Towards an Ecological Theory of So-Called Primitive Accumulation, Part I: Socio-Spatial Partitioning

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Abstract

This paper explores the relevance of Karl Marx's writing on so-called primitive accumulation to capitalism's immanent climate crisis. This work aims to fill a gap in the discourse around the "shifting" of capitalism's "metabolic rift" by specifying the state-led mechanisms, including legal dispossession and financial regulation, through which capitalism displaces its ecological burden from "core" to dynamic "periphery." The paper offers a theoretical vantage point from which to systematize the uneven pressures of climate change on select populations, a process driven by the imperialist expansionism of capitalist circulation. Through a close reading of Marx's writings leading up to 1867, I investigate the mechanisms by which humanity's labor metabolism is disrupted and how capitalism's ecological burden is weaponized to serve capital accumulation. This paper demonstrates the material ecological implications of capital's logic through an array of distinct contexts, connected by a mode of relating to 'nature' implied by capitalism's internal logic. (150c)

Introduction:

Reeds dance, backlit by a vibrant chemical sunset. The distant humming of machinery lies thick like a blanket over the landscape. From a circle of sunken lawn chairs, family members chat, chuckle, and cough. Hand-me-down sneakers tied to young feet chase after a ball, kicking sparse grass into the humid air. Beneath them lies a ground carved with approximately 10,000 miles of canals and a network of pipelines drilled 90,000 meters into the hot earth (Brown 2023a). This is the Louisiana coastline. A place where "today's multinational oil companies inherit the quasi-sovereign status of colonial joint-stock companies," achieving a faster rate of coastal erosion than anywhere else in the world (Brown 2023b). This land, once tilled by enslaved sugar harvesters, now makes up 25% of the United States' oil refining capacity and 25% of the nation's chemical production. Louisiana ranks second-to-last in the country for life expectancy and last in the nation for social and economic outcomes (McKinsey 2018). Located in the heart of the empire, it is one place where a history of dispossession, resource extraction, and racism supports the accumulation of super profits under capitalism.

This is Part I of a paper aimed at re-examining Karl Marx's writing on *so-called primitive accumulation* (*SCPA*) in the context of our imminent climate crisis. I examine SCPA as a central disruptor of planetary equilibria and humanity's ability to adapt to climate change, tracing how its ongoing structures of dispossession are largely state-assisted. Following Kohei Saito's publication of *Marx in the Anthropocene* and its insights from the *Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe*, there has been growing interest in environmentalist readings of Marx. However, as John Bellamy Foster once noted, "an ecological-materialist critique was embedded in all of Marx's work," even before his later engagement with natural science (Foster 2008). For Saito, SCPA is the dawn of an irreparable *metabolic rift* between humanity and the Earth. For him, capitalism manages this rift by *shifting* its environmental burden across *spatial*, *temporal*, and *technological* lines.[1] Illuminating as this framework is, Saito leaves underdeveloped *how* and through what social structures such *metabolic shifts* occur. By developing a dynamic theory of SCPA out of Marx's notion of the modern state as a dependent agent of capitalist valorization, I propose a legal nexus of responsibility for both the metabolic rift and the metabolic shift. Part I of this paper addresses the spatial aspect of Saito's shift, tracing the capitalist core's deferral of environmental harm onto ever re-negotiated 'periphery' populations. Part II explores temporal and technological shifts.

Methodologically, I integrate a close reading of Marx's writings on the structure of SCPA with a material analysis of the socio-ecological toll capital's logic of valorization implies across distinct, yet economically connected, global contexts. Capitalism's *outside* lies not only beyond the official borders of its imperial entities, relegated to distant IMF-enforced wildlife conservations or the far-flung coltan mines that power American smartphones. Capitalism's outside permeates the imperial core in rows of former slave accommodations where Louisiana's migrant workers rest between long hours. It surfaces in the reality of contaminated prisons where billions of dollars of annual revenue pour from incarcerated bodies. And it erupts in the tired arms of low-income parents who have been funneled into food deserts, working a 'double shift' to raise the nation's reserve labor army.

Far-reaching as these instantiations are, the elaboration of a dynamically re-organizing, state-led dependence theory provides a locus around which to map complex networks of environmental injustice. I consider SCPA a structural feature of capitalism, grounding its ongoing character in the structural necessity of SCPA elaborated by Marx himself. SCPA

[1] The "metabolic rift" derives from John Bellamy Foster and the notion of capitalism "shifting" of this metabolic rift derives from Kohei Saito.

continuously disrupts natural economies by forcing wage labor into periphery populations and actively maintains wage-labor-dependence in the core. Between SCPA and capital's expansion-oriented circulation model, a contradiction emerges; *capitalism depends on a periphery into which its core inherently encroaches*.

The imperial state defers capitalism's self-destructive tendency by working extra-economically to ensure the availability of new outsides. Such sites double as shock absorbers for the core's infinitely valorized polluting industries. Abroad, this takes on colonial and neo-colonial forms. Domestically, it involves dividing populations along lines of race, citizenship, gender, and class to create new zones upon which the formal economy can feed. Both aspects operate through legal means. In Louisiana, a state-level board holds the authority to grant exemptions for local entities' property taxes, a power no other legislative branch in the country has. This prevents Louisiana's most lucrative and poisonous industries from financially benefiting their local community. While the modern state is beholden to capital accumulation, capitalist profiteers are increasingly multinational.[2]

As the spontaneous needs of a global market shift, so too do the geographic and social partitions between those engaged in *doubly-free labor* and *unfree labor*. It is at the ever-changing edges of core and periphery that we find global capitalism's populations made most vulnerable to 'natural disasters.' SCPA not only involves the initial dispossession of communities from shared land but implies the constant de-integration and re-integration of populations and their soil into capitalist production. Through SCPA, I reconstruct how even the early Marx might consider climate collapse a uniquely capitalist, systemic issue and one inseparable from colonialism. *First,* I demonstrate how the *ongoing* expropriation of the producers from the soil is required by Marx's General Formula for Capitalist Circulation. *Second,* I unpack how exclusive private property, proliferated through SCPA, disrupts humanity's *species being* or *metabolism* (*Stoffwechsel*), producing the human subject at a distance from its natural component. *Third*, I propose *three* aspects of SCPA carried out by the imperial state to prolong the accumulation of capital, and by extension, itself, in the face of climate catastrophe.

To ground this abstraction in the material reality it implies, we might recall the words of Frantz Fanon: "for a colonized people: the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity" (Fanon 1963, 44). The land, as SCPA suggests, is capital's first site of alienation. This paper, being written from the position of an implicated subject within the neocolonial relations it examines, demands a self-critical method as engaged with the human cost of SCPA as its economic logic. Case studies ranging from Louisiana's coastline to U.S.-occupied soil abroad do not operate as examples of a theory but constitute the very tissue of its development. The cyclical, global character of SCPA and the range of imperialist strategies employed to shift capital's ecological burden can only be advanced through specific instances and their interrelations. Building on existing metabolic rift literature, Marx's writing on SCPA contributes needed depth to his account of nature and its political stakes.[3]

1. Situating So-called Primitive Accumulation:

In its simplest formulation, *SCPA* denotes the process of "divorcing the producer from the means of production," opening laborers up to capitalist exploitation (Marx 1992, 874-875).

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[2] Take, for example, Louisiana's centrality to a U.S.- backed expansion of Venezuela's oil industry.

[3] Including but not limited to Saito, Foster, Jason Moore, Andreas Malm, and McKenzie Wark.

SCPA has often been read as a historically located "period of transition that led to the emergence of capitalism" (Bonefeld 2001, 1). Rosa Luxemburg, who propagated the idea of ongoing *SCPA* as integral to capitalism, famously asserted so as a departure from Marx. While drawing on her contribution, this paper emphasizes Marx's declaration that *SCPA* "assumes different aspects in different countries and runs through its various phases in different orders of succession, and at different historical epochs" (Marx 1992, 876). The term "ursprüngliche Akkumulation" poses a challenge for translation, as Ben Fowlkes noted (Marx 1992, 714). The word "primitive" was chosen over "original" to represent "ursprüngliche" in attempt to avoid the concept's temporal restriction to a particular moment. By *SCPA*, Marx meant "a series of historical processes," resulting in the decomposition of an original union between the laborer and their instruments (Marx 1985, 129).

Expropriation of the producer from the land is "primary" in the sense of its foundational in capitalism's becoming. This, however, does not preclude the process from recurring. Across Marx's critique of political economy, there emerges a tension between social forms that are primary in a logical sense and those that are primary in a historical sense. In the *Contradictions in the General Formula,* for example, "merchant's capital and interest-bearing capital are derivative forms" of the modern form of capital, despite their earlier appearance in history (Marx 1992, 287). The unmediated M-M' formula of usurer's capital is incompatible with the nature of money and inexplicable from the standpoint of commodity exchange, thus it is logically downstream of M-C-M' (Marx 1992, 287). For Marx, as demonstrated here, a form of exchange that is historically prior can be logically derivative from one that emerged later. In the words of Rosalind C. Morris, *SCPA* is "at once the condition of possibility and the effect of capitalism's emergence" (Morris 2016, 30). By untangling logical and historical primacy in Marx, ongoing *SCPA* becomes easier to understand.

Marx's qualification of 'primitive accumulation' with the words 'so-called' denotes his skepticism towards the pseudo-historical origin of the term as coined by Adam Smith.[4] Marx proceeds via a doubled motion to reveal the mystification embedded in 'primitive accumulation.' He first overturns a historically specific concept that has been naturalized by political economy and then excavates its logic through materially surfacing contradictions. By invoking Smith's 'primitive or original accumulation,' Marx exposes the force bound up in the proliferation of 'free' capitalist labor. He unveils how a structural necessity of capitalism (*SCPA*) was cleverly masked as a historical myth. What is missed by Fowlkes's translation, for Morris, is "the aporetic relation between the structural and temporal paradigms" (Morris 2016, 13). Marx's allegorical gesture marks 'primitive or original" accumulation as an ideological tool of political economy. This paper is interested in what environmental notions ideologically serve the ruling class.

The term "primitive accumulation" is imperfect.[5] However, in the difficulty of its translation, we are reminded of the concept's veiled appearance. Several reformulations of 'so-called primitive accumulation' have been suggested, including Morris's "originary accumulation," David Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession," and Anna Tsing's "salvage

[4] "Sogenannte" in German sounds somewhat less charged than its English translation.

[5] Let it also be recognized that "primitive" is often associated with negative attitudes in the English-speaking world regarding indigenous knowledge and social forms of organization. While this unfortunate connotation was not directly involved in the mistranslation, it may be another source of skepticism towards 'so-called primitive accumulation' as a technical term today. The new translation of *Capital* by Paul Reitter and Paul North justifies its translation of "Ursprüngliche" as "original" to this effect.

accumulation" (Tsing 2021, 70).[6] Each of these accounts builds towards the continuous aspect of SCPA, yet does so at a distance from Marx. I retain SCPA as a token of the concept's complexity, avoiding semantic attempts at 'updating' Marx's work, and leveraging its context to understand Marx's ecological, non-productivist turn towards the end of his life.

1a. Capitalist Circulation as the Motor of Climate Catastrophe:

While Marx could not have predicted our current moment, much of the contemporary human-nature relationship is embedded in the logic of capitalism as elaborated by Marx in 1867. Capitalism is unlike any prior mode of economic organization. Under capitalism, *use value* (such as food's capacity to satiate hunger) emerges only as a mere means to *exchange value* (a measure of account or the money commodity). As such, humanity's reproductive cycle becomes disjointed from its own ends. Instead of working to reproduce the human species directly, capitalist subjects sell their labor time for currency, then exchanged to reproduce the individual. The disruption of humanity's *species being* begins historically with *SCPA*, but logically, with the capitalist mode of circulation. Marx's General Formula is essential to understanding (i) the imperialist expansionism of a free market and (ii) humanity's estrangement from nature; both leading factors in present-day climate collapse.

Via circulation, Marx shows that capitalism is structurally unable to subsist beyond the premise of its own expansion. The General Formula begins with an inversion of direct circulation, Commodity-Money-Commodity (C-M-C), into capitalist circulation, Money-Commodity-Money′ (M-C-M′), as capitalists exchange *use values* to receive increased *exchange value*. Capitalist circulation contradicts Marx's law of commodity exchange by failing to adhere to a trade between commodities of distinct *quality* and equal *quantity*. In capitalist circulation (M-C-M'), the initial and resulting sums are formally identical (i.e. qualitatively indistinguishable). The addition of surplus (M') resulting from each exchange is capitalism's only escape from this structural tautology (M-M). From here, the constant need for valorization arises. This necessity also functions at the level of social meaning. In each exchange circuit, the demand for valorization arises anew (Marx 1992, 107).

Capital cannot develop from circulation alone, but "it is equally impossible for it to arise apart from circulation" (Marx 1992). Given the demands of capitalist exchange, the exploitation of *variable capital*, or *doubly free labor*, becomes capitalism's *core* mode of valorization. Formal wage labor is, however, supported by a second exploitative process that runs parallel to it. The forceful "separation of labor and property is the precondition of this (capitalist) exchange" (Marx 1993, 295). Pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, like slavery, outlay the initial sum (M) upon which capitalist valorization is built. Furthermore, "the existence of capitalism," as oriented towards expansion, endlessly "requires an environment of noncapitalist forms of production" into which it can swell (Luxembourg 1972). This *outside* fuels (i) capitalism's market for surplus value, (ii) its need for raw materials, and (iii) its reserve labor supply (Morris 2016, 22). *SCPA* severs ordinary laborers from their means of production, their land, and their communal ties, 'freeing' them to trade their *labor time* in exchange for wages. The "transition" to capitalism through *SCPA* must be ongoing so long as capitalism endures because the structure of capitalist circulation renders infinite accumulation an *ontological necessity* for the capitalist class.

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[6] Tsing was alerted to 'salvage accumulation' by the necessity of cultural translation to the matsutake trade, but her conception of the term strikes close resemblance to my reading of *so-called primitive accumulation*, as an ongoing interpenetration of capitalist and non-capitalist forms for the accumulation of exchange value.

Marx echoes Hegel in reflecting that capital's quantitative shift towards the infinite passes into a potent qualitative change (Marx 1992, 424). In a capitalist market, the quantitative value of a commodity takes precedence over its qualitative makeup. This is logic intensifies in later-stage capitalism, as monopolies limit the competition that once drove improved use value (Lenin 2021). The capitalist state's environmental legislation reflects a similar preference for quantity over quality. In 1992, GMO plants in the United States became "substantially equivalent" to non-GMO plants following George H.W. Bush's Executive Order. This legal categorization "ignored the qualitative internal alteration required to genetically engineer" GMO crops, and their impact on public health, in favor of biotech profits (Engdahl 2007, 7). The state doctrine of "substantial equivalence" not only led to untested GMO products being sold to farmers across the U.S. but was quickly integrated into foreign policy. During its military occupation of Iraq, the U.S. Department of Agriculture brought the food supply of a sovereign nation under the control of foreign-patented seed technology. When studies revealed GMOs' links to cancer, the U.S. government and Green Revolution profiteers intervened to keep the quality of these new agricultural commodities out of public view.

István Mészáros offers that "external obstacles," such as public health crises and climate disasters, "could never bring capital's limitless drive to a halt" regardless of how devastating the effects may be long-term. This is because "both nature and human beings could only be considered external 'factors of production' in terms of capital's self-expansionary logic" (Mészáros 2010, 174). Under capitalist circulation, the *use values* that make up our material reality are secondary to valorization. As a result, humanity falls out of sync with the material demands of its long-term reproduction, which relies on the Earth. Marx noted that "exchange itself is a chief means of… individuation [Vereinzelung]," which renders humanity's "herd-like existence superfluous and dissolves it" (Marx 1993, 496). Capitalist exchange is thus established as the motor that rends humanity from its *species-being* or labor *metabolism* with the Earth.

2. *So-Called Primitive Accumulation* as a Process of Estrangement:

In his classic demonstration of SCPA, Marx invokes a bloody history of turning arable land into pasture, beginning with individual acts of violence in fifteenth century England. By the eighteenth century, "the law itself" became "the instrument by which the people's land is stolen" (Marx 1992, 885). A characteristic moment of SCPA was the systematic establishment of Highland deer forests, occupying land where Scottish villages were burned to the ground a century prior (Macleod 1892).[7] By 1981, these deer parks covered an area of nearly 2,472,113 acres. "In the eighteenth century the Gaels were both driven from the land and forbidden to emigrate, with a view to driving them forcibly to Glasgow and other manufacturing towns" (Marx 1992, 890-891). As the peasants were forced off their land, wage labor encircled them as the only available means of survival. As deer were given "extended ranges," workers were "hunted within a narrower and still narrower circle" (Marx 1992, 893). From the legal inscription of stolen land as private property, a growing working class was born.

The basis of SCPA is the expropriation of the agricultural producer from the land, readying the soil to be incorporated into capital (Marx 1992, 895). For Marx, simple "cultivation of the soil posits the land as the individual's extended body," establishing a metabolic unity

[7] "After all, the whole area of the Park Deer Forest was occupied by hundreds and hundreds of crofters until they were evicted earlier in that century." These elite hunting grounds, which are seemingly even less productive than the sheep runs they replaced, were highly hostile to human life.

between humans and the Earth (Marx 1993, 493). Even under feudalism, property was largely non-exclusive and its use corresponded directly to workers' reproductive needs.[8] Through SCPA, producers are divorced from their means of production, beginning with the soil.

> "Not only do the objective conditions change in the act of reproduction… but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language" (Marx 1993, 494).

Through SCPA*,* human beings are transformed into individuals. Once coerced into wage labor, the worker is rendered object-less, becoming an isolated subject (Marx 1993, 507). In Marx's framework, direct, common property, contra private property, is a relation posited by the community regarding the individual, as to how the conditions of production are one's own (Marx 1993, 493-497). Under the clan system, the fundamental condition of property was to be a member of the clan. One's relation to the land and soil was thus mediated through the community.[9]

In 1844, Marx wrote that "in estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor estranges the species from man" (Marx 1978, 75). SCPA brings about a new mode of property which involves the dissolution of humanity's "relation to the earth… as the natural condition of production" (Marx 1993, 497). It thus modifies how individuals relate to *their own inorganic being.* The implementation of wage labor mutates humanity's relation to the Earth as an extension of itself through the dissolution of communal property. *Labor*, or the conscious, transhistorical mediation between humanity and the earth, grows estranged. The separation of humans from their labor time 'frees' workers to confront capitalists as 'equal' sellers on the market. Labor then faces the worker as something alien, "a power independent of the producer," a mere commodity (Marx 1978, 72-73). Estranged labor robs its seller of their *means of life* by establishing work as a mere means to satisfying external needs.[10] Capital's specialized workers no longer directly engage with the network of natural and social relations that support their labor. Their tools and raw materials confront them mysteriously in the factory, deprived of any discernible social and ecological origin.

When *use values* are disconnected from the labor process, human labor is reduced to an indirect mode of satisfying basic functions. To invoke W.E.B. Du Bois, living is earning a living under capitalism. The maintenance of *crude need* becomes the end of all labor for the wage worker, suppressing its spiritual and social significance (Marx 1992, 497).[11] For the capitalist, labor and its requirements become a mere means to valorization. Both classes are deprived of pursuing life as an end in itself.

It is initially through SCPA that nature becomes a matter of utility for the capitalist system. Human reproduction is made secondary to the expansion of capital, whereas earlier,

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[8] The debates on fallen wood rights in Prussian Rhineland, written about by the young Marx, demonstrate this.
[9] While individual possession might involve the division of fruits between families, land and labor were held in common. In Marx's view, capitalism introduces an entirely new type of property relation. "Slavery and serfdom are… only further developments of the form of property resting on a clan system… In classical antiquity, manufacture appears already as a corruption… The community itself appears as the great force of production…" (Marx 1993).
[10] "Thus the more the worker by his labour *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of *means of life* in the double respect: first, that the sensuous external world more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labor – to be his labour's *means of* life; and secondly, that it more and more ceases to be *means of life* in the immediate sense, means for the physical subsistence of the worker."
[11] Labor loses its artistic aspect, which for Marx, was still half-present under the Guild Corporation System.

nature was reproduced as an extension of the collectively-rooted self. Through a history of enforced alienation, "the blind dictates of self-expanding exchange value" have disrupted humanity's centuries-long reproductive circuit (Mészáros 2010, 195). Forced estrangement is at the center of the ecological rift. If SCPA estranges humans from the land, transforming subjects into individuals, it also transforms how 'nature' is understood and related to.

2a. The Category of Nature:

> "It is not the *unity* of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather, the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labor and capital" (Marx 1993, 489).

The opening of the world to wage labor via SCPA resulted in a new way of conceptualizing nature. 'Natural' environments became a place apart; distant from the 'dot-like isolation' of capitalist subjects (Marx 1993, 485). As sheep and deer ranges were cleared of human inhabitants, pastoral aesthetics rose to popularity. In eighteenth-century England, watercolor landscape paintings featuring vacant fields flourished. A century later, American Romanticism developed, associating feelings of individual freedom and spiritual ecstasy with vast, empty landscapes. William Cronon calls the bourgeois ideal of uninhabited wilderness a "throughgoing erasure of the history from which it sprang" (Cronon 1996).

The invention of nature as a place of leisure entailed the displacement of non-capitalist life. The cruel nineteenth-century idea of wilderness as a pure, 'virgin' land bears resemblance to the foggy image of an "original garden… a place outside of time, from which human beings had to be ejected before the fallen world of history could properly begin" (Cronon 1996). Historically specific notions of individual freedom are naturalized in wilderness's curated appearance of authenticity. "By the nineteenth century, the very memory of the connection between the agricultural laborer and communal property had, of course vanished" (Marx 1992, 899). Today, I, an individual, confront the landscape as other to my being, as other to my labor, and as other to the fellow humans whose distant hands once tended the processed crops I consume. The separation of nature from the laborer, like the separation of labor from the laborer, readies the landscape for commodification. Privatized property incentivizes owners to mine natural resources and industrialize farming on a scale incompatible with Earth's reproductive timeline.

All is cannibalized in pursuit of accumulation, environmentalism included. In today's financialized economy, the very idea of conserving untouched 'nature' has become a profit strategy, concretized in the push by major polluting industries for carbon credit markets, often materially backed by nature reserves in the Global South. "Carbon credits" are tradable claims to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, which often take the form of 'carbon offsets.'[12] By purchasing tens of millions of carbon credits per year, for example, Delta Airlines claims to be carbon neutral, despite operating around 4,000 flights per day (Adow 2023).

"Biodiversity conservation has historically been financed by the State," but recently, "carbon credit markets have been established, in which individuals, organizations, and even governments attempt to meet emissions reduction goals… at a lower cost" (Garcia and Moros

[12] A similar system was established in Columbia in the form of carbon taxes.

2025).[13] [14] As acquisitions of land designed to offset the emissions of imperialist nations frequently displace locals, the vacated nature preserves behind carbon offsets conjure the eerie image of nineteenth century highland deer parks. Innovations in climate finance are making it increasingly possible to transfer the ecological burden of developed capitalist nations onto developing nations.[15] Despite profitability, storing carbon in plant life has been criticized as a vulnerable climate strategy, as forest fires and logging could unpredictably re-release carbon.[16] Rather than fueling resilient development run by local communities, carbon offsets enable consolidated industries to continue polluting at scale, while incentivizing neoliberal land grabs. This is capitalism working as structured, only in a new form: siphoning valorization from 'outside' territories, commodifying land, and displacing those who threaten profits. Climate finance is one of many new forms of SCPA, backed by imperial states, yet serving increasingly transnational billionaires.

Vulnerable, untouched wilderness is often invoked as justification for capital's encroachment on local economies. As a growing ecotourism industry allows the upper classes to live out transnational fantasies of pristine wildlife and moral consumption, local peoples are turned into trespassers on their own ancestral lands (Oakland Institute 2018).[17] Meanwhile, in the imperial core's proud national parks, indigenous people are accused of poaching on colonized land (Warren 1944).[18] Wilderness as an alienated object of protection forms one of the central "quasi-religious values of modern environmentalism" (Cronon 1996). Conservation is a cultural tool of the bourgeoisie, much like Smith's 'primitive accumulation.' Under capitalism, the human subject is re-formed at a distance from its objective, natural component. An enclosing of the modern imagination thus flows from SCPA's material enclosures. Saito writes that Marx was concerned with ecological crisis from "an 'anthropocentric' perspective because he consistently recognized the 'non-identity' of nature" (Saito 2023, 104). Marx most often wrote from the perspective of capital, seeking to understand it from within.[19] Bearing this in mind, an anti-capitalist environmentalism might demand a re-unified conception of nature.

2b. Linking Human Economic Activity and Climate Change Across Time:

Marx understood the world as a systemic, "constructional whole of relations between elements" (Okada 2007). For him, social formations are both self-reproductive and vanishing. As demonstrated in the previous two sections, "the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism… constantly engaged in a process of change" (Marx 1992, 93). Marx was interested in

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[13] In 2022, the Liberian government agreed to sell 10% of its land to the UAE-based company, Blue Carbon, threatening indigenous communities who rely on these forests (Adebayo 2024).

[14] Subsequently, Blue Carbon signed memorandums of understanding with governments in Liberia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe to manage large forest areas and produce carbon credits from conservation initiatives (Civillini 2023).

[15] The African Carbon Markets Initiative, run by McKinsey consulting, paired with Western billionaire philanthropies in Kenya, Nigeria, and Gabon, aimed to increase carbon credit generation to 300 million by 2023.

[16] Carbon credit systems put conservation zones at risk for increased droughts, floods, and storms.

[17] The Maasai and Batwa people have lost much of their traditional land due to animal conservation projects in Kenya and central Africa. Tanzanian government officials and police are complicit in dispossessing the Maasai in collaboration with foreign companies such as Tanzania Conservation Ltd (based in Boston) and Ortello Business Corporation (Based in the UAE) through conservation laws.

[18] The Blackfeet are referenced here.

[19] With certain exceptions such as *Notebook V* of the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1993, 485).

how the components of certain socially objective systems operate to reinforce one another. Nature is no exception. What is considered "nature" and how it behaves is constantly shifting with the social activity of its constitutive inhabitants. That change, however, follows a historically specific logic.

> "The spontaneous rhythm and recalcitrance of nature are no longer credible excuses for justifying the living conditions of countless millions who had to perish in misery in the last few decades, and so continue to perish today" (Mészáros 2010, 176).

Having unpacked the fiction of nature as an untouched purity, this section considers how 'natural disasters' have been shaped by economic activity and capitalist expansion.

Mike Davis begins his book, *Late Victorian Holocausts, El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* by asserting that droughts and famines are never simply 'natural disasters' (Davis 2017, 20). His analysis highlights the staggering millions of people who died of famine in the developing world during the same half-century when famine disappeared throughout Western Europe. From 1876 to 1902, in India, China, and Brazil alone, between 31.7 and 61.3 million died of famine and related diseases. In Ethiopia and Sudan, one-third of the population died of similar causes from 1889 to 1991. No prior record of extreme weather simultaneously affecting the food availability of so many distant lands had ever been recorded (Davis, 2017, 8-9).[20] Alfred Russel, a Victorian naturalist, viewed such mass starvation not as a 'natural disaster,' but as a political tragedy. Marx's writing on SCPA shows that capitalism needs the power of the state to expand, i.e. subsist.[21]

At the turn of the twentieth century, capitalism's commodification of agriculture disrupted village-level reciprocities across the globe. Local systems traditionally provided welfare to the poor and maintained food stores in preparation for unfavorable harvest seasons. Davis writes, "millions died, not outside of the 'modern world system,' but in the very process of being forcibly incorporated into it." Again, circulation is central. From 1743 to 1744, China experienced an El Niño Southern Oscillation event of similar strength to that of the following century. However, then, the Fang Guancheng administration maintained two million peasants for eight months on relief grain, of which 85% was borrowed from greeneries outside the drought radius (Davis 2017, 297). Following the Opium Wars and China's loss of sovereignty over foreign trade, droughts posed a new threat to population subsistence.[22]

In 1944, Karl Polanyi recognized the role of economic activity in creating natural disasters by attributing "the actual source of famines in the last fifty years" to the "free marketing of grain combined with local failure of incomes" (Davis 2017, 10). At the same time, Polanyi "reified the market as automata," making it easy to visualize famine as an inadvertent 'birth pang' on the road toward market-based subsistence. Marx's writing on SCPA grounds responsibility for climate catastrophe in the capitalist state. "What historians have so often dismissed as 'climactic accidents' turn out not to be so accidental after all" (Davis 2017, 295). The estrangement of humanity from the earth bears immense material consequences that have only worsened in capitalism's higher stages. The concentration of 'natural disasters' along colonial and neo-colonial lines is an essential aspect of ongoing SCPA.

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[20] Droughts and flooding documented in Egypt, Java, The Philippines, New Caledonia, Korea, Brazil, Southern Africa, the Maghreb, North China, North Africa, Russia, Ethiopia, Sudan.

[21] This point will be elaborated further in Section 3.

[22] It is also worth mentioning that with the opium wars, a new concept of 'nature' emerged in the Chinese language (Ziran).

3. Climate Catastrophe and the Imperialist State:

Within Marx's systematic worldview, it is difficult to imagine a time before human activity impacted environmental processes. In the so-called Eastern United States, the presence of Oak and Chestnut trees results largely from cultural burning practiced by indigenous societies to achieve nut crops (National Parks Service 2024). This pre-twentieth century land-management practice points toward long-standing, human-induced climate change. Capitalism does not introduce climate change as such. Capitalism detaches humanity from its natural component, such that humanity's productive goals conflict with the species' long-term reproductive needs. Volcanoes, floods, and earthquakes have long disrupted the lives of humans, but only through capital has it become possible for humanity to affect the environmental safety of the entire planet through its social activity. A defining factor of *climate collapse* is the ability to identify complex human-led environmental disaster chains, without the ability to adapt our behavior to remedy them. Despite having robust knowledge of better energy sources, fossil fuels are too central to the Trans-Atlantic capitalist class to convert to sustainable and higher-yielding energy sources at scale. Andreas Malm writes, "the fossil economy has the character of a totality," a socio-ecological complex of economics, international relations, and energy weaves the fabric of life as we know it (Malm 2016, 12). All agency under capital, like the state's, is bound by valorization.

Mészáros reflects that "agricultural production did not begin with the eradication of famine and malnutrition," but rather its displacement and concentration (Mészáros 2010, 176). Davis demonstrated this at the turn of the twentieth century, tracing how British colonial and economic policy produced famines across the constructed 'third world.' Today, the pattern holds.[23] After Israel bombed Gaza's last operating flour mill on November 14, 2024 (following an eighteen-year air, land and sea blockade), a bag of flour in the Gaza Strip sold for $1,000 (Al Jazeera, 2023).[24] The deliberate manufacture of widespread hunger, a so-called natural disaster, spurred by the valorization needs of imperialist nations is an ongoing reality of SCPA.

In *Capital Volume I*, Marx cited how between 1814 and 1820, "15,000 inhabitants, about 3,000 families, were systematically hunted and rooted out. All of their villages were destroyed and burnt, all of their fields turned to pasturage" (Marx 1992, 891). Two centuries later, in just four months, eighty-five percent of Gaza's population was forcibly displaced, suffering levels of systematic 'hunting and uprooting' that far exceed Marx's observations in Scotland at the turn of the nineteenth century (Lakhani 2024). Between October 7th, 2023, and February 10th, 2024, 28,064 (documented) Palestinians were killed in Gaza, including over 11,500 children, while being forced to flee their homes (Reuters 2024).[25] These numbers, the abstraction of which cannot begin to convey the human suffering they represent, have increased dramatically since. In 2024, Israel initiated a multi-million-dollar international ad campaign selling Gaza's rubble-strewn coast as a tourist destination to the international elite (Barnett 2024).[26] In 2026, the U.S. President's son-in-law presented a plan at the World Economic Forum to "build a riviera on the bones of the dead," a landscape flattened by years of U.S. artillery (Paul, 2025). Among other

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[23] In Sudan, nearly 4.2 million cases of acute malnutrition are expected in 2026 due to droughts and flooding exacerbated by global price shocks in grain and other commodities (Reeves, 2026). In Yemen, seventeen million people are suffering food insecurity compounded by a cholera outbreak, intensified by Saudi Arabia's blockade (WFP 2022).

[24] Jabalia Refugee camp, Northern Gaza.

[25] Likely a gross under-count.

[26] Such ads have been run on massive media outlets, including Hulu, and shown twice during the U.S. 2024 Superbowl.

omitted national economic motives for this genocide is an estimated $524 billion worth of oil reserves in the Levant Basin (UN 2019).[27] [28]

The commodification of land and its machinery of ongoing displacement logically entail catastrophic environmental harm, jeopardizing future generations.[29] The planet-warming gases emitted during the first two months of Israel's war on Gaza alone were reported to be greater than the annual carbon footprint of "more than 20 of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations" (Lakhani 2024). On February 4th of 2026, Israel reportedly sprayed Glyphosate on South Lebanon Farmlands, deliberately targeting the soil (Beirut Today 2026). These are not isolated incidents but expressions of a single logic: capitalist circulation's ontology of infinite growth, carried out on a planet with finite resources. The environmental disasters that characterize today's *climate crisis* are generated structurally through an asymmetrical alliance between capitalist monopolies and imperialist states. Ecological equilibria are first disrupted at the core's outer edges but quickly spread damage across the globe. Despite the shifting of capitalism's ecological burden onto 'periphery' populations, the Earth remains an integrated system. Capitalism's disruption of humanity's metabolic exchange with 'nature' is an environmental liability for the entire planet. We can trace disaster chains with greater precision than ever before and have yet to sever them.[30]

3a. The Dependent Agent of *So-Called Primitive Accumulation*:

To clarify our object of critique, this paper uses 'the modern state' to refer to Western nation-states of the eighteenth century onward. Such formations, by Lenin's definition, share an imperialist trajectory corresponding to capitalism's development into the monopoly stage, despite crucial differences.[31] This paper does not deny that the nation-state can be a horizon of liberation for colonized people. As Ghassan Kanafani shows in *The 1936-39 Revolt in Palestine*, resistance against Zionist capital, advanced by British imperial policy, involved a fundamentally different role for the state than the one discussed here, one situated within a larger class war. That said, if capital is the agent of accumulation by waged exploitation, the imperial state is the agent of SCPA. Revisiting Marx's framing of SCPA, we are brought to examine a critical dialectic between capitalism and the state. William Clare Roberts writes, "according to Marx, the state pursues policies of primitive accumulation because it has become dependent upon capital accumulation… for its own existence and functioning" (Roberts 2022, 2). The capitalist state, while strategic, exists within a limited realm of self-preserving, and therefore capital-preserving, action. I propose the modern state's incapacity to foreground environmental concerns is a function of such dependence. While the state shares a motive of economic growth with the

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[27] In 2026, Venezuelan oil arrived to Israel for the first time since 2009 (Democracy Now! 2016)

[28] Another national economic motive might involve the long-discussed Ben Gurion Canal as a proposed alternative trade route to the Suez (The New Arab 2022).

[29] Racism and capitalism have long been close bedfellows.

[30] Human agency cannot presently implement its knowledge of impending self-destruction to halt the economic systems driving it. While arguments against environmental humanism have been made, it seems humanism is the revolutionary position in a self-perpetuating circuit of exploitation. Flisfeder writes, "in some ways, posthumanism has the potential to essentialize and naturalize its own position as objective in and of itself" and identifies the position with an, arguably capitalistic, desire for the "generalized equality of objects and species" (Filsfeder 2023, 167,168).

[31] China, for example, as a contested "semi-periphery" with different lending practices from Western Nation States, would not be considered an imperialist "state" under the definition of this paper (Minqi 2021).

capitalist, it maintains an ability to operate beyond the confines of a typical free market actor. I argue that the state carries out SCPA across three dimensions. The first two, however contested, are identifiable in Marx's writing and substantiated in the footnotes. The third is an 'original' contribution inferred from capitalism's expansionary logic and dependence theory.[32]

First, and most widely recognized, the imperialist state uses property rights to legitimate the incorporation of new land into the capitalist system. Land first acquired through violent dispossession is later validated by law, as shown by Marx's analysis of the legitimation of land theft in Scotland by the British state.[33] Present-day contexts include, but are far from limited to, Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico. This first dimension of SCPA can also take on neo-colonial forms, including the U.S. and U.A.E.'s funding of carbon credit initiatives in the Global South.

Second, Marx writes that during early capitalist production, the state works "to *keep* the worker himself at a normal level of dependence" and calls "this is an essential part of so-called primitive accumulation" (Marx 1992, 900). This dimension of SCPA involves social intervention via domestic state policies regarding labor,[34] crime,[35] education,[36] social services,[37] and migration.[38] While Marx included indirect domestic policies in his definition of SCPA, he failed to anticipate their continuation beyond capitalism's ascending phase. However, today, analogous legal mechanisms actively maintain dependence in the capitalist core. Some contemporary forms of SCPA's second dimension include: labor laws, tax exemptions, predatory policing, media censorship, austerity measures, and border protections.

The *third* dimension of SCPA, logically entailed by Marx's theory, but not named, is the state's active reproduction of capital's 'outside,' without which the core could not exist, buffering the contradiction posed by capitalist circulation.[39] Capitalism is formally oriented towards an extension over the whole planet, and yet, if it were to achieve this, its dictate of growth would bump up against a real material limit.[40] Marx himself recognizes that:

> "If it (the state) destroys these (non-capitalist economies) in one form, in particular branches at certain points, it resurrects them again elsewhere, because it needs them to some extent for

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[32] 'Original' is written in scare quotes because intellectual labor is never an individual endeavor, but rather a collective form of labor pursued across time.

[33] Again, fallen tree rights in Prussian Rhineland offer a strong case study. Daniel Bensaïd's book, *The Dispossessed*, contextualizes the moment well.

[34] "The rising bourgeoisie needs the power of the state, and uses it to 'regulate' wages, i.e. to force them into the limits suitable for making a profit, to lengthen the working day…" "English Parliament… held the position of a permanent trade union of capitalists against the workers throughout five centuries" (Marx 1992, 900, 903).

[35] People were turned into vagabonds and tried as voluntary criminals. "Bloody legislation against vagabondage was enforced across Europe…" (Marx 1992, 895).

[36] "The advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws" (Marx 1992, 889).

[37] Austerity measures, poor laws, and the law that "all persons have the right to take away the children of vagabonds and keep them as apprentices" (Marx 1992, 897).

[38] "In the eighteenth century the Gaels were both driven from the land and forbidden to emigrate, with a view to diving them forcibly to Glasgow and other manufacturing towns" (Marx 1992, 90, 91).

[39] Given the core's reliance on a periphery for (i) the appropriation of raw materials and unfree labor and (ii) new markets into which it can expand.

[40] Not that there aren't attempts, such as Elon Musk's Mars project. Bogdanov anticipated capital's colonial dilemma in his science fiction novels, written about by McKenzie Wark in her book, *Molecular Red*. Part II of this paper will elaborate such technological fantasies spurred by capitalism's ecological rift.

> the production of raw material. It produces, therefore a new class of small villagers who cultivate the soil as a subsidiary occupation, but find their chief occupation in industrial labor…" (Marx 1992, 911).

This cyclical dynamic appears clearest in the cultivation of raw materials abroad, as the imperialist U.S. state wages proxy wars, stages international coups, funds terrorist groups, and orchestrates debt traps to secure its interests abroad. The state's layered approach to periphery maintenance, however, reveals capitalism's 'outside' as a socio-spatial entity, one amenable to re-organization and overlap. A dynamically re-organized periphery includes populations who are only partially integrated into wage labor and territories of raw material extraction alike. State strategies for maintaining this 'outside' can range from interference in the economic development of other nations to the generation of new categories of unfree laborers at home.[41] The state maintains a domestic outside in part by establishing and enforcing labor groups such as criminals and 'illegal aliens' who experience vastly different workplace regulations than those fully integrated into the formal economy. Domestic periphery populations also often suffer a greater environmental burden than their fellow citizens, a burden shared by those oppressed beyond the imperial nation's borders.

In 2023, an incarcerated man in California went viral for donating $17.74 to relief efforts in Gaza. The sum represented 136 hours of prison labor working as a porter/janitor, making 13 cents per hour. The Palestinian Youth Movement reflected that "some of the deepest solidarity with Palestine in the US lies in the US prison system" (@palestinianyouthmovement 2024). Such instances of solidarity show that 'periphery' populations within the capitalist state and outside of its official borders have more in common than it appears. Both incarcerated Americans and occupied Palestinians experience state-sponsored violence directed at maintaining their exclusion from doubly-free labor. Both populations also suffer from remarkably high levels of pollution. In Gaza, sanitation and water treatment systems have been destroyed while thousands of Israeli and U.S.-supplied bombs pollute the air, leaving a new layer of toxic chemicals in Gazan soil. In the U.S., one-third of state and federal prisons are located within three miles of a federal Superfund site, contributing to increased rates of illness and lower life expectancies for inmates (Prison Policy Initiative 2022).

In Chicago, an organization of Black and Latinx mothers advocating for police abolition, MAMAS, sees their struggle as deeply connected to that of Palestinian mothers who have been separated from their children abroad. The American citizens most likely to be brutalized by the police have been spatially zoned along racial and economic lines, assisted by the FHA. Such redlined neighborhoods demonstrate disproportionately higher rates of disease, flooding, heat waves, and crowding than historically white neighborhoods (Wang 2018, 134).[43] The economic development of Black Americans has also been repeatedly and deliberately stunted by the U.S. state, through interventions like the Tulsa Massacre and the CIA-Contra-Crack Cocaine Controversy. In capitalism's higher stages, the geographic zones of 'core' and 'periphery' increasingly overlap. It is increasingly common for those who make up capitalism's periphery to participate in 'doubly-free' wage labor, in addition to serving as a source of unwaged labor. MAMAS points to the periphery population of women, a group economically cornered into

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[41] Consider incarcerated laborers and criminalized undocumented workers.

[43] A study of 108 U.S. urban areas found that formerly redlined neighborhoods are on average 4.5 degrees Fahrenheit hotter than non-redlined neighborhoods (Anderson 2022).

unwaged reproductive labor roles during capitalism's ascension phase, many of whom now work a 'second shift' as wage laborers.[44]

The carceral system reveals functional overlap with even greater clarity. While the prison originally served SCPA by punishing vagabondage and continues to criminalize poverty today,[45] it has since emerged as a multi-billion-dollar private industry (Equal Justice Initiative 2021).[46] In 2024, Edgeworth Economics published a cost-benefit analysis of ending involuntary servitude and slavery in the U.S. by raising pay for incarcerated workers to a wage between $7.25 and $21.00 per hour. They concluded such an undertaking would cost the government between $8.3 and 13.5 billion, a cost outweighed by cumulative financial benefits (Edgeworth Economics 2024, 50). The profits of the prison industrial complex, however, stretch far beyond those gained from unfree labor, flowing through what Ruth Wilson Gilmore identifies as a convergence of surpluses, mitigated by a vast network of financial incarceration incentives.[47] Gilmore demonstrates how California's prison expansion in the 1980s and 1990s was an inevitable outcome of four unavoidable post-war surpluses: *finance capital* seeking investment, *land* devalued by agricultural restructuring, *labor* rendered surplus by cyclical crises and deindustrialization, and *state capacity* reconfigured away from Keynesian principles (Gilmore 2007, 57, 88).[48] Prisons for Gilmore absorb multiple surpluses at once, turning structurally idled land and people into vehicles for valorization, while absorbing finance capital through municipal bonds. Capital is valorized off the backs of humans detained on U.S. soil, not only through their unwaged labor, but through their very identification as a 'periphery' population to be managed.

This structural overlap extends to the carceral state's expanding immigration apparatus. Populations displaced by the imperial state's SCPA activity abroad who have migrated to the core in search of work encounter a state prepared with new profitable mechanisms for their containment. The Trump administration's 2026 proposal to spend over $38 billion converting warehouses into ICE detention facilities, funded in part by the $45 billion May 2025 Reconciliation bill, exemplifies this dynamic (Democracy Now! 2026, American Immigration Council 2025). CoreCivic and GeoGroup, the private prison monopolies standing to benefit most, receive approximately $165 per detainee per day held in detention from ICE (Trovall 2025). In the immigration detention center, periphery folds into core most explicitly. The doubly displaced and commodified detainee experiences an environment of extreme overcrowding, poor sanitation, and abysmal healthcare access. Like prisons, immigration detention facilities are often located near polluting sites.[49] The same state that expropriates 'periphery' populations abroad fuels multiple industries to contain them at home, profiting once more off of land poisoned by core industries.

Saito offers that capitalism 'shifts' the 'rift' it causes in humanity's labor metabolism with the Earth across spatial, temporal, and technological lines. Through a close reading of Marx on

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[44] In urban areas, forty percent of the poorest households are headed by single women (UN 2009). Meanwhile, upper-class women who have assimilated into the capitalist core hire a more vulnerable class of women, often immigrants, under the table to reproduce their families.

[45] See the Vera Institute of Injustice for a comprehensive study of The Criminalization of Poverty in Kentucky, linking deindustrialization, the subsequent over-prescription of pain medication, Class D felonies, and the use of criminal legal fines to state and county revenue.

[46] McDonald's and Victoria's Secret are two examples of major companies profiting directly from prison labor.

[47] Including but not limited to: private prison direct profit, service monopolies, political lobbying, the infrastructure and construction industry, and investment banking profits.

[48] Devalued land and capitalism's structurally demand for a surplus population are of particular interest here.

[49] The Karnes City, Texas detention center located within 100 feet of fracking emissions (Ford 2023).

SCPA, I have proposed the modern state as a primary enactor of such shifts. Capitalism, however, cannot delay its damage indefinitely. Marx himself studied how the collection of Guano from seabirds in Latin America, used to improve soil fertility in nitrogen-depleted Europe, eventually led to war and resource exhaustion. While the state's threefold perpetuation of SCPA temporarily mitigates the contradiction of capitalism's periphery-dependent core, its interventions do not necessarily keep pace with capitalist expansion.

> "The more capitalism is developed, the more strongly the shortage of raw materials is felt throughout the whole world, the more desperate is the struggle for the acquisition of colonies" (Lenin 2021, 31).

Through climate crisis, labor's material basis (which *exchange value* obscures) eventually catches up with capitalism. As more geographical contexts are integrated into capitalism, new outsides continue to spring up within the imperial core, slowly bringing 'natural disasters' closer to home for imperial elites.[50] In this way, too, the division between capitalism's interior and exterior is growing increasingly thin. The contradiction between capitalism's core and periphery poses a threat to the free market system, particularly when compounded with the material consequences of humanity's estrangement from its *species being*. "We always find that this peasantry turns up again," domestically and internationally, "although in a diminished number and in a progressively worse situation" (Marx 1992, 912). In the state's threefold management of capital's dependence contradiction, SCPA is rendered a cyclical process with a lagging function of climate crisis containment.

Conclusion:

Marx's writing on SCPA draws attention to a cyclical process of encroachment and disenfranchisement, motivated by capitalism's expansionary form of motion, a system that ruthlessly demands infinitely increasing *exchange value*. This portion of Marx's corpus foregrounds the land, while his later scientific inquiries in the MEGA foreground the soil. The environmental turn of Marx's research towards the end of his life can thus be read not as a departure but as an extension of his earlier insight that capitalism fundamentally requires humanity's estrangement from the Earth. This dynamic begins with the expropriation of the producer from the land and culminates in the exhaustion of the soil itself.

I have established that for Marx, SCPA denotes an ongoing process that relies on the dependent agency of the modern state and denaturalizes capitalism's impact on the land it absorbs. Building on this foundation, I have argued that the state's role operates along three distinct axes. The first, dispossession through property law, is the most widely recognized. The second, the maintenance of wage labor dependency through domestic policy, extends at a pace beyond the "full development" of the capitalist mode of production in a given region, persisting and even intensifying in capitalism's higher stages. The third, which I have derived from Marx's logic, involves the constant creation of new exteriors to capitalism, zones from which it can draw free labor and resources, and into which it can expand once more, after incorporated territories are exhausted.

Ongoing SCPA not only reveals a fruitful contradiction for theoretical investigation but foregrounds Capitalism's material reality of extraction, displacement, and confinement. The climate crisis is a problem that involves the whole of humanity. Yet, the ruling class deceptively

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[50] "Under capitalism the home market is inevitably bound up with the foreign market" (Lenin 2021, 24).

defers its burden spatially, temporally, and technologically onto subordinate populations instead of addressing its root cause (namely, the organization of labor under capitalism and the estrangement from 'nature' it requires). Marx's critique of political economy helps systematize the uneven pressures of climate change on select populations. The majority of those who sit in air-conditioned offices and enjoy free two-day shipping have yet to feel the full consequences of humanity's estrangement from its *species being*. However, the line between capitalism's core and its periphery is thinning. As wage labor proliferates across the globe, new outsides spring up in increasingly small patches; sometimes separated from the core by as little as a city block, and at other times directly overlapping with it.

Louisiana's Cancer Alley, Boxtown, Tennessee, and the incarceration facilities that dot the American landscape are not exceptions to the core-periphery model, but evidence of its adaptation to an increasingly globalized system of accumulation. Capitalism's periphery is no longer elsewhere, but also nested within the imperial core, produced and reproduced by the same state mechanisms that operate abroad. As capitalism grows, so too do its material contradictions. As capitalism grows, so too does the proximity of those contradictions to the centers of power that imagine themselves immune.

Part I of this paper has probed the socio-spatial lines along which capitalism, and its dependent agent, the imperial state, shifts its climate burden. But spatial reorganization is only one dimension of this story. As Andreas Malm reminds us, "now is a singularly bad time for declaring the demise of time" (Malm 2016, 11). Against theorists who would subordinate temporality to a postmodern spatial logic, Malm insists that time remain an urgent focus of attention in the climate crisis. This insistence resonates with the argument developed here. Luxemburg argued that the moment capitalism becomes universal, it ceases to exist. This follows from the general formula for circulation laid out in section 1a. But as Jacky Wang points out, Luxemburg's argument assumes capitalism is a static rather than a dynamic system (Wang 2018, 108). The system's disturbing genius lies in its capacity to generate new outsides even as it consumes old ones, to produce temporal disjunctures alongside spatial ones.

Part II will take up this provocation, investigating the temporal and technological aspects of Saito's 'metabolic shift' through the lens of SCPA. If so-called development entails deliberate under-development 'elsewhere,' what model of history does Marx's critique imply? The early Marx's Promethean reputation has long obscured the temporal complexity of his thought. According to Roberts, "returning 'primitive accumulation' to the context of its origination… actually brings Marx's argument up to date" on the controversial topic of progress (Roberts 2022, 3). Part II will argue that SCPA, understood as an ongoing process, demands a nonlinear conception of capitalist time; one in which progress and regression, integration and expulsion, are not sequential phases, but simultaneous operations which render the historical shape of capital's moment abderitic in form.[51]

[51] In the Kantian sense, as a view of history characterized by meaningless flux which ultimately results in stasis.

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