

What Is To Be Built?: Lenin and Utopia

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Abstract: Lenin was a utopian thinker, after all. He understood that to build socialism required some hard decisions about which actually existing conditions, modes of life, and practical skills—be they in service of “agrarian capitalism” or the medieval “natural economy”—will be brought into the future to modernize Russia. The problem, whether you’re Lenin or you, is that if anyone is ever to build something new in a present whose foundations are inevitably in the past, we must undo the ideologies of modernism and adopt a counterview called “unmodernism.”

Keywords: Lenin, utopia, peasants, building, infrastructure, modernization, modernism, capitalism, feudalism.

The following essay originates in a talk entitled, “The Poiesis of the Present,” delivered on May 16, 2024, in the global conference, “Leninist days / Jornadas leninistas” (January 27 to May 25, 2024), organized in commemoration of the centenary of the death of Vladimir I. Lenin. My comradely co-panelists, Rebecca Comay, Frank Ruda, Heather H. Yeung, and Peter Hallward (as respondent), made brilliant interventions on the topic of “Insurrection as an Art / The Art of Insurrection.” To mark this centenary occasion, this contribution is simulcast here and on the website for Communis Press (<https://communispress.com/>) with abiding thanks to the conference organizer and press founder, Rolando Prats.

Reality without real possibility is not complete, the world without future-laden properties does not deserve a glance, an art, a science any more than that of the bourgeois conformist. *Concrete utopia stands on the horizon of every reality; real possibility surrounds the open dialectical tendencies and latencies to the very last.*
—Ernst Bloch

Vladimir Lenin reads like none other, and I don’t mean his voracious study habits or exhortations to “study, study, study.”¹ Nor do I mean his sartorial smarts—always sporting, at least for the camera, a suit and tie with a newspaper in hand when there’s no tuxedo cat nearby to pamper. Rather, I mean, the way he reads to us as an author for whom no single method of reading succeeds in interpreting all that he says. It’s for this reason that sometimes we might read Lenin speculatively, not as the reluctant and rowdy philosopher he was, but rather in the way we might naively imagine we’re shadowing him, there with him, identifying with his moment enough to sense the contingency of history itself, the pure eventfulness of quick changing circumstances and multiple problems appearing all at once, from

all sides and at every scale. Can we appreciate the extent to which Lenin's entire surround had too much possibility or, frankly, too much history?

How wrong we've been to fuss over the "End of History" when it's plainly obvious that the beginning of history is where all the problems are, especially when history hits hard and fast and doesn't need a capital letter to make itself known.² And the truest Hegelian point about that phrase, in any case, is that history really doesn't care if you think it's ended—that's how reliably "Other" it is. Evidently, then, we're fundamentally concerned with the struggle against, as much as within, history. So we want to study Lenin at the moment of actuality actualizing itself, horizons opening up before they collapse into the white dot of singularity as swiftly as options for action reduce down to one or zero. Reading Lenin contingently may help us apprehend these dense historicities, then, if for no other reason than Lenin would seem to call for it himself when he says, "I had no time to write a single line of the chapter; I was 'interrupted' by a political crisis—the eve of the October revolution of 1917... It is more pleasant and useful to go through the 'experience of revolution' than to write about it."³ Meaning, he already has too much on his docket to sit and write some new scholarly tome. Things are afoot. Got places to be. He can't write about everything, and he also may not wish to do so beyond what he's already committing to paper for his speeches, courier messages, newspapers, conferences, telegraph communications, and texts for that "newspaper without paper and without wires," the radio.⁴ With our readerly mindset fully engrossed in contingency, then, we are finally prepped to contemplate Lenin's everlastingly blunt question, "What is to be done?" Think quickly on an answer, stake a claim, find a solution, pick a side, and don't worry about what *can* be done. Just do what must be done. ACT!

Something's off here, of course. To act at a moment's notice feels too impetuous, too spontaneous, and that's because, for Lenin, it very much is. The problem is to read Lenin for pointers not on how to act in a flash but how to build that "bridge leading from capitalism to socialism."⁵ This is a great motto, but it teaches us nothing until we remember that a bridge is never just a bridge—never just a metaphor for anti-capitalist ambitions so much as the word for, or one word for, the realities of the built environment for which Marxism now has many names ranging from the literal, like "forces of production" to the allegorical with a term like "utopia." While Lenin has much to say about "What is to be done?" (answer: start a national newspaper), he has as much, if not more, to offer on the alternative question in my title: "What is to be built?" This question grounds us in Russian actualities as we look out onto Lenin's present, and behold what's actually existing as the *place* for organization and the *space* to reclaim and construct socialism from all that's already at hand. Simply by asking this constructive question, "What is to be built?," we can find in Lenin's work what makes *praxis* a *poiesis*, action as a form of making or building. If we're going to think with Lenin, we might pull up a chair and

with him look out onto the social landscape, behold what infrastructures and ways of life remained among the peasantry and the proletariat, and make some decisions about where human creativity and productive skill and capacity could be found in the construction of socialism. In other words, we will have a lot to say here about spatial thinking as well as the peasantry and the older so-called natural economies, and we'll experiment with a conception I'd like to call "unmodernism" to make sure we're not losing our way.

Audacious Arts

There's no greater way to pose the matter of contingency in Marxism than with the problem of spontaneity. Long before the term denoted unreflexive and precritical consciousness, which would include Louis Althusser's idea of the "spontaneous philosophy of the scientists,"⁶ spontaneity is meant to describe a certain so-called subject of history, the masses, who became suddenly energized, sometimes violent, but above all unfocused in their aims to break out from poverty and unlivable and unfair working conditions and.... And what? That's the question. It's for this reason, which is a lack of an answer, that Marx and Engels hoped to declare that insurrection must in the long run be an "art" or, rather, a discipline—not a spasmodic irruption.

In *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany*, datemark September 18, 1852, Marx and Engels stated:

Now, insurrection is an art quite as much as war or any other, and subject to certain rules of proceeding, which, when neglected, will produce the ruin of the party neglecting them. Those rules, logical deductions from the nature of the parties and the circumstances one has to deal with in such a case, are so plain and simple that the short experience of 1848 had made the Germans pretty well acquainted with them. Firstly, never play with insurrection unless you are fully prepared to face the consequences of your play. Insurrection is a calculus with very indefinite magnitudes, the value of which may change every day; the forces opposed to you have all the advantage of organization, discipline, and habitual authority: unless you bring strong odds against them you are defeated and ruined. Secondly, the insurrectionary career once entered upon, act with the greatest determination, and on the offensive. The defensive is the death of every armed rising; it is lost before it measures itself with its enemies. Surprise your antagonists while their forces are scattering, prepare new successes, however small, but daily; keep up the moral ascendancy which the first successful rising has given to you; rally those vacillating elements to your side which always follow the strongest impulse, and which always look out for the safer

side; force your enemies to a retreat before they can collect their strength against you; in the words of Danton, the greatest master of revolutionary policy yet known, *de l'audace, de l'audace, encore de l'audace*.⁷

Our authors here speak of “art” as a kind of planning with order and efficiency: “organization, discipline, and habitual authority,” which terms only affirm that by “art” they mean “ars” in the old Latin sense, as in Livy’s “ars belli” or “the art of [waging] war.” Talk of “rules” and “logical deductions” only confirm this emphasis, as does—and this is the point—all the ways they are compelled to speak urgently about why there needs to be rules at all, addressing what exceeds logic and expectations, namely, all the contingencies packed into “the short experience of 1848” to which the term “event” does no justice; which is to say, it was indeed an “experience” (a word itself we should track and rethink from Marx and Engels, to Lenin, to Althusser and beyond). Despite a certain confidence that comes with hindsight looking at 1848, Marx and Engels are overcome by their own topic, speaking the language of contingency and expressing an emotional discourse that is itself artful. So, there’s less the impression here of any prescription for acting this way or that—apart from admonitions to expect the unexpected—and more an imperative to think the present as an almost impossibly contingent moment, and a freedom that is at once an emergency. This is why the final imperatives to be audacious call for passionate release and are a goad to spontaneity, after all.

Lenin latches on to this idea of “insurrection as an art” in countering the charge that Marxism is basically Blanquism, revolutionary activity by the elites to the exclusion of the proletariat:

Marxists are accused of Blanquism for treating insurrection as an art! Can there be a more flagrant perversion of the truth, when not a single Marxist will deny that it was Marx who expressed himself on this score in the most definite, precise and categorical manner, referring to insurrection specifically as an art, saying that it must be treated as an art, that you must win the first success and then proceed from success to success, never ceasing the offensive against the enemy, taking advantage of his confusion, etc., etc.?⁸

This is a fair summary of the foregoing passage in *Revolution and Counter-revolution in Germany* and a good defense of Marx, though there’s no mention of Engels (always the bridesmaid!), and few are lining up these days to dunk Blanqui anyway. So we can move on from this squabble.

As it stands, Lenin approaches the task of “treating insurrection as an art” with more detail than Marx and Engels, almost as if he’s drawing a tactical map in a way the latter two never did:

In order to treat insurrection in a Marxist way, i.e., as an art, we must at the same time and without losing a single moment organize a *headquarters* of the insurgent detachments, distribute our forces, move the reliable regiments to the most important points, surround the Alexandrinsky Theatre, occupy the Peter and Paul Fortress, arrest the General Staff and the government and move against the officer cadets and the Savage Division those detachments which would rather die than allow the enemy to approach the strategic points of the city. We must mobilise the armed workers and call them to fight the last desperate fight, occupy the telegraph and the telephone exchange at once, move our insurrection headquarters to the central telephone exchange and connect it by telephone with all the factories, all the regiments, all the points of armed fighting.⁹

Lenin closes out his letter with these words: “at the present moment it is impossible to remain loyal to Marxism, to remain loyal to the revolution unless insurrection is treated as an art.”

Now, Lenin here describes many actions that had already happened in previous struggles up to the July days and including the so-called trial run of 1905. Bearing in mind that he writes this passage in September of 1917—and to be plainly obvious, *before* October of 1917—we can see he reflects on the intensifying actualities of the present. Therefore, you could decide that Lenin himself is speaking with some urgency and, let’s just say, “spontaneity,” with phrases concerning all that is to happen “at the same time”—spontaneity as a reaction to unthinkable simultaneities: “we must at the same time and without losing a single moment organize.” Granted, in this particular letter Lenin never once utters the word, “spontaneity”—though bear in mind that he can’t stop saying the term most everywhere else, including a crucial text he wrote soon after this one.¹⁰ But he is evidently imagining himself to be at the cross-roads where insurrectionist spontaneity and artful revolutionary practice meet, as he acknowledges emphatically: “Insurrection must rely upon a *revolutionary upsurge of the people*.”¹¹ This is not the easiest space in which to dwell. Accordingly, it’s here we find our first point about Lenin’s habit of channeling insurrectional energies into something *constructively revolutionary* and, as we will suggest below, *constructed*: when Lenin thinks and writes in this “Marxist way,” when matters are ever urgent and too immediate for words, he adopts his preferred “art” of infrastructural, médiatique, and architectural explanation—the real and actually existing or soon-to-be existing *sites* of “organization.” This is, in other words, Lenin’s spatial imaginary and, you could say, spatial dialectic.

That Lenin is thinking practically and spatially is fitting for any revolutionary thinker who has to plan for mobilization. Full stop. But it’s apt for *this thinker* whose metaphors for “organizing” are indelibly architectural and vibrant with images of building and creating. Readers

may best remember his passage about the importance of newspapers in his work of 1902, “What is to be Done?” Behold Lenin’s musings on the “art of politics”:

The whole art of politics lies in finding and taking as firm a grip as we can of the link that is least likely to be struck from our hands, the one that is most important at the given moment, the one that most of all guarantees its possessor the possession of the whole chain. If we had a crew of experienced bricklayers who had learned to work so well together that they could lay their bricks exactly as required without a guide line (which, speaking abstractly, is by no means impossible), then perhaps we might take hold of some other link. But it is unfortunate that as yet we have no experienced bricklayers trained for teamwork, that bricks are often laid where they are not needed at all, that they are not laid according to the general line, but are so scattered that the enemy can shatter the structure as if it were made of sand and not of bricks.¹²

Lay bricks “spontaneously” without a plan, or a guide line, and you’ll soon be off kilter in your construction and looking at what’s called in the trade a “tear out and replace,” which is backbreaking and makes no one happy.

Lenin adopts this language consistently, as we’ll see. And his readers of yesterday and today will very well recognize the following lines from his spat with L. Nadezhdin, the *nom de guerre* or *nom de plume* for Y. O. Zelensky:

The scaffolding is not required at all for the dwelling; it is made of cheaper material, is put up only temporarily, and is scrapped for firewood as soon as the shell of the structure is completed. As for the building of revolutionary organisations, experience shows that sometimes they may be built without scaffolding, as the seventies showed. But at the present time we cannot even imagine the possibility of erecting the building we require without scaffolding.¹³

Here we go: it is one thing to perform a “*ruthless criticism of all that exists*,” as Marx famously says, which by the way is possible only if you admit that “constructing the future and settling everything for all times are not our affair.”¹⁴ Yet it is another thing to criticize *and* construct that future. What we have, in other words, is Lenin exhibiting a metaphorical interest in building precisely because his concerns with building are deeply practical and every bit pertain to that “building of socialism” he so frequently insists upon. It will turn out that his emphases, metaphors, and foci—which are building “materials” in perhaps the most actual way possible within the greater “*materialist* conception” of history—tell us

a great deal about his revolutionary theory, which for Lenin requires a studied sense of place, a real and useful understanding of locality not subsumed by “internationalism” after all, and a spatial politics that comes down to the constructive matters of not who is where doing what but who will build what and with what *means* and practical knowledge.

1899: (U)topianism

Lenin’s “What Is To Be Done?” bears a title whose question is more often asked than answered. In responding to his own question, Lenin trains his focus on spontaneity within a spatial frame, attentive to actuality as a certain lay of the land, and he’s thinking about the way spontaneity spreads from “the places where it began... to new localities and to new strata of the population.” Spontaneity is inhaled: “under the influence of the working-class movement, there was a renewed ferment among the student youth, among the intellectuals generally, and even among the peasantry”—a “rapid” and “widespread” “spontaneous upsurge of the masses.”¹⁵ The lesson?: the masses need to collect itself into a collectivity, and that can only transpire through an all-Russia newspaper that goes out to all localities and puts everyone literally on the same page, reading something together, a *collective* as in *co-lectio* or co-reading (technically, *legens*, if we mean the practice). This is a good plan, but also a utopian one—and I say this on the wager that spatial thinking, any attempt to read and *write the world* or present (*Vorstellung*) conditions as they are, invariably contains utopian possibilities.

Fredric Jameson, reading Lenin, said that “[c]ertainly, there are wonderful utopian passages in *The State and Revolution*.”¹⁶ This claim should strike the reader as strange, *prima facie*, because Lenin, from his early text *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) to his later work *State and Revolution* (1917), rejects utopianism, as when he insists that “[t]here is no trace of utopianism in Marx, in the sense that he made up or invented a ‘new’ society. No, he studied the *birth* of the new society *out of* the old, and the forms of transition from the latter to the former, as natural-historical processes.”¹⁷ Likewise, in the later text, *State and Revolution*, Lenin says, “[w]ithout building utopias, Marx defined more fully what can be defined *now* regarding this future, namely, the differences between the lower and higher phases (levels, stages) of communist society.”¹⁸ Utopianism, even if dreamy and artful, is spontaneity itself or what Slavoj Žižek calls an “outburst of blind utopian passions.”¹⁹ In his own remarks, Lenin, of course, had in mind specific kinds of “utopian socialism,” which for him “could not explain the real nature of wage-slavery under capitalism” nor “show what *social force* is capable of becoming the creator of a new society.”²⁰

Yet what one hand taketh, the other giveth: Lenin still has a “new society” on his mind, and we are told not to hang back while it emerges ex

nihilo by some miracle but participate in its construction and *imagine how it is to be done, how it is to be built* by dint of a constructive revolutionary labor. That is utopian thinking of yet another kind. For his part, Jameson didn't identify exactly what utopian passages he had in mind in *State and Revolution*. Only later did he do so, picking out a passage—appropriately enough—on the “art of administration.”²¹ Clearly, there are sentences in Lenin's work that we can read as utopian expressions, in the manner of Jameson's (Blochian) procedure and in the way I shall be doing below. But I believe the following passage represents the most straightforward and outright expression of the kind of utopian thinking I, after Ernst Bloch, have in mind, and it's no surprise that it concerns the urgent matter of “*building a new Russia*”:

a new Russia *has to be built in such-and-such a way* from the standpoint of, say, truth, justice, equalised labour, and so on, it will be a subjectivist approach that will land me in the sphere of chimeras. In practice, it is the class struggle, and not my very best wishes, that will determine the building of a new Russia. My ideals of building a new Russia will not be chimerical only if they express the interests of an actually existing class, whose living conditions compel it to act in a particular sense. By thus adopting a stand for the objectivism of the class struggle, I do not in the least justify reality, but, on the contrary, indicate in this reality *itself* the deepest sources (though they are invisible at first sight) and the forces that can transform it.²²

And in this utopian thought of making visible what's invisible in the present, Lenin has Marx firmly backing him up, with a focus on including the peasantry in revolutionary struggle to “the destruction of feudalism in the countryside, the creation of a free landowning peasant class.”²³ We'll return to the question of feudalism or serfdom, and much that both entail, below.²⁴

My present aim is to read passages from Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899) and see how they inform his later writings. This book is a scholarly, statistical, and factual study, but it is also a text in motion, with its own nimbleness or you could say “spontaneity” in how Lenin tracks multiple rapidly developing circumstances at the end of the nineteenth century. It's not for nothing that he commonly uses the phrase, “in the making,” to describe identities and economies in continuous states of becoming, which, of course, is fitting to the whole idea of development announced in the title of the work. But these qualities are also the stuff of utopian thinking just in the way Lenin himself later says, as we saw above, without ever using the word: utopian so as to “indicate in this reality *itself* the deepest sources (though they are invisible at first sight) and the forces that can transform it.”

For example, in a section entitled “The Development of the Lumber and Building Industries,” Lenin states:

One of the necessary conditions for the growth of largescale machine industry (and a highly characteristic concomitant of its advance) is the development of the industry for the supply of fuel and building materials, as well as of the building industry. Let us begin with the lumber industry. The felling and preliminary dressing of trees for their own needs has been an occupation of the peasantry from time immemorial, one that nearly everywhere forms part of the tiller’s round of work.²⁵

Every plowman knows carpentry and has access to the right tools and work spaces. That’s because (citing an historical study) “[c]arpentry has left a deep impress upon the whole peasant life.”²⁶ Accordingly, Lenin goes on to connect carpentry, and all it involves, to its actualization in building:

Building was originally also part of the peasant’s round of domestic occupations, and it continues to be so to this day wherever semi-natural peasant economy is preserved. Subsequent development leads to the building workers’ turning into specialist *artisans*, who work to customers’ orders. In the villages and small towns, the building industry is largely organised on these lines; even today the artisan usually maintains his connection with the land and works for a very narrow circle of small clients. With the development of capitalism, the retention of this system of industry becomes impossible.²⁷

Lenin proceeds to explain how this semi-natural peasant economy transforms during “the development of capitalism,” in which “the retention of this system of industry becomes impossible.”

But that is precisely the point. Those practices Lenin finds to be disappearing are still what’s very much present. In other words, in this snapshot of a transitional moment from the peasant economy to a capitalist agrarian one, and looking out on the “territorial division of labor,” as defined by “the formation of large areas in which the working population specialises in some particular branch of building”—Lenin discovers, codifies, and quantifies the constructive, agrarian productive capacity of Russia:

Judging by these figures, the number of building workers in European Russia must be *not less than one million*. This figure must rather be considered a minimum, for all the sources show that the number of building workers has grown rapidly in the post-Reform

period. The building workers are industrial proletarians in the making, whose connection with the land—already very slight today—is becoming slighter every year.

Once more, Lenin is capturing a moment in transition or “in the making,” and while below we will query his perspective on agrarian capitalism, it has to be said that one million builders, *at least*, from the peasant population would come in handy for “building booms’ (like the one we are experiencing now, in 1898).”²⁸ These specialist workers from the peasantry amount to a goodly number among a total population that was recorded by the census of 1897 to be at 125,640,021, with the peasantry itself upwards of 96,896,648 people or 77.1% of the population.²⁹ Lenin was surely right in this respect: there were definitely a lot more builders and experts in various crafts like metalworking, masonry, et cetera, than one million. We’ll return to this fact.³⁰

Finally, in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* there’s a category of labor that Lenin often calls “home-work.”³¹ He explores this particular labor in his account of how “agricultural capitalism” doesn’t require much infrastructural or technical innovation because peasants can be hired to do extra work in their homes:

None of the Narodniks has even noticed the trifling detail that home workers constitute what is, perhaps, the largest section of our “reserve army” of capitalism. By distributing work to be done in the home the entrepreneurs are enabled to increase production immediately to the desired dimensions without any considerable expenditure of capital and time on setting up workshops, etc.³²

Fair hit on the Narodniks. But you can see what’s being said here—namely, that within the peasant home or rather across homes are a variety of means of production for which capitalists themselves don’t need to advance their capital in order to purchase or develop it. The means are already there, in other words; so, too, is the productive capacity conducive to “the immediate expansion of production”³³—a phrase that has immense significance in terms of what was to come, and how fast, as we see after Lenin’s death in the rapid expansion of industry and agricultural collectivization.

But we see what we have here in all these passages: Lenin’s reflections on building and creating—as well as his intimations about extant means of production—touch on palpable impulses we might name utopian or even describe as a poiesis of the present—ways of making, building, constructing that are themselves *already practiced* and, accordingly, are praxis itself. By these utopian lights, then, the way to praxis, most usually understood within (and without) Marxism as a sudden outburst of passion or a kind of communist building that contains these

impulses by some industrial program or other, could be easier realized in some other agrarian way.

Poieses of the Present; or, What is to be Undone?

Let's rangle Lenin. He can take it and certainly dish it out. But eventually he'd agree with what we're about to argue, as we'll soon see. So: Did he forestall this connection between persistent peasant practices from "time immemorial" and emergent socialist ones on account of his modernist and modernizing worries about, precisely, any lingering medieval modes of social organization within the movement itself? To ask more perversely in the form of a single question with two parts connected at the hip: Did Lenin like capitalism too much and the medieval peasant economy too little to make decisions about just where and how socialism will emerge?

We begin with his words in "What is to be Done?" (again, from 1902) first to take stock of his characterization of extant peasant economies:

Yet subservience to spontaneously developing forms of organisation, failure to realise the narrowness and primitiveness of our organisational work, of our "handicraft" methods in this most important sphere, failure to realise this, I say, is a veritable ailment from which our movement suffers.... [A]n irreconcilable struggle must be waged against all defence of backwardness, against any legitimation of narrowness in this matter.³⁴

No disagreement here—what kind of moron leans into "backwardness"?—but anyone who has studied closely the premodern world, to say nothing of finding Marxism to be the best way to analyze it, can sniff out his viewpoint here and discern its own limitations. Yet Lenin's modernism, more than his justifiable gripes about "utopian socialism," kept him from certain utopian insights about how present ways of life are, perhaps, already the future itself. As we saw above, he mentioned these present-day modes in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899), the way "[b]uilding was originally also part of the peasant's round of domestic occupations," but doesn't carry them forward or use this insight to qualify his larger claims about what exactly constitutes present-day Russia.

In *State and Revolution* (1917), Lenin said that "we want the socialist revolution with people as they are now," and this view would seem to accord with a (Blochian) utopianism that sees possibility in current ways of life across society, but the people he has in mind are the proletariat, "foremen and accountants"—the latter not the equivalent of certified public accountants—who can do record keeping and boss others around to get with the program.³⁵ A year later, he'd make the claim more forcefully with the agrarian contrast we're worrying about:

The Russian is a bad worker compared with people in advanced countries. It could not be otherwise under the tsarist regime and in view of the persistence of the hangover from serfdom. The task that the Soviet government must set the people in all its scope is—learn to work. The Taylor system, the last word of capitalism in this respect, like all capitalist progress, is a combination of the refined brutality of bourgeois exploitation and a number of the greatest scientific achievements in the field.... The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organisation of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism.³⁶

There're echoes here of Lenin's earlier remark, in 1912, that "[i]n very many and very essential respects, Russia is...one of the most benighted, medieval and shamefully backward of Asian countries"³⁷—only that in the inset quotation above Lenin feels that there's nothing to be had in "the persistence of the hangover from serfdom." One can have feelings about things, but I sense that we may read Lenin's point in a different way, not about "the persistence of the hangover from serfdom" but about the persistence of agrarian life and so-called peasant economies. And what of those economies? This is our abiding question, which we've been answering with various passages in which Lenin no sooner asserts the existence of such economies than denies them. It's as if he's thinking hastily, or is swept up in history himself, mesmerized by what's new, a capitalist *novum* that "astonishes" one so viscerally that there's no stomach for an everyday *residuum* that has its own potentiality and surprise, per Brecht: "What's usual here should astonish you."³⁸

We hear Lenin's modernism talking. As an ideology contemporaneous with capitalism, modernism weds one to capitalism either through alignment with its ambitions or opposition to them, or indeed in some combination of these two tendencies. The point is that we can understand that Lenin thinks within an *aligned opposition* to capitalism because, in part, his modernism colors his ideas about capitalism, as we see in his recommendations to adapt capitalism not "in the name of capitalism"³⁹ and his caveats about how "our state capitalism differs from state capitalism in the literal sense of the term."⁴⁰ Many things can be said about these ideas within the Marxist frame about what it takes to transition to socialism, and among them it could be proposed that modernism is so alluring as to cloud those forms of domination that capitalist modernization itself borrows from feudalism, which incidentally—and this is often forgotten—the very problem the concept of "racial capitalism" picks out.⁴¹ We discover in modernization, in other words, a domination—or, more precisely, "the confiscation of surpluses from the peasants"⁴²—not unlike the feudal extraction of said peasant surplus; more on this below. For now, let's just say that there's always the matter

of demystifying and critiquing capitalism, but while we're at it can one see feudalism itself for what *it* really is, and *where* it really is, and how its forms of domination persist into the present by some other name?

I claim that Lenin was too vigorous in imputing capitalism to the contemporary agrarian landscape in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*.⁴³ The point isn't only about correctly distinguishing medieval from modern, feudalism from capitalism, or agrarian from industrial processes, but rather about what the present looks like as a landscape within which any kind of momentous historical transition can be *organized* at all. My sense is that Lenin didn't follow his own lead in identifying the utopian elements of the (medieval) present that were anti-capitalist already precisely because they were pre-capitalist and "medieval," which is a point of view—in another context—that Marx himself could only entertain to a limited degree in, for example, his remarks about use-value economies in the former colonies, and that Frantz Fanon to a greater degree could claim in his idea that the inherent *uncolonial*, outsiderist mediocrity of the peasantry could be activated into a *decolonial* force, harnessing the "pride of the peasant, his reluctance to go down into the towns and rub shoulders with the world built by the foreigner."⁴⁴ For his part, Lenin always held a view that ...:

The proletarian method is *exclusively* that of clearing the path of all that is medieval, clearing it for the *class struggle*. Therefore, the proletarian can leave it to the small proprietors to discuss "norms" of landownership; the proletarian is interested only in the abolition of the landlord latifundia, the abolition of private ownership of land, that *last* barrier to the class struggle in agriculture.⁴⁵

... by which even the distinctions between what's proletarian, what's peasant, what's medieval, and what's modern are hard to know when, fundamentally, there's this obvious need for "the small proprietors to discuss 'norms' of landownership," inconsideration of which will make difficult the whole effort at transition to socialism no matter what name you assign to your starting point. Those norms are indeed the "base" to whatever new superstructure is to follow.

No? Any reader of Lenin—and of contemporary writers in conversation with him—will know that phrases about "building socialism" are widespread during this period, and usually mean all that's involved in transitioning to a socialist *economy* or, as he had to accept, an economy of state capitalism. But as you can see in my various emphases here on the built environment, on what is actually existing in the agrarian landscape, on the variety of expertises required to construct everything from railways, useable roads for the transport of grain, and the power grid to storehouses for grain and houses for people, that I mean something very practical in the term "building" and that, accordingly, I have in mind

just where that constructive labor force is, and what its character may well be.

When, for his part, Lenin came around to imagining which builders, which experts in the crafts of construction and administration thereof, could help in the transition to socialism, he nominated not the agrarian peasantry whom we saw (above) lived in a culture of building for centuries. Instead, he had in mind the capitalists themselves, the bourgeoisie proper. Let me offer a selection of passages from different texts and speeches across the years 1919 to 1922:

Political distrust of the members of a bourgeois apparatus is legitimate and essential. But to refuse to use them in administration and construction would be the height of folly, fraught with untold harm to communism.⁴⁶

The question of the bourgeois experts has arisen in the army, in industry, in the co-operatives, everywhere. It is a very important question of the period of transition from capitalism to communism. We shall be able to build up communism only when, with the means provided by bourgeois science and technology, we make it more accessible to the people. There is no other way of building a communist society. But in order to build it in this way, we must take the apparatus from the bourgeoisie, we must enlist all these experts in the work.⁴⁷

And, more fully, from Lenin's text of March 1922, "Political Report of The Central Committee of The R.C.P.(B.)":

The idea of building communist society exclusively with the hands of the Communists is childish, absolutely childish.... We Communists shall be able to direct our economy if we succeed in utilising the hands of the bourgeoisie in building up this economy of ours and in the meantime learn from these bourgeoisie and guide them along the road we want them to travel.

To win the second part of the victory, i.e., to build communism with the hands of non-Communists, to acquire the practical ability to do what is economically necessary, we must establish a link with peasant farming; we must satisfy the peasant, so that he will say: "Hard, bitter and painful as starvation is, I see a government that is an unusual one, is no ordinary one, but is doing something practically useful, something tangible."⁴⁸

To sum up Lenin's passages here: you could say his focus on the bourgeoisie was a consequence of his ideas about "dual power," but

even here he still could have satisfied the desideratum to “direct initiative of the people from below, in their local areas” by thinking of the small peasant experience, too.⁴⁹ It was his decision to view, expect, plan for construction, building, design, in bourgeois terms, which should seem strange to folks in the Party jostled to sober up from “petty-bourgeois intoxication.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile, there’s an entire agrarian capacity, not yet industrialized or collectivized, that could be imagined to participate in these constructions, were it not for a certain modernizing point of view. Indeed, to view agrarian life through the bifocals of capitalism and a socialism-to-be on the way to communism, amounts to modernism, which accordingly constrains Lenin to conclude in a more general way, in 1922, that “[w]ithout an alliance with non-Communists in the most diverse spheres of activity there can be no question of any successful communist construction.”⁵¹

To be clear, we’re not meant to fuss about a new cultural style like modernism in the “history of ideas,” but rather better understand—in our speculative reading—the qualities of a self-selected if not celebratory modernism in which capitalist modernization is welcomed as the new necessity, and how such a modernism addresses *or not* the contingences and emergencies of wartime communism, in which feeding the army must be a priority. However we view the matter, the peasantry is right there as an agent. They will either be building things or be waylaid by the fact that they’re not building things like better supply lines up to Petrograd. Eventually, though, Lenin would adjust his thinking in these respects, as yet more practical matters prevail upon him and continue to insinuate themselves into revolutionary theory. He will soon see that we were right.

1917: Unmodernism

Our task is not to be anti-modern in a reflexive reflux of conservatism. Not in the least. It is, rather, to think and read Lenin according to a certain *unmodernism*—a hermeneutic by which we’re attentive to the limits of modernization itself, as an ideology and as a practice that, in its material instantiation, seeks to bulldoze, level, and otherwise transform age old infrastructures and ways of life so hastily as to elide their own utopian possibilities for building a future. Unmodernism, if anything, is the study of the present, and a concern for what hasn’t yet been formally or really subsumed during modernization, to say nothing of capitalization. Which is to say, we look for and work with *what persists*: this is the raw material, already in the present, that is the basis of a lower-case utopianism not to be confused with the Utopians. We ourselves wouldn’t want to deprive Lenin of this reflective, philosophical mode attentive to the poises of the present, and perhaps we can even see him wending his way to it. Uppercase Utopianism, as we keep saying, doesn’t vitiate lowercase utopian reflection. What Lenin was seeking to figure out in his *The Development of Capitalism*

in *Russia*—namely, how first to recognize conditions as the raw material for a future socialism—became all too clear after the second October revolution in his “Decree on Land.” This text is a true case in point on how we read the evolution of Lenin’s thinking, his tempering of certain modernisms into arguably an *unmodernism*, and his awareness of spatial politics in its most concrete sense—having to do with *land* and all it emblemizes as a resource, a force of production, an infrastructure, a way of life, a commons, and a world. What Jameson says about our own time, “today everything is about land,” certainly applies here.⁵²

The “Decree on Land”—contained within the “Report on Land October 26 (November 8)” of 1917—is no minor document, and Lenin unequivocally states its importance: “The outbreak of the armed uprising, the second, October, Revolution, clearly proves that the land must be turned over to the peasants.... The first duty of the government of the workers’ and peasants’ revolution must be to settle the land question, which can pacify and satisfy the vast masses of poor peasants.”⁵³ We can see that Lenin is codifying earlier efforts to get out in front of the peasant seizure of lands to themselves as their own private property and to endorse instead the peasant requisitioning of landed estates, so long as this is done in, of course, “an organized way.”⁵⁴ He aims to address “peasant demands,” which issue from the ground up and were recorded by functionaries in the antagonist Socialist-Revolutionary party, but it would be as accurate to say—as we did in our discussion of his *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*—that he is also imagining a new policy within the framework of extant ways of life down to the fundamentals of effective possession or “use” that are by no means a communist novelty so much as an old agrarian category familiar to the commune or *mir* within what’s generally called fill-in-the-blank feudalism (“bastard,” “corporate,” “muscovite,” whatever). For example, the decree establishes that “[a]ll the small streams, lakes, woods, etc., shall pass into the use of the communes, to be administered by the local self-government bodies”—a verbal gesture by which, even in the listing of natural features, approaches the sense of land as *already* infrastructural by dint of being natural resources that aren’t “property” or appropriated. To boot, “all land” shall “become the property of the whole people, and pass into the use of all those who cultivate it.”⁵⁵ Yes, not the private property of landlords, but the common property of all, in which possession—all the same—is exercised in “use,” in labor. We will turn to the question of surplus extraction below, as Lenin lamented it in 1921; meanwhile, these two provisions alone would be legible to a peasant in the Middle Ages across all the innumerable feudalisms across the globe on into modernity from England, to Poland, India, Japan, and indeed Russia. That legibility—what is pointed out in Lenin’s sentences—is the raw material for utopian conceptuality itself.

In case I need to be resolutely clear: Lenin is obviously right that it's wrong to argue for the preservation of feudal lords or anything like the Narodnik/Sismondian notion "to allot small plots of land to day labourers and to impose the duty of guardianship over the latter upon the landowners," to say nothing of the harebrained idea of cosplaying as peasants in tattered clothes.⁵⁶ However, whether there's something workable in the Socialist-Revolutionary position about peasant land after all, Lenin has made up his mind: "Voices are being raised here that the decree itself and the Mandate were drawn up by the Socialist-Revolutionaries. What of it? Does it matter who drew them up?"⁵⁷ You read that right: these are the same Socialist Revolutionaries whose arguments Lenin had already deemed just the year before to be "flimsy" (to say the least).⁵⁸ This realization by Lenin is, to use the embarrassing phrase of our own moment, a teachable moment in practical politics in real time. He was always stropo about something and cynical over the coming months about his intentions even here to cross ideological lines, but we may find this episode to be instructive about where facts and actualities begin on question of "land" and where division and sectarianism, so often associated with Lenin himself up until he changes his mind at the last minute, end.

The point is when land is regarded and respected, and when the generations of collective experience working the land are appreciated, then we get close to an understanding of peasant agency as well as the utopian potential of actually existing conditions. Lenin knew this. His own commitment to peasant creativity and agency, in this respect, comes in the conclusion of the "Decree on Land": "Experience will oblige us to draw together in the general stream of revolutionary creative work, in the elaboration of new state forms. We must be guided by experience; we must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the masses."⁵⁹ Guided by voices and experience. Study is one thing. Decreeing, another. Programming, yet another: "we are writing a decree, not a programme of action. Russia is vast, and local conditions vary. We trust that the peasants themselves will be able to solve the problem correctly, properly, better than we could do it."⁶⁰ Here, then, are the "experts," and they are not the bourgeoisie.

1921: The beginning is often the end

As we course through events from 1917 heading to 1921 and beyond, we realize the great difficulties Lenin and his contemporaries faced—in terms of war, internecine strife, and in general what goes under the name of "wartime communism." This is where we now ask not "What is to be done?" but rather "What goes wrong?" Lenin tells us himself in 1921, bringing us to our twice deferred point: "the confiscation of surpluses from the peasants was a measure with which we were saddled by the imperative

conditions of war-time, but which no longer applies to anything like the peace time conditions of the peasant's economy. He needs the assurance that, while he has to give away a certain amount, he will have so much left to sell locally."⁶¹ We see the problem here. If "use" and effective possession resonated with the older ways of life and are themselves the intimations of a utopian project centering communal relationships, mutual aid, and a host of other intentional community building endeavors we would recognize in "cooperatives"—precisely because they are intelligible to peasant ways of life already—then the extraction of peasant surplus brings back some of the most negative and dystopian elements of agrarian modes of production of whatever name, the kind of domination and "open" or political exploitation at the center of feudalism. The "confiscation of surpluses" was more than a terrible idea, especially when transported along bad roads (and eventually rivers)—which points to the necessity of infrastructure building, of course—and it's here one risks asserting that Lenin should have been *more utopian* in his policy imaginings, not less.

To come to an end here in our contingent reading of Lenin, we can ask after two texts—"The New Economic Policy and the Tasks of the Political Education Departments," from October 17, 1921, and "The Role and Functions of the Trade Unions Under the New Economic Policy," from January 12, 1922, both of which, I realize, deserve an entirely separate essay. I also understand not everyone likes these two works owing to the proposed initiatives that seem at odds with the aims of planned economy, the NEP caricatured as nothing but the "New Exploitation of the Proletariat."⁶² Indeed, Lenin said that the NEP was bound to "lead to a certain strengthening of capitalism."⁶³ Yet in these texts we find something that Lenin longed for, and what anyone would have longed for in the midst of war and famine—that is, what he truly hoped would be "peaceful construction" from 1918 on.⁶⁴ Here, too, is the road not taken, for in the same way Lenin aimed "to build communism with the hands of non-Communists"—i.e., the capitalists, the bourgeoisie, the non-Party members, Socialist-Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, anarchists, onlookers, and whoever else—he could have instead found the peasantry as the locus for such constructive productivity.

As Lenin says in 1922: "The items of our programme of building a communist society, that we could apply immediately, were to some extent outside the sphere of activity of the broad mass of the peasantry, upon whom we imposed very heavy obligations, which we justified on the grounds that war permitted no wavering in this matter."⁶⁵ This is, again, a very important admission on Lenin's part, and comes close to putting the pieces together for us if not for himself: were it not for the heavy extraction of surpluses, perhaps the peasant's "sphere of activity" could indeed include, well, their very own sphere of activity, as Lenin first described it in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*: "Building was originally also part of the peasant's round of domestic occupations, and

it continues to be so to this day wherever semi-natural peasant economy is preserved.” We could even say that Lenin, in defending the NEP, as much recognized this oversight in his acknowledgement that communist building wasn’t successful: “People who differed on many questions, and who assessed the situation from different angles, unanimously and very quickly and unhesitantly [sic] agreed that we lacked a real approach to socialist economy, to the task of building its foundation; that the only means of finding this approach was the New Economic Policy.”⁶⁶

All of Lenin’s honest declarations seem to underscore the strength of what was put forth in the NEP as well as a certain difficulty Lenin knew he and his comrades—and all of the country—would have to work out, lest there be total ruin:

But here is something we must do now in the economic field. We must win the competition against the ordinary shop assistant, the ordinary capitalist, the merchant, who will go to the peasant without arguing about communism. Just imagine, he will not begin to argue about communism, but will argue in this way—if you want to obtain something, or carry on trade properly, or if you want to build, I will do the building at a high price; the Communists will, perhaps, build at a higher price, perhaps even ten times higher. It is this kind of agitation that is now the crux of the matter; herein lies the root of economics.⁶⁷

And there is our abiding question in another form: Who will do the building or for that matter rebuilding? And for how much? And why? The root of economics indeed.

Communist building had other plans anyway. We’re now cast back into retrospection and historical hindsight, flung out from contingency, possibility, and emergence and into harsh necessities, bad decisions, and poor health, as we follow the fate, from 1921 forward, of the New Economic Policy and the debate between various parties after Lenin’s death —Bukharin, on the one hand, Trotsky on the other, just to name the two most prominent persons, on whether the policy should continue. Bukharin said yes, Trotsky, no, but even this split would be immaterial for Stalin who in 1925, at the 14th Party Congress, first agreed with Bukharin’s view but in 1927 changed sides, abandoning the New Economic Policy, and all the directions and serious concerns expressed by Lenin himself. Then came 1930 when any and everything had gone off the rails.⁶⁸ This, despite all that Lenin had, quite late, imagined and emphatically advocated about discovering and respecting the “*practical experience in the localities*”: “What we must fear most of all, I think, is clumsy interference; for we have not yet made a thorough study of the actual requirements of *local* agricultural life and the actual abilities of the machinery of local administration (the ability not to do evil in the name of doing good).”⁶⁹

But let's not have history quash contingency or slide off into Stalinism hopelessly, for we must read these two texts on the New Economic Policy with zero arrogance and in the full aleatory mode in which we take a position in a moment of contingency, realizing that we must think not only as historical materialists but also as practical, reality-minded persons without an "ism" looking out on the landscapes of life and asking, What is to be done? or, better, What is to be built? This is always the query of any art of insurrection that knows poiesis to lie at the foundations of praxis, and forgetting to ask this question is a failure of the revolutionary imagination itself, a pale showing for any art whatsoever.

1 Lenin 1899a, p. 281. My epigraph is from Bloch 1986, p. 223 (original emphasis).

2 I don't care about Francis Fukuyama. I blame the "critique of origins" crowd, with Friedrich Nietzsche as their instigator, for the bizarre and unfounded take on history, "origins," what have you.

3 Lenin 1917a, p. 497. This is his "Postscript to the First Edition."

4 Lenin 1921a, p. 473.

5 Lenin 1917a, p. 426.

6 Althusser 1990. See, too, the unique discussion by my physicist friend responsible for introducing Althusser to Greek readers, Baltas 1993, p. 647–58.

7 Engels and Marx 1912, p. 161–62.

8 Lenin 1917b, p. 22.

9 Lenin 1917b, p. 27.

10 Just a few days later, that is, Lenin observed that "[d]uring the past half year of our revolution, we have experienced very strong spontaneous outbursts (April 20–21, 15 July 3–4) in which the proletariat came very close to starting a civil war" and that the "Bolshevik Party joined this spontaneous movement under the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets,'" which, for Lenin, is crucial not only in terms of winning over the "revolutionary masses"—"It is a fact that these slogans actually won over the majority of the active revolutionary masses in Petrograd on April 20–21, June 18, 20 and July 3–4"—but, quite evidently, in channeling spontaneity and formalizing audacity (tenacity by another name): "the tenacity of the proletarian revolutionary movement in republican Russia is very great" (Lenin 1917c, p. 32–33, 34; see 35).

11 Lenin 1917b, p. 22.

12 Lenin 1902, p. 502.

13 Lenin 1902, p. 503.

14 Marx 1843, p. 142.

15 Lenin 1902, p. 396; see 446.

16 Jameson 2007, p. 64.

17 Lenin 1899b, p. 430.

18 Lenin 1917a, p. 469.

19 Žižek 2007, p. 79.

20 Lenin 1913b, p. 27.

21 "But once again, information technology now stands as an absolute historical break with whatever utopias might have been imagined on the basis of this uniquely relational system, about which Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, took as the Paris Commune's lesson for communism itself: 'to organize our whole material economy like the postal system, but in such a way that the technical experts, inspectors, clerks, and indeed all persons employed, should receive no higher wage than the working man'" (Jameson 2016, p. 15; see 64–65). For the passage on the "art of administration," though the following edition doesn't use that exact phrasing and as Amir Saifullin suggests to me, the wording is far from it, see Lenin 1917a, p. 479; this is to say, Jameson quotes from a different version.

22 Lenin 1912a, p. 330.

23 Lenin writes that "here is how Marx reasoned during the most 'critical' period of the building of *new* Germany. 'The upper bourgeoisie,' wrote Marx in 1848, 'ever anti-revolutionary, concluded a defensive and offensive alliance with the reactionaries for fear of the people, that is to say, the workers and the democratic bourgeoisie.' 'The French bourgeoisie of 1789 did not for a moment leave its allies, the peasants, in the lurch. It knew that its rule was grounded in the destruction of feudalism in the countryside, the creation of a free landowning peasant class. The German bourgeoisie of 1848 is, without the least compunction, betraying the peasants, who are its most natural allies, the flesh of its flesh and without whom it is powerless against the aristocracy. The continuance of feudal rights ... such is the result of the German revolution of 1848. The mountain brought forth a mouse'" (Lenin 1912a, p. 330–31; formatting adjusted).

24 Lenin had earlier reflected on these same lines in Marx (and Engels) in his "Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution" (1905), with the proviso that "With the proper allowances for concrete national peculiarities [between Russia and Germany] and with serfdom substituted for feudalism, all these propositions are fully applicable to the Russia of 1905" (Lenin 1905a, p. 135–36).

25 Lenin 1899b, p. 525.

26 Lenin 1899b, p. 532.

27 Lenin 1899b, p. 530.

28 Lenin 1899b, p. 531.

29 Rubinow 1906, p. 108; Orlovsky 1991, p. 249–50.

30 I struggle to reconcile Lenin's perspective of agrarian labor, with its evidently multiple knowledges and wide-ranging techne from planting to building, with a claim like this: "agricultural capitalism has for the first time undermined the age-old stagnation of our agriculture....The monotony of routine natural economy has been replaced by a diversity of forms of commercial agriculture; primitive agricultural implements have begun to yield place to improved implements and machines; the immobility of the old-fashioned farming systems has been undermined by new methods of agriculture" (Lenin 1899b, p. 314). This is the opposite of views about interdisciplinary (for lack of a better term) medieval labor expressed, even if romanticized, by the likes of John Ruskin, who wasn't the worst author.

31 Lenin uses this phrase, for example, in Lenin 1913a.

32 Lenin 1899b, p. 447.

33 Lenin 1899b, p. 447.

34 Lenin 1902, p. 441–42. Here's another passage: "A study circle that has not yet begun to work, but which is only just seeking activity, could then start, not like a craftsman in an isolated little workshop unaware of the earlier development in "industry" or of the general level of production methods prevailing in industry, but as a participant in an extensive enterprise that *reflects* the whole general revolutionary attack on the autocracy. The more perfect the finish of each little wheel and the larger the number of detail workers engaged in the common cause, the closer will our network become and the less will be the disorder in the ranks consequent on inevitable police raids" (p. 507). And we can set these statements alongside some remarks in 1917: "As to the Cossacks, they are a section of the population consisting of rich, small or medium landed proprietors (the average holding is about 50 dessiatines) in one of those outlying regions of Russia that have retained many medieval traits in their way of life, their economy, and their customs. We can regard this as the socio-economic basis for a Russian Vendée [i.e., a conservative, counter-revolution—A.C.]" (Lenin 1917c, p. 33).

35 Lenin 1917a, p. 430–32.

36 Lenin 1918, p. 259.

37 Lenin 1912b, p. 163–64.

38 Jameson 1971, p. 126., and Bloch, who cites Brecht's epilogue to 'The Exception and the Rule' in *Principle of Hope*, 1.415.

39 Lenin 1916, p. 249. "We Social-Democrats always stand for democracy, not 'in the name of capitalism,' but in the name of clearing the path for *our* movement, which clearing is impossible without the development of capitalism."

40 Lenin 1922a, p. 427.

41 As told by Cedric J. Robinson; see Robinson 1983, p. 9–28, which is the first chapter, entitled "Racial Capitalism: The Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development."

42 Lenin 1921b, p. 187.

43 I shall, in his defense to my own charge, cite his "Petty-Bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism" (Lenin 1905b), but it's his shifting sense of distinctions between modes of production, at whatever scale, that an argument begins.

44 Fanon 2004, p. 88; cf. 65, where he speaks of the "organized petrification of the peasantry. Regimented by *marabouts*, witch doctors and traditional chiefs, the rural masses still live in a feudal state whose overbearingly medieval structure is nurtured by the colonial administrators and army."

45 Lenin 1907, p. 362.

46 Lenin 1919a, p. 389.

47 Lenin 1919b, p. 178. His point here about "experts" is something we can regard as "Leninist," the inevitably practical and infrastructural emphasis within Marxism. We find it everywhere in Frantz Fanon, who in his later work engages with a different situation, Algeria undergoing a war of decolonization, but still a similar problem about (constructive) expertise and the future, in his case "nation," to be built: "Perhaps everything to be started over again: The type of exports needs to be changed, not just their destination; the soil needs researching as well as the subsoil, the rivers and why not the sun. In order to do this, however, something other than human investment is needed. It requires capital, technicians, engineers and mechanics, etc." (Fanon 2004, p. 56–57). But these will have to come in from the outside, since the colonized "bourgeoisie has neither the material means nor adequate intellectual resources such as engineers and technicians" (p. 100); "there is no doubt architects and engineers, foreigners for the most part, will probably be needed" (p. 141). Fanon's bourgeoisie—i.e., the colonized intellectual who assumes the places

vacated by colonizers—lies outside the practical frame in a way Lenin's does not.

48 Lenin 1922b, p. 290–91.

49 Lenin writes: "What is this dual power? Alongside the Provisional Government, the government of *bourgeoisie*, another government has arisen, so far weak and incipient, but undoubtedly a government that actually exists and is growing—the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies" (Lenin 1917d, p. 38).

50 Lenin 1917d, p. 40.

51 Lenin 1922c, p. 227.

52 Jameson 2015, p. 131. I wish to emphasize, too, that the very word, "land," identifies a large set of longstanding concerns and mobilizations in indigenous movements and studies. An article that channels those energies is Tuck and Yang 2012.

53 Lenin 1917e, p. 257.

54 Here's Lenin: "The local peasants are to do this [i.e., seize the landed estates] in an organised way, that is, in accordance with the decision of the majority. That is the advice of our Party. The local peasants are to have the *immediate* use of these lands, which are to become the *property* of the people as a whole" (Lenin 1917f, p. 450).

55 Lenin 1917e, p. 258–59.

56 Lenin 1897, p. 239.

57 Lenin 1917e, p. 260.

58 Lenin 1917f, p. 449–54.

59 Lenin 1917e, p. 261.

60 Lenin 1917e, p. 261.

61 Lenin 1921b, p. 187.

62 Ball 1987, p. 16.

63 Lenin 1922d, p. 196.

64 Lenin under the heading of "Our Mistake," writes: "At the beginning of 1918 we expected a period in which peaceful construction would be possible. When the Brest peace was signed it seemed that danger had subsided for a time and that it would be possible to start peaceful construction" (Lenin 1921c, p. 62).

65 Lenin 1922b, p. 268.

66 Lenin 1922b, p. 267.

67 Lenin 1922b, p. 275.

68 See Hunter and Szyrmer 1992, esp. chap 6.

69 Lenin 1922e, p. 327–28. Just a few days earlier, Lenin addressed these points publicly, but they weren't sticking: "Today, as far as the New Economic Policy is concerned the main thing is to assimilate the experience of the past year correctly. That must be done, and we want to do it. And if we want to do it, come what may (and we do want to do it, and shall do it!), we must know that the problem of the New Economic Policy, the fundamental, decisive and overriding problem, is to establish a link between the new economy that we have begun to create (very badly, very clumsily, but have nevertheless begun to create, on the basis of an entirely new, socialist economy, of a new system of production and distribution) and the peasant economy, by which millions and millions of peasants obtain their livelihood. This link has been lacking, and we must create it before anything else. Everything else must be subordinated to this. We have still to ascertain the extent to which the New Economic Policy has succeeded in creating this link without destroying what we have begun so clumsily to build" (Lenin 1922b, p. 269). The following words, too, from the same letter cited here echo across time after Lenin's death: "Comrade Osinsky: After thinking over the conversation I had with you about the work of the Agricultural Section of the Party Congress, I have arrived at the conclusion that the most urgent thing at the present time is: not to tie our (neither the Party's nor the Soviet government's) hands by any orders, directives or rules until we have collected sufficient facts about economic life in the localities and until we have sufficiently studied the actual conditions and requirements of present-day peasant farming; under no circumstances to permit what would be most dangerous and harmful at the present time, and what the local authorities may easily slip into—superfluous, clumsy and hasty" (Lenin 1922b, p. 327; formatting and punctuation adjusted).

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