

Punctum Exercise 3 (Marx)

*"[Marx] conceived historical consciousness as an instrument of human liberation in a way that no other nineteenth-century thinker of similar stature ever tried to do."
(White, p. 284)*

"This fancifulness is necessary for conveying his conception of the way consciousness functions to endow things, processes, and events with (false) meaning." (White p. 293)

"The historical record is divided into a manifest and a hidden level of meaning, which are related to each other as phenomenal form to content." (White p. 315)

"...all previous history is the history of class struggle..." (White p. 309)

No critical intelligence can fail to discern in Einstein's epochal copula $E = mc^2$ a dialectical insight of the utmost importance to the history of the conditions of production — both material and social. In the double *vincula* of that equality, we readily glimpse the outstretched arms of Hegel and Adam Smith, now extended, now clutching in chalerous embrace. At the bottom of a black board densely hatched with abstruse mathematical notation, we discover an epigrammatic promulgation of the banns of holy matrimony between the dowdy-but-stolid *matter* of English political economy and the ethereal, luminous *Energeia* of the German ideology. It is difficult to imagine a more concise (or more robust) indication of the form of that definitive sublation wherein base and superstructure put aside the Punch and Judy show of history, and we are finally invited to inhabit an inhabitable world: the mere clippings from a shaved shilling, it turns out, actually contain — nay, *are* — the labor power of a small sun in an adjacent galaxy. Here lies a calculus with which to shatter the money-fetish of bourgeois accountants from Lloyd's of London to the souks of Saipan. Every ounce of the very stuff of the earth veritably seethes with the *capacity to do work*, a discovery which amounts to a sandwich board hung around the neck of every crumb in the physical universe, reading in bold print: "Workers of the world! You are free!"

But it is never a good idea to underestimate the forces of reaction. No sooner was the bell of Liberty rung from within the heart of matter itself than the malevolent agents of capitalist imperialism seized that clapper and set to the task of using it as a cudgel with which to batter into brutalized submission some half million starving proles. I refer, of course, to the clever American gadget known as the *Atomic Bomb*, a contraption best understood as an ingenious inversion of the Carthaginian bronze in which the youth were sacrificed to Baal: whereas the latter device was said to convert the screams of those incinerated within to a sweet music, the more modern device converted the sweet strains of liberty sounding from within the very center of matter itself into the anguished howls of millions.

And to what end? At the close of that great imperial conflict known as the “Second World War,” the American leaders themselves could barely maintain the fiction that permitted them to argue that the dropping of “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” (note the Laurel and Hardy cartoonishness — one must credit the wry humor of the cigar chomping butchers) on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was necessary to “end the war in the Pacific.” It was perfectly clear at the time, and has remained perfectly clear ever since (despite a blizzard of misinformation and propaganda), that the Japanese were on the cusp of capitulation, and that a land invasion would have been quite unnecessary to bring the war to a close. All the breathless conjurations of to-the-last-man *bushido* had of course been entirely trumped up by those keen to make a bright show of the dawning of the “Nuclear Age.” Why? For the simple strategic reason that the Communist forces of the Soviet Union were, at all cost, to be kept from the Far East. Neither time nor lives could be spared in the mad dash to establish an imperial client state (and its associated military bases) in Japan.

The “defeat of fascism” in Europe can be best understood as a stalemate in the revolutionary efforts of the working class on the Eurasian landmass. By contrast, the end of the war in the Pacific theater was never anything but two imperial goats — one Oriental, one Occidental — butting heads over the scattered archipelagos of a vast and mostly vacant barnyard. In this sense we may justly invoke the historical apothegm so apt in the case of Louis Bonaparte: history does indeed repeat itself, the first time as tragedy, and the second time as farce. The end of the war in Berlin, soon to be sundered between East and West, was a *tragedy* for the exploited proletariat of Europe — on both sides of what was soon to be the Iron Curtain. The end of the war in Japan, however, was a *farce*, in that it amounted to an opportunity for the Sons of Liberty to skywrite, using the smoke of Hiroshima, that paradoxical adage inscribed in small print on the underside of the Statue of Liberty: “We had to destroy the village to liberate it.”

It was not the last time that this essential apothegm of bourgeois emancipation would be blazoned over Asia.

The actual morning of the 6th of August 1945, we might add, proves no exception to the general tragi-comic rule of history: the bomb that fell on Hiroshima at 9:15 in the morning was certainly a tragedy of the first order; that the bomb was promptly followed by the drifting to Japanese soil of the irascible son of an Italian surgeon (a good bourgeois, this pilot, decked out in an American charivari of ancient privileges of the chivalrous class — astride a chrome horse, fine leather gauntlet-gloves in his cabin, a penchant for swordplay secreted in his bosom) must be accounted *the very specimen of farce*.