even slightly sympathetic to Māori, provides repetitive evidence of callous insensitivity to (even the possibility of the existence of) local protocols and of violence as an immediate response to any perceived slight, minor provocation, or even their own incomprehension. Pākehā, when they arrived, must have appeared to Māori as having very primitive social skills.

Marx's categories such as the commodity are those of an 'endoanthropology', too internal to his own society to be able to provide the basis of comparison between societies without presupposing the universal existence of the commodity. While the commodity is of particular importance within capitalism, it is not more or less common to all social formations. Where the commodity might seem to be a more or less universal category is in its useful, or thingly aspect.

Although the commodity cannot provide a universal basis of comparison, this does not mean that it is precluded from providing a point of comparison. A question that emerges from such a comparison is what the commodity fetish that arrives with Pākehā would look like from a Māori perspective. An important difference follows from an absence of the opposition between use and exchange in te ao Māori prior to European arrival. Because of the absence of this distinction, the apparent inversion that sees relations between people 'appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly', remains a limited or bracketed

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62 F.D. Fenton, 'Report as to Native Affairs in the Waikato District March 1857,' *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives*, E-1c (1860), 11.

perspective.<sup>63</sup> For Māori, there was instead always a field of interrelation and co-constitution, *whakapapa*, a sociality between and amongst ourselves and the world. To invert the inversion enacted by the commodity would be to remain blinded as to the fullness of the dynamic inter-relationality of everything with everything else.

Reading Marx from an Indigenous perspective, Glen Coulthard transforms Marx's concept of 'modes of production' into the more expansive 'modes of life'.<sup>64</sup> Rather than Marx's more anthropocentric notion of relations of production conditioned by forces of production, a mode of life refers to 'a field of relationships of things to each other'.<sup>65</sup> What I call a 'geometry of life' tries to think the epistemological implications of the concept of mode of life.<sup>66</sup> A geometry of life—the patternings traced in a world by the flux of its constituent sociality—gains a third dimension through the development of a 'geomentality'.<sup>67</sup> A geomentality is a relationship with the earth that issues from the particular rhythms and patterns of a world expressed as a particular enunciative fold within it (for example, a human). As a rhythmic aspect, a geometry of life has a temporal dimension that is given through the metabolic interchange with the earth, the tempo of which is particular to a mode of life. The comparative, historical, vital, and sacred materialism approached by the conception of a geometry of life is an initial and provisional methodological formulation of a Māori Mārx.

A geometry of life seeks to remain open such that *a priori* reconfigurations of other worlds are lessened. Absolute symmetry or complete non-distortion of perspective remains, however, an unachievable purity that would be likely to be entirely sterile, even if it were possible. The point is not to come to an objective view from nowhere but instead to reach a meeting place where different perspectives can be held in their

63 Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, 169.

64 Coulthard, 'Place against Empire,' 1–34.

65 Coulthard, 'Place against Empire,' 16.

66 Simon Barber, *Geometries of Life* (PhD diss., Goldsmiths, University of London, 2018).

67 The term is taken from Hong-Key Yoon, 'On Geomentality,' *GeoJournal* 25, no. 4 (1991): 387–92.

difference, with the hope of coming to novel, collective, and experimental constructions. A geometry of life is, then, a provisional orientation from which to begin the transformation of Marx's thinking from an Indigenous perspective.

## Proletarian Papatūānuku

Coulthard has convincingly argued that, although *Capital* acknowledges a double moment of dispossession *and* proletarianisation, Marx's interest is for the most part taken up with the latter. Coulthard suggests moving away from Marx's more capital-centric analysis to one in which land is more central and in which dispossession becomes a more sustained focus. This speaks more directly to Indigenous experience.<sup>68</sup> In light of this, my claim that Papatūānuku is best understood as proletarian might seem incongruent.

What I hope to make apparent via this phrasing is that the process of dispossession of people from the land is also one in which the land is forced to 'work' in the factory. The farm/field is a factory in which the industrial rhythms of capitalist agriculture sever and supplant those of the metabolism of people living in intimate, umbilical connection with the earth. Whereas Papatūānuku is formerly the means of reproduction of life on the planet, once dominated by capital this function is devalued, and her ability to do so lessens as she is impoverished by increasingly frenetic exploitation. Capitalist agriculture produces a rift by demanding more from the earth than it is able to give. The profit motive that demands that production increase in each business cycle is in direct relation to the increasing poverty of the earth. Capital tries to staunch this deficit by increasing its violent means of technological intervention. The literal Latin meaning of proletariat, 'those with many offspring', was used in its ancient Roman sense to designate the lowest class of people, whose members, poor and exempt from taxes, were useful to the republic only for the production of

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68 Coulthard, 'Place against Empire.'

children.<sup>69</sup> It is in this impoverished reproductive sense that Papatūānuku, as dominated by capital, is proletarian.

Because of the particular relationship of humans, understood as tangata whenua (people of the land, born of Papatūānuku), to her, the dispossession of people from the land is from Papatūānuku's perspective a theft of her land people. As Māori Marsden explains:

The function of humankind as the envelope of the noosphere—conscious awareness of Papatūānuku—is to advance her towards the omega point of fulfilment. This will mean a radical departure from the modern concept of man as the centre of the universe towards an awareness that man's destiny is intimately bound up with the destiny of the earth. . . . Thus will he embrace a holistic view which encompasses all life. He will thus learn to flow with and ride upon the vibrant energies of the Cosmic stream. . . . So will he overcome his sense of isolation, that estrangement which breeds despair—the encounter with nothingness. Only then will he recognise inwardly that he has come home.<sup>70</sup>

And so the dispossession that produces the worker as a subject set against inert nature is also the inversion of Papatūānuku's own consciousness against herself.

A recent and celebrated case, the result of many years of struggle by the various iwi and hapū involved, marks the attempt to return consciousness and voice to Papatūānuku. Te Awa Tupua (the Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017 bestows legal personhood on the Whanganui River.<sup>71</sup> By way of the act, two people are appointed by the Crown and iwi associated with the river to be te Pou Tupua (guardians of the river) and to speak on the river's behalf.<sup>72</sup> This is no doubt a considerable achievement

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69 Cedric Robinson, *An Anthropology of Marxism* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2001), 17.

70 Marsden, *Woven Universe*, 46.

71 New Zealand Parliament, *Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017*, Public Act no. 7 (20 March 2017).

72 Former MP Dame Tariana Turia and educator Turama Hawira have been appointed the first Te Pou Tupua.

that provides significant protections for the river, also opening the law up to far more dynamic and creative processes than have been previously available to it.<sup>73</sup>

The decision has become one of international renown, and will no doubt find resonance with many working in the wake of new materialisms, plural ontologies, or post-humanism. That a river might be given voice is a practical fulfilment of the hope expressed by Bruno Latour for a ‘parliament of things’.<sup>74</sup> However, both legal personhood and parliament are, of course, bourgeois forms entirely consistent with the continued domination of the earth by capital. In the terms of first law, the Whanganui River’s subject–objecthood, understood as a relational agency, is expressed in the multiple *taniwhā* that inhabit it. A *taniwhā* is a relational being that inhabits a body of water and acts as *kaitiaki* of the health and vitality of that water, including that of all those things nourished by it. A *taniwhā* is an expression of the field of reciprocity and cohabitation whereby the health of the river is also the health of the communities it sustains. The latter are in a position of responsibility and obligation to the river as reciprocity for their own existence.

As against the indivisible individual of the river as legal person,<sup>75</sup> I am instead describing the unbounded relational totality of the river expressed by *taniwhā*, *tupuna*, *atua*, *tangata whenua*—an expression of the collective powers of the earth. It is through this agency, and by way of our participation in this ensemble, that we might begin to fulfil our responsibilities to Papatūānuku and to each other by negating the ruinous exploitation of her (including us) by capital. That is, the liberation of the earth by the coming to self-consciousness of proletarian Papatūānuku.

This will not be possible if our imaginations remain constrained by the forms of capital, whether legal, economic, ideological, or otherwise. The capitalist mode of life forecloses, however inconclusively, that of Māori,

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73 Marama Muru-Lanning, *Tupuna Awa: People and Politics of the Waikato River* (Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 2016).

74 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

75 ‘Te Awa Tupua is an indivisible and living whole’: New Zealand Parliament, *Te Awa Tupua Act 2017*, 2:12.

as te ao Pākehā, the commodity-world, asserts itself as the only possible reality. A negation of this negation remains open to us: Papatūānuku might this time heave capital off of herself. This is due to the vast manaakitanga shown Pākehā by Māori. That many Pākehā fail to see the door Māori hold open, or to see the possibilities for our co-constitution and cohabitation beyond relationships of domination, is due to the violence carried by Pākehā in the readiness to refuse, extinguish, or flatten other modes of life, precluding us from sharing the energies and imagination of this vision. Thus, the unending struggle by Māori, which finds one present expression in the patient work of the Matike Mai collective for a constitution based on first law, appears to Pākehā as an attempt to undermine sovereignty.<sup>76</sup> The continuation of violence is upheld against the offer of open aroha.

Papatūānuku calls out to us now, her karanga tinged with urgent lament. Responding to this call, Marx, with his spiralling investigations into the advanced social technologies of Indigenous peoples and the immense productive forces of capital, arrives at this hui alive and among us. A new world struggles to be born. Either we breathe life into that world and learn to breathe its life or we suffocate in this one. Tihei mauri ora!

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76 *He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu mō Aotearoa: The Report of Matike Mai Aotearoa – The Independent Working Group on Constitutional Transformation* (2016), available at, <https://nwo.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/MatikeMaiAotearoa25Jan16.pdf>