



the commoner



:: a web journal for other values ::

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The Carnival of Values



***and the Exchange Value
of Carnivals***

In the beginning there is the doing, the social flow of human interaction and creativity, and the doing is imprisoned by the deed, and the deed wants to dominate the doing and life, and the doing is turned into work, and people into things. Thus the world is crazy, and revolts are also practices of hope.

*This journal is about living in a world in which the doing is separated from the deed, in which this separation is extended in an increasing numbers of spheres of life, in which the revolt about this separation is ubiquitous. It is not easy to keep deed and doing separated. Struggles are everywhere, because everywhere is the realm of the commoner, and the commoners have just a simple idea in mind: **end the enclosures, end the separation between the deeds and the doers, the means of existence must be free for all!***

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Preface: Spring 2005</i>	4
<i>Value as the Importance of Action</i>	18
David Graeber	
<i>Value(s), Measure(s) and Disciplinary Markets</i>	66
Massimo De Angelis	
<i>Immeasurable Value?: An Essay on Marx's Legacy</i>	87
George Caffentzis	
<i>Work, Value and Domination</i>	115
Harry Cleaver	
<i>All Labour is Productive and Unproductive</i>	132
David Harvie	
<i>Development and Reproduction</i>	172
Mariarosa Dalla Costa	
<i>For Another Agriculture and Another Food Policy in Italy</i>	200
Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Dario De Bortoli	
<i>Women's Land Struggles and the Valorization of Labour</i>	216
Silvia Federici	

Introduction

The Carnival of Values and the Exchange Value of Carnival

In this issue of *The Commoner* we are beginning to clear a path (or maybe several paths) out of the dust emerging from the front line, and try to make sense of what is the reason for the smoke and sparks. We see a strange phenomenon occurring: what we practice is often not what we value and what we value is often not what we practice (and in saying this let us not forget that “practice” means many diverse things: work, shopping, eating, filling forms, writing, taking the train, watching the telly, harvesting a crop, reading, struggling, changing nappies ... and each and one of these involve direct or indirect relations to the “other”).

Yet, anthropologists tell us, value is what guides our practices and the latter are in turn constituted by values. Could it be then that struggles are clashes among values and correspondent practices (value practices) and that what constitutes our daily existence is the front line, the battlefield? If this is the case, to be a “journal for other values” as *The Commoner* proclaims is to attempt to recast politics in terms of values, that is a politics grounded in the aspiration emerging from struggles everywhere to reclaim social wealth as commons so as to live in dignity by practicing what we value. A politics of value is also what is behind David Graeber’s contribution who starts us up into our journey with an extract from his 2001 book (*Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*) in which he argues the anthropological case for understanding value as the importance people attribute to action. He also writes an introductory essay on “the political metaphysics of stupidity,” in which he offers some reflections on how value theory (of the anthropological type, not of the political economic type) can shed light on such a phenomenon as Bush’s re-election.

The fact that struggles are clashes of value practices is not easily recognised by Marxist economists, who as soon the word “value” is pronounced, they talk to us about the correspondent “law” (of value) often accompanied by pages and pages of

econometric regressions to “prove” its continuing relevance (as if the rat race we are compelled to take part in needs to be proved). On the other hand, many also think it is more appropriate to confine this “law” of capitalism to the bin of history, as irrelevant to explain contemporary capitalism and its post-modern multitudes. In the following four quite diverse contributions we indulge a little on this “law of value” and seek to reinterpret it so as to both grounding it in (and making relevant to) our many struggles and defend its relevance as a framework for the understanding of contemporary capitalism.

De Angelis here follows those who depart from this tradition that sees only capital and portrays us purely as victims. He sees the law of value in terms of ongoing struggles among value practices, struggles that are not only “out there”, but also traversing the subjects. He distances himself from both those writers who fetishise the labour theory of value by separating it from struggles, and those who dismiss the contemporary relevance of its measure imposed over the social body. For capital value cannot be beyond measure, he argues, because commodities' value are constituted through a continuous process of measurement of people's activity that keep us on our toes, whether we are “material” or “immaterial” workers, waged or unwaged. It is in this way that we reproduce scarcity while we could celebrate abundance. Similarly, in an older contribution published in 1989, Harry Cleaver confronts the argument of Clauss Offe and Toni Negri according to which Marx's theory of value is made obsolete by the historical evolution of capitalist accumulation. For Cleaver, while Offe is shortsighted in believing that in current capitalism work has been displaced from its central role of organising society, Negri's position on the obsolescence of the labour theory of value is predicated on the artificial separation between a concept of labour as producer of wealth and as means of domination, associating only the former with value. Also George Caffentzis intervenes on the question of the measure of value in contemporary capitalism with an essay on the legacy of Marx. He shows how modern capitalism still rely on “quantity” and “measure” and categories such as formal and real subsumption of labour have quantitative aspects in Marx's work that would make it impossible to use the notion while neglecting these aspects. David Harvie instead tackles another related subject, that of what labour is productive of value for capital. He argues that all labour, waged or unwaged, “material” or “immaterial”, is both productive and unproductive, because all labour become the realm of capitalist drive and hence is a terrain of struggle.

Conflicting value practices around land are underpinning the following article by Mariarosa Dalla Costa, originally appeared in 1994, which discusses the expropriation

of land *and* the putting a price on it as still two fundamental strategies to make a profit out of the Third World today as they were in the origin of capitalism in Europe. These enclosures which are predicated on valuing land in monetary terms, are challenged by struggle of reappropriation which are “pregnant with a multitude of meanings.” Land in fact does not only refer to means of subsistence, although this is “excellent reason” for a movement of re-appropriation. It means and is also valued for a plurality of other reasons. Reflecting on eco-feminist practices “linking nature, women, production and consumption in a single approach” she criticises male scholars who dismiss these as “romantic”. “One might wonder ... what value to these scholars attribute to the right to survival of those communities ... whose subsistence and life system are guaranteed by these practices with nature, while the ‘development proposal’ almost always presupposes the sacrifice of the vast majority of the individuals that constitute these communities.” We have also another, more recent article, that Dalla Costa wrote together with Dario De Bortoli surveying and reflecting on a variety of struggles on land, food and agriculture, this time in a country of the North, Italy. This recent movement is distinct from classical unionism, which fixed working conditions but remained indifferent to what was produced and how, and is centred on a plurality of value problematics, such as “the question of the ends and the sense of peasant labour, a fundamental rethinking of the farmer’s activity ... plus of course the ... defence of plant and animal biodiversity and therefore of the raw material of a diversified agriculture. This is a movement that reflects the “collective will of farmers, stockbreeders and citizens (not only as consumers), who have organized to refuse an agriculture and a stockbreeding system that increasingly spreads illness and danger of death.”

Silvia Federici continues this line of argument as she surveys a myriad of contemporary land struggles made by women from the South not only to re-appropriate land, but also to boost subsistence farming. It is thanks to these efforts that, she argues billions of people are able to survive. Not only, but in these struggles women show they “valorize” the labour of their children and family members as opposed to the de-valorisation they are subject to within the sexual and international division of labour which make capital accumulation thriving. Ultimately, these struggles point in the direction of the changes needed to regain control of the means of production and a new society, “where reproducing ourselves does not come at the expense of other people, nor is a threat to the continuation of life on the planet.”

David Graeber

Preface: Spring 2005

The theory of value presented in the next essay was developed in the 1980s (largely by anthropologists in the University of Chicago) and '90s (largely by myself) so it occurred to me, this being a new millennium and all, it might be helpful to the reader to provide something of an update. Something to demonstrate how this rather abstract theory can be useful for something. Since I am writing from America (just barely: I'm writing from New York, which is a little like America, but also a little like the world) shortly after the quite possibly legitimate reelection of George W. Bush, this seemed an obvious topic for reflection. How on earth could this have happened? All over the world, and certainly across the American left, people have been asking "what, exactly, were Bush voters thinking?" How could a demonstrable liar and idiot with the worst economic record of any American president since Herbert Hoover win the enthusiastic support of millions of Americans—and most excruciatingly, working class Americans, towards whose economic interests he is so openly hostile?

Obviously, this very puzzlement is something of an explanation: many on the left clearly have no idea what most Americans are thinking. I would like to demonstrate that value theory, of the rather unconventional variety I'm proposing here, might actually be useful here. Therefore, I'll start by setting out the problem in the starkest terms as possible. I will begin with an excursus on what I call the "political metaphysics of stupidity", then pose a political-economic explanation. It is, I think, a pretty good one. Still, I hope to show that the very logic of the explanation illuminates the limits of any purely political economic approach and pushes towards something beyond it, the understanding that both economic and political struggles are, always, ultimately, struggles over the nature of value.

The Political Metaphysics of Stupidity

Consider the intelligence of the average American. Then consider the fact that half of them aren't even *that* smart.

—Mark Twain

As democracy is perfected, the office represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last, and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron.

—H.L. Mencken

For most of the American liberal intelligentsia, the thing that really left them reeling from the last election was the sneaking suspicion that all things they most hated about George Bush were exactly what so many Americans loved about him. It was not that "red state" Americans voted for Bush despite the fact that he was stupid. They voted for him *because* he was stupid. Millions of Americans watched George Bush and John Kerry, two Yale-educated children of millionaires, lock horns and concluded that Kerry won the argument. Then they voted for Bush anyway. The horrified suspicion was that in the end, Kerry's articulate presentation, his skill with words and arguments, actually counted against him. Bush's stupidity on the other hand was perceived as a virtue. And I think this is substantially correct. Many Americans do genuinely admire Bush's stupidity.

Let me clarify what I mean by this. First of all, I take it for granted there is really no such thing as "intelligence". There are a million ways to be smart and no one's smart in all of them; everyone can be slow on the uptake, and most human beings, whether plumbers or professors, will be remarkably apt at some things and hopeless at others. But stupid isn't dumb. Stupidity is different. It involves an element of will. This is why no one ever talks about "militant dumbness" or "militant cluelessness", but they do talk about "militant stupidity".

The Polish science fiction writer Stanislaw Lem once tried to imagine the stupidest possible computer. It could only do one problem, $2+2$, thought the answer was 5, and when anyone tried to tell it otherwise, it grew outraged and eventually, tried to kill them. It is in this sense that I we can call Bush stupid. He is a man used to deciding what he thinks is right, and then sticking to his guns no matter how insane, disastrous, or simply incorrect his premises turn out to have been. But of course this is precisely the core of what his supporters like about him. He's firm. Decisive. A strong leader. Not

like those over-intellectual flip-floppers who are always going on about how many sides there are to a problem.

It sends liberals into spirals of despair. They can't understand why decisive leadership is equated with acting like an idiot. Neither can they understand how a man who comes from one of the most elite families in the country—George W. is as close as we have to royalty (according to some rumors, his family is so intermarried with actual royalty that only thirty or forty people would have to die for him to become king of England)—who attended Andover, Yale, and Harvard, whose signature facial expression is a self-satisfied smirk, could ever be taken as a “man of the people”. I must admit I've puzzled over this kind of thing for many years myself. As a child of working class parents who won a scholarship to Andover and eventually, a job at Yale, I've spent much of my life in the presence of men like that: almost everywhere I went, the bright, hard-working kid from a modest background trying to make something of myself, there he was, the drunken, loutish, empty-headed child of privilege, all the time laughing at me, because he knew how matter how stupid he was, or hard I worked, in the end it made no difference at all, because he was going to be running the country and I wasn't. For me, the truly remarkable thing—the real quintessence of social class—is that it never even occurs to such characters to wonder if they actually deserved it. Anyway, the presence of such a sneering idiot in the Oval Office already felt like a personal affront. The fact that so many working-class Americans see him as one of them was, at first, well-nigh incomprehensible. I have grappled with it for some time. In the end, I was forced to the conclusion that it has to do with the role of the educational system in turning America into an increasingly caste-like society.

A Political-Economic Hypothesis

The fact is that stories like mine—stories of dramatic class mobility through academic accomplishment—are increasingly unusual. For most of its citizens, America is no longer a land of opportunity. Increasingly, it is starting to look like a caste society. As the higher education system is no longer seen, at least by the white working class, as a plausible means of social mobility, class resentments have become grafted onto educational attainment. What I want to ultimately argue then that it's the very liberal elites who find Bush so repellent have to bear much of the blame for this. Bush-style populism is the final result of their own stacking of the deck in favor of their own children.

America of course continues to see itself as a land of opportunity. (It also continues to represent itself as a beacon of democracy, despite the fact that by now, most countries have far more democratic constitutions). It is clear that, from the perspective of an immigrant from Haiti or Bangladesh, America certainly continues to be a land of opportunity. It's probably true that, in terms of overall social mobility, we still compare favorably to countries like Bolivia or France. But America has always been a country built on the promise of *unlimited* upward mobility. The working class condition had been traditionally seen as a way station: something one's family passes through on the road to something better. 'What makes American democracy possible', Abraham Lincoln used to stress, 'is that we lack a class of permanent wage laborers.' At the very least, one passes through a stage of wage labor to eventually buy some land and become a homesteader on the frontier. What matters is not so much how much this was really true, as whether it seemed plausible... Every time that road is broadly perceived to be clogged, profound unrest ensues. The closing of the frontier led to bitter labor struggles, and over the course of the twentieth century, the steady and rapid expansion of the American university system could be seen as a kind of substitute. Particularly after World War II, huge resources were poured into expanding the university system, which grew very rapidly, and all this quite developed quite intentionally as a means of social mobility. The Cold War social contract was not just a matter of offering a comfortable life to the working classes, it was also a matter of offering at least a plausible chance that their children would not be working class.

From the point of view of the governing elites, there are a couple obvious problems with this approach. First of all, a higher education system can't be expanded forever. Second of all, there quickly comes a point where you end up with far more educated people than you can employ—that is, unless you want to have thousands of extraordinarily literate receptionists and garbage collectors. At a certain point one ends up with a significant portion of the population unable to find work even remotely in line with their qualifications, who have every reason to be angry about their situation, and with access to the entire history of radical thought. During the twentieth century, this was precisely the situation most likely to spark urban revolts and insurrections—revolutionary heroes in the global South, from Chairman Mao to Fidel Castro, almost invariably turn out to be children of poor parents who scrimped and saved to get their children a bourgeois education, only to discover that a bourgeois education does not, in itself, allow entry into the bourgeoisie. In the US, we've never had the problem of hundreds of unemployed doctors and lawyers, but it's clear something analogous began happening in the '60s and early '70s. Campus unrest

began at exactly the point where the expansion of the university system hit a dead end.

What we see afterwards, it seems to me, is best considered as a kind of settlement. On the one hand, most campus radicals were reabsorbed into the university (in the late '70s and early '80s it often seemed all liberal disciplines were dominated by self-proclaimed radicals). On the other, what those radicals ended up actually doing was largely a work of class reproduction. As the cost of education skyrocketed, financial aid and student loan programs were cut back or eliminated, the prospect of social mobility through education gradually declined. The number of working class kids in college, which had been steadily growing until the late '60s or even '70s, began declining, and has been declining ever since. This is true even if we consider the matter in purely economic terms. It is all the more true when one considers that class mobility was never primarily a matter of income. Class mobility was about the attainment of a certain sort of gentility. Consider, here, the phenomenon of unpaid (or effectively unpaid) internships. It has become a fact of life in the United States that if one chooses a career for any reason other than the money—if one wishes to become part of the word of books, or charities, the art world, to be an idealist working for an NGO an activist, an investigative reporter—for the first year or two, they won't pay you. This effectively seals off any such career for the vast majority of poor kids who actually do make it through college. Such structures of exclusion had always existed of course, especially at the top, but in recent years fences have become fortresses.

I think it's impossible to understand the "culture wars" outside of this framework. The identities being celebrated in "identity politics" correspond almost exclusively to those groups whose members still see the higher education system as a potential means of social advancement: African-Americans, various immigrant groups, Queers, Native-Americans. (One might even add women, since by now women are attending universities at far higher rates than men—almost 3 to 2 by some counts.) These are also the groups that most reliably vote Democratic. Dramatically lacking in debates about identity politics are identities like, say, "Baptist", or "Redneck"—that is, those that encompass the bulk of the American working class, who are made to vanish rhetorically at the same time as their children are, in fact, largely excluded from college campuses and all the social and cultural worlds college opens up.

The reaction is, predictably, a tendency to see social class as largely a matter of education, and an indignant rejection of the very values from which one is effectively excluded. As Tom Frank has recently reminded us, the hard right in the US is largely a working class movement, full of explicit class resentment. Most working class Bush

fans don't have a lot good to say about corporate executives, but to the frustration of progressives everywhere, corporate executives never seem to become the principal targets of their rage. Instead, their hatred is directed above all at the "liberal elite" (with its various branches: the "Hollywood elite", the "journalistic elite", "university elite", "fancy lawyers", "the medical establishment"). The sort of people who live in big coastal cities, watch PBS or listen to NPR or even more, who might be involved in appearing in or producing programming on PBS or NPR. It seems to me there are two perceptions that lie behind this resentment:

1. the perception that members of this elite see ordinary working people as a bunch of knuckle-dragging cavemen, and
2. the perception that these elites constitute an increasingly closed, caste-like group; one which the children of the white working class would actually have more difficulty breaking into than the class of Enron executives

It seems to me that both these perceptions are, largely, true. Let me take each in turn:

1. The first thing to be said about this perception is that it is largely true. Members of what passes for an intellectual elite in America do see their fellow citizens as idiots.

It is a peculiar feature of American democracy that we have never had much in the way of an intellectual class. America has never really produced figures like Camus, Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell or even George Bernard Shaw: that is, genuine thinkers whose works are widely read and argued about by ordinary, literate citizens. The equivalent role tends to be filled, instead, by journalists. Mark Twain and H. L. Mencken are probably the archetypal figures in this respect: men of modest origins who rose through the world of newspapers and popular magazines, and who throughout their lives continued to earn their livelihoods, essentially, in the entertainment industry. Not surprising, then, that both tended to see the public as an irrational herd, or bunch of gullible simpletons. Journalists always tend to think that way. It has certainly been my own experience: it is hard to talk about politics with a professional journalist—even, often, relatively "progressive" journalists—without hearing some cynical tirade about the ignorance or stupidity of the American public.

It might seem surprising to see such attitudes reproduced—as in the quotes above—just as much among folksy populists like Twain as unapologetic snobs like Mencken, but actually, it is a strange paradox of the American spirit that elitism itself

can be a populist attitude. We have always seen ourselves as a country of hucksters and salesmen; market democracy means that everyone is free to at least try to bilk, scam and rip each other off. It doesn't cause resentment as long as people feel that anyone can play the game: that one can rise from obscurity. It's when that is no longer the case that the sneering attitude becomes genuinely insufferable. When leads us to observation #2:

2. Consider, here, the current condition of Hollywood. Hollywood used to represent for many the quintessence of the American dream: a simple farm girl goes to the big city, is discovered, becomes a big star. For present purposes, it doesn't really matter how often this actually happened (it clearly did now and then); the point is in the '40s, say, people largely saw the fable as not entirely implausible. Look at the lead actors of a major motion picture nowadays and you are likely to find not a single name that can't boast a genealogy with at least two generations of Hollywood actors, writers, producers and directors. The film industry is dominated by an in-marrying caste. Is it surprising, then, that Hollywood celebrities' pretensions to populist politics tends to ring a bit hollow in the ears of most working class Americans? In all this, Hollywood is not an exception. It's emblematic. Almost the same thing is happening with lawyers, professors, even journalists.

Bush voters, I would suggest, tend to resent intellectuals as a class more than rich people, largely because they can imagine a scenario in which they might become rich, but cannot possibly imagine one in which they or any of their children would become a member of the liberal intelligentsia. If you think about it that's not an unreasonable assessment. A truck driver's son from Wyoming might not have very much chance of becoming a millionaire, but it could happen. Certainly, it's much more likely than his ever becoming an international human rights lawyer, or drama critic for the New York Times. Such jobs go almost exclusively to children of privilege. Insofar as there are not quite enough children of privilege to go around—since elites almost never produce enough offspring to reproduce themselves demographically—the jobs are likely to go to the most remarkable children of immigrants. Executives with Bank of America, or Enron, when facing a similar demographic problem, are much more likely to recruit from poorer white folk like themselves. This is partly because of racism; partly, too, because corporations tend to encourage a broadly anti-intellectual climate themselves. It is well known at Yale, where I work, that executive recruiters tend to prefer to hire Yale's "B" students, since they are more likely to be people "they'll feel comfortable with."

Here we come on what's the most difficult and divisive aspect of this conflict: the racism, the homophobia, the fundamentalism. Obviously none of these things have been brought into being by current directions in educational policy; they have all been around for a long time. The question is why at this particular moment so many people are using as a basis for voting, even if it means voting against their own economic interests. Here I might ask a parallel question. Why does one not see a similar anti-intellectual politics among, say, African Americans, or in immigrant communities? I can't myself think of a single elected Black official who got into office by appealing to this sort of sentiment. To the contrary, over the last year, we have recently been seeing an outpouring of debate, from the African-American cultural and political leadership, about what to do with the problem of "black anti-intellectualism". When investigated, the phenomenon in question seems to come down to little more than the fact that black high-school students to mock those who study too hard as 'trying to be white'—in other words, that like any other American teenager, they tend to make fun of people they consider nerds. The very fact that in Black America this is considered a crisis is telling in itself, considering the complete absence of any parallel debate about white anti-intellectualism. Anyway, it's hard to think of a single African-American, or Asian or Latino politician who actually panders to anti-intellectualism in the manner of George W. Bush. Clearly, because these are populations who continue to see the higher education system as a plausible means of social advancement. Poor white folk, meanwhile, see a rapidly shrinking pie of public funds and innumerable barriers, and for the most part, their understandable reaction is to say that the sorts of knowledge and attainment higher education offers isn't all its cracked up to be anyway—that religious wisdom, or commercial savvy, patriotism or moral virtues are really worth a thousand times more. Religion in particular offers an explicit critique of dominant forms of knowledge: a radical challenge to assumptions about what's really important or valuable in life and what sort of people have to right to make judgments on such matters. If people vote against their obvious economic interests, then, it can only be because one cannot, really, separate the economic issues from social and cultural ones.

We are, in other words, in the domain of values. The Right would be the first to acknowledge this.

Family Values

In progressive circles in the United States left the big debate after the election was the relative importance of "bread and butter" issues, or what was called "the

culture wars". Did Kerry lose because he was not able to offer to spell out any plausible economic alternatives, or did Bush win because he successfully mobilized his base of conservative Christians around the issue of gay marriage? A case could be made either way. I however want to draw attention to the division. It is of course in the nature of capitalism that we assume there is something called "the economy", which operates by its own logic, and that it can be set against pretty much everything else. The American left works almost entirely within this framework, even if it generally suggests that the economy should not be run in quite such a cut-throat fashion.

Actually, any market system does something like this—capitalism just takes the logic the furthest. As soon as one marks off one domain of human activity where everyone is expected to behave in a rational, calculating fashion to try to get as much as possible for themselves, other areas of human activity come to be seen as the domain of irrational emotions and ideals, or uncalculating altruism. One becomes the mirror image of the other. It's important to emphasize that this is not inevitable. Anthropologists have documented any number of societies where this kind of distinction simply did not exist. As Marcel Mauss long since pointed out, in "gift economies" one can't really speak either of pure egoism or pure altruism; instead, for example, economic transactions often operate on a far more complex and often set of motivations, like, for instance, putting one's services permanently at the disposal of those who have provided one with a wife, or showering wealth on rivals to make them feel small. The interesting thing is that historically, markets, and world religions (with their doctrines of purely altruistic behavior) tend to crop up at exactly the same time. Even today, Christian missionaries working in parts of the world where gift economies still exist, or where market logic is little developed, see their work as a matter of both teaching "the natives" both rational economic behavior, work discipline and the arts of saving and investment at work, and selfless devotion to others when operating within the sphere of church affairs. In other words, they are trying to create both spheres at the same time, separate motives that are in fact entirely entangled in traditional life, give each a space and habitation of its own.

Right wing political strategies, it seems to me, follow an analogous logic. In the US, for example, the Republican Party, it's always said, is divided between the libertarians and fundamentalists. On the one hand, free-market fundamentalists of one sort or another, who believe that democracy itself is (or should be) a matter of consumer choice. On the other, the religious right: Christian fundamentalists suspicious of democracy of any sort but very much in favor of biblical injunctions and "family values". In many ways their positions are quite contradictory (one need only

think about the issue of abortion). Still, there is a sense in which they are clearly complementary, since this same division has recurred in one form or another, in right-wing alliance, for generations—even centuries. Essentially, one might say that the conservative approach has been to release the dogs of the market on the one hand, throwing everyone’s world into a tumult of insecurity and all traditional verities into disarray; and then, with the other, to offer themselves up as the last bastion of order and authority, the stalwart defenders of the authority of churches and fathers against the barbarians one has oneself unleashed. One result is that—as liberal pundits periodically complain—the right seems to have a monopoly on value. They wish, in other words, to occupy both positions, on either side of the market: extreme egoism and extreme altruism.

Still, there are other ways to parse this division, that I think might tell us a little more. Note how the split also corresponds to the division between “value” and “values”. In a capitalist system, “the economy” refers mainly to those domains in which labor is commoditized. The domain of self-interest, therefore, operates under the ‘law of value’. Value in this sense is also a quantifiable abstraction. One might have more or one might have less of it, but otherwise it is exactly the same. This is of course because value in this sense comes into being through, and is realized in the form of, money—the ultimate abstract and quantifiable medium. The fact that one unit of money is exactly the same as any other means that one unit of work can be seen as the same as any other. As soon as one leaves the area where labor is bought and sold, however, one immediately enters into the realm of “values”: especially “family values” (since far the most common form of unpaid labor in most industrial societies is child-rearing and housework), but also, but also religious values, political ideals, the values that attach themselves to art or patriotism, or for that matter loyalty to a football team. All are seen as principles that ought to be uncorrupted by the market, but at the same time, as unique and profoundly different from one another. Beauty, devotion, integrity—these things are inherently incommensurable. In other words, where there is no abstract medium to reduce value to a uniform, fluid form, one is left with concrete, particular crystallizations.

In this light, I think one can return to those unpaid internships—the ones which so effectively freeze working class kids out of the best or most fulfilling jobs—and understand a little better what’s really going on. Earlier, I said these policies lock the vast majority of Americans out from jobs one would want for “any reason other than the money.” We can perhaps rephrase this now. What we are really talking about are jobs that open the way to the (legitimate, professional) pursuit of any forms of value

other than the economic. Whether it's the art world, or charity, or political engagement (as in, say, journalism, or activism) we are speaking of ways that one can dedicate oneself to something other than the pursuit of money—and compensatory consumerism. If one does not possess a certain degree of wealth to start out with, or at the very least the right kind of social networks and cultural capital, one is simply not allowed to break into this world.

Critical social thinkers interested in understanding such structures of exclusion tend to use the theoretical terms developed by Pierre Bourdieu, and speak of different social fields (the economic, the political, the academic field, the art world...), and the way social actors deploy economic, social, and cultural capital to move within and between them. I think Bourdieu's theories are very useful here. At the same time, I think they have their limits. By reducing everything to forms of capital, Bourdieu ends up arguing that all fields are organized, at least tacitly, in the same way as the economic field: as an arena of struggle between a collection of maximizing individuals. The only thing that really sets the economic field apart is that there's no work of euphemization: in it, all the selfish motives and maximizing strategies that are covered up in other fields become utterly explicit. But all fields are not fields of competition. Some areas valued precisely because they are not. Neither can this simply be reduced to the fact that—as Bourdieu sometimes rather cynically suggests—those best able to play such games are those who manage to convince themselves they are actually sincere. To the contrary, what we are seeing here, in many cases, is a battle over access to the right to behave altruistically. Selflessness is not the strategy, it's the prize. (Catherine Lutz for example, who has been studying US overseas bases, makes the fascinating observation that all US bases have projects where soldiers provide free medical services for local people. This usually has almost no effect, she says, on local opinion about the US presence; instead, it's done almost entirely for the sake of the soldiers, who invariably tell her that providing this sort of service is what their job is really all about. Without allowing them to behave altruistically, there apparently would be no way to convince them to re-enlist.

In value terms, the question becomes: who has the right to translate their money into what sorts of meaning? Who controls the medium through which, and the institutions through which, our actions become meaningful to ourselves, by the very act of being publicly recognized in some kind of public arena? It seems to me that while if one is trying to understand the strategies by which people can move back and forth between "fields", and especially, by which some are excluded from them,

Bourdieu's models are pretty much indispensable, they do little to tell us why anyone wishes to enter certain fields to begin with.

The latter is the promise of value theory: to understand that the ultimate stakes of politics are the ability to define what's important in life to begin with. "The economy", after all, is ultimately a gigantic system of means and not of ends. Neoclassical economics has in fact only been able to make a successful claim to being a science since it has effectively vanished the analysis of ends—of values, of why people want the things they do—entirely from its purview. It can thus reduce human life to a series of strategies by which rational actors try to accumulate different forms of value: while exiling the study of value itself to other, inferior, disciplines: psychology, sociology, anthropology, and so on. (What this comes down to in practice is an insistence on treating all human behavior with total cynicism, and then treating the ability to do so as a value in itself. Hence, students learning rational choice analysis are endlessly told that one should not look at, say, idealists who sacrifice themselves for a cause as acting selflessly, but rather, as maximizing the feelings of self-satisfaction they get out of the knowledge that they are sacrificing themselves; while the obvious question—"why is it that anyone can get such feelings of self-satisfaction out of self-sacrifice in the first place?"—is treated as irrelevant.) The moment we refuse to sever these things, however, we realize that what on a personal level is a battle for access to the right to behave altruistically becomes, on a political level, a battle over control of the apparatus for the creation of people.

The Production of Human Beings and Social Relations

Let's arrange the pieces in a slightly different way, again. The formal distinction between "the economy" and domestic sphere is also represented, in political-economy terms, as the domain of production, and that of consumption. Obviously, this is only true if one thinks what is really significant in the world is the history of manufactured objects, but this has become, over the last two hundred years, the favored way of looking at societies. We are, in other words, in that strange fetishized world Marx described where we continually forget that the point of life is actually the creation of certain sorts of people, and that the same system—even if we look at it in the starkest, Dickensian terms mainly as an opposition of factories (and shops and offices) and private households (and schools and poorhouses)—can be seen as consisting of a sphere for the making of human beings, that are then in effect consumed again in the workplace. One can hardly underestimate how deep this fetishism runs. In Africa and Asia, for example, it's perfectly unexceptional to hear government officials remarking

that HIV infection rates are a serious crisis in their country, because the fact that in certain regions half the population is dying of AIDS is going to have devastating consequences for the economy. Not long ago, “the economy” was recognized mainly as the means by which people are provided with their material needs so that they stay alive. Now the best reason to object to their all dying is that it might interfere with economic growth rates. The thing to ask, it seems to me, is what it takes to put us in a place where public officials can make statements like this without being immediately put away as psychotics. Ultimately life is about the production of people—and not just in the physical sense of “reproduction”, especially if that’s reduced to pregnancy and childbirth (though, of course, pregnancy and childbirth often end up becoming concrete symbols for the process as a whole)—but in the sense that human beings are constantly shaping and fashioning one another, training and socializing one another for new roles, educating and healing and befriending and rivaling and courting one another. This is what life is actually about, and it can never, by definition, be reduced to a simple utilitarian calculus. In most human societies, the forms of labor entailed in all this are recognized to be the most important ones. The production of material necessities, or material wealth, is usually seen as at best a subordinate moment in the overall process of creating the right sort of human beings. Hence the most important value forms in most societies are those that emerge from the process. Certainly, this might involve all sorts of fetishism in their own right, as tokens of honor not only inspire, but come to seem the source of, honorable behavior; tokens of piety inspire religious devotion; tokens of wisdom inspire learning, and so on. But it seems to me these forms of fetishism are relatively minor—at least, in comparison with the kind of grandiose, ultimate fetishism of capitalism, which places the world of objects as a whole above that of human beings and social relations.

In America, though, if one looks at the matter institutionally, one begins to notice something very interesting. America is by no means a deindustrialized society, but factory labor has increasingly been relegated to immigrants and pushed away from the centers of major cities. At the same time, as Michael Denning has pointed out, any number of such cities are in the process of being reorganized, economically, around hospitals and universities. This is not only true of longstanding university towns like Ann Arbor or New Haven but major cities like Baltimore. In other words, as commodity production increasingly moves overseas, we are seeing communities organized around what are, effectively, factories for the production of persons: divided, in good Cartesian fashion, into those which aim at mind, and those which aim at the body.

Both hospitals and universities were, once, institutions largely insulated from market logic. Now both are increasingly being forced to reorganize themselves on corporate lines. Both are sites of intense social struggle. For the Left, they have become the major new centers for labor organizing in recent decades. For the populist Right, they have been the special targets of rage and resentment. Right wing populists see universities (accurately enough) as the very locus for the production of the “liberal elite”, and tend to wage specific campaigns—most obviously, the campaign against the theory of evolution—to undermine the basis of their claims to having any special purchase on Truth. Radical anti-abortionists see the medical establishment, in turn, as the very locus of evil—an engine not of the creation of health but for the mass murder of babies. In a broader sense, what the right is waging is a broad assault on the ability of the liberal elite—from which their constituents have been so effectively excluded—to control what in classic Marxist terms would be called the terms of social reproduction. Bush won, many point out, largely because the Republican Party was so effective in mobilizing his base; it did so by ensuring that so many swing states had referendums on the ballot concerning a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. The gay marriage issue is a perfect illustration of the real stakes. Ultimately, the battle is over the apparatus for the creation of persons, and the forms of value created in the process. Even beyond the question of whether universities and hospitals are to be forced to submit to the profit motive—that is, whether they themselves will be forced to abandon any notion that they represent autonomous domains of value—there is the question of whether they can maintain their role as the primary institutions regulating the self-creation of human beings, or whether they are ultimately to be replaced by churches (already slowly taking over welfare functions abandoned by government in poor communities across America) prisons, and the military. The battle is lopsided in many ways. Left populists stand little chance of radically changing the nature of US nationalism; right populists stand little chance of having any say in determining what is art—though in either case not for lack of trying. (This is why both sides detest institutions like the New York Times as the bastion of the other.) The point is that the economic structures and strategies are not an autonomous domain here, but are part and parcel of the way each side protects its ability to control the legitimation of different forms of publicly recognized value.

If the Left is going to launch a realistic offensive in the United States, it can only happen, it seems to me, if we start taking this notion of self-creation seriously, and understand that no one is going to look at members of caste-like, self-reproducing elites that try to monopolize the power to determine what’s important in human life,

and accept them as genuine agents of human liberation. Ultimately, a free society can only be one in which everyone has an equal power to determine for themselves what they believe to be important. The only legitimate economic question, it seems to me, is what sort of system for the distribution of material goods will best put people in a position to do so.

Value As The Importance of Actions

What if one did try to create a theory of value starting from the assumption that what is ultimately being evaluated are not things, but actions? What might a broader social theory that starts from this assumption look like? In this chapter, I'd like to explore this possibility in greater detail.

I ended the last chapter with the work of Nancy Munn, one of the few anthropologists who has taken this direction. Munn is not quite the only one. Another is Terence Turner, who has developed some of the same ideas, not so much in the phenomenological tradition, but with an eye to adopting Marx's labor theory of value for anthropological use. Turner's work, however, has found even less broad an audience. There are many reasons for this. Many of his most important essays (1980a, 1984, 1987, 1988) remain unpublished; others are either scattered in obscure venues (1979c, 1985a. . .) or written in a language so highly technical it is often very difficult for the non-adept to make head or tail of them (consider, for example, 1979a:171, or 1985b:52). Hence, while there are a handful of anthropologist have been strongly influenced by his ideas (Jane Fajans, Fred Myers, Stephen Sangren. . .), the vast majority has never even been exposed to them. Before outlining Turner's approach, though (or anyway my own idiosyncratic version of it) some groundwork is probably in order.

the underside of the Western tradition

At the end of the last chapter I suggested that one reason Nancy Munn's work has been so little taken up is that theories that start from action fall so far outside the main currents of the Western intellectual tradition that it's hard for most scholars to figure out exactly what to do with them. They belong, one might say, to the Heraclitean tradition, which in Western thought has always been somewhat marginal. Western philosophy, after all, really begins with the quarrel between Heraclitus and Parmenides; a quarrel that Parmenides won. As a result, from almost the very start, the Western tradition marked itself by imagining objects that exist, as it were, outside of time and transformation. So much so that the obvious reality of change has always been something of a problem.

It might be useful to review that quarrel, however quickly.

Heraclitus saw the apparent fixity of objects of ordinary perception as largely an illusion; their ultimate reality was one of constant flux and transformation. What we assume to be objects are actually patterns of change. A river (this is his most famous example) is not simply a body of water; in fact, if one steps in the same river twice, the water flowing through it is likely to be entirely different. What endures over time is simply the pattern of its flow.¹ Parmenides on the other hand took precisely the opposite view: he held that it was change that was illusion. For objects to be comprehensible, they must exist to some degree outside of time and change. There is a level of reality, perhaps one that we humans can never fully perceive, at which forms are fixed and perfect. From Parmenides, of course, one can trace a direct line both to Pythagoras (and thus to Western math and science) and to Plato (with his ideal forms), and hence to just about any subsequent school of Western philosophy.

Parmenides' position was obviously absurd; and indeed, science has since shown that Heraclitus was more right than he could possibly have known. The elements that make up solid objects are, in fact, in constant motion.² But a fairly strong case can be made that had Western philosophy not rejected his position for Parmenides' false one, we would never have been able to discover this. The problem with his dynamic approach is that while obviously true it makes it impossible to draw precise borders and thus to make precise measurements. If objects are really processes, we no longer know their true dimensions—at least, if they still exist—because we don't know how long they will last. If objects are in constant flux, even precise spatial measures are impossible. One can take an object's measure at a particular moment and then treat that as representative, but even this is something of an imaginary construct, because

even such “moments” (in the sense of points in time, of no duration, infinitely small) do not exist—they, too, are imaginary constructs. It has been precisely such imaginary constructs (“models”) that have made modern science possible. As Paul Ricoeur has noted:

It is striking that Plato contributed to the construction of Euclidian geometry through his work of denominating such concepts as line, surface, equality, and the similarity of figures, etc., which strictly forbade all recourse and all allusion to manipulations, to physical transformation of figures. This asceticism of mathematical language, to which we owe, in the last analysis, all our machines since the dawn of the mechanical age, would have been impossible without the logical heroism of Parmenides denying the entirety of the world of becoming and of *praxis* in the name of the self-identity of significations. It is to this denial of movement and work that we owe the achievements of Euclid, of Galileo, modern mechanism, and all our devices and apparatus (Ricoeur 1970:201-202; also in Sahlins 1976:81-82n.21)

There is obviously something very ironic about all this. What Ricoeur is suggesting is that we have been able to create a technology capable of giving us hitherto unimaginable power to transform the world, largely because we were first able to imagine a world without powers or transformations. It may well be true. The crucial thing, though, is that in doing so, we have also lost something. Because once one is accustomed to a basic apparatus for looking at the world that starts from an imaginary, static, Parmenidean world outside of it, connecting the two becomes an overwhelming problem. One might well say that the last couple thousand years of Western philosophy and social thought have been an endless series of ever more complicated attempts to deal with the consequences. Always you get same the assumption of fixed forms and the same failure to know where you actually find them. As a result, knowledge itself has become the great problem. Roy Bhaskar has been arguing for some years now that since Parmenides, Western philosophy has been suffering from what he calls an “epistemic fallacy”: a tendency to confuse the question of how we can know things with the question of whether those things exist.³

At its most extreme, this tendency opens into Positivism: the assumption that given sufficient time and sufficiently accurate instruments, it should be possible to make models and reality correspond entirely. According to its most extreme avatars, one should not only be able to produce a complete description of any object in the physical world, but—given the predictable nature of physical “laws”—be able to predict precisely what would happen to it under equally precisely understood conditions. Since

no one has ever been able to do anything of the sort, the position has a tendency to generate its opposite: a kind of aggressive nihilism (nowadays most often identified with various species of post-structuralism) which at its most extreme argues that since one cannot come up with such perfect descriptions, it is impossible to talk about “reality” at all.

All this is a fine illustration of why most of us ordinary mortals find philosophical debates so pointless. The logic is in direct contradiction with that of ordinary life experience. Most of us are accustomed to describe things as “realities” precisely because we *can't* completely understand them, can't completely control them, don't know exactly how they are going to affect us, but nonetheless can't just wish them away. It's what we don't know about them that brings home the fact that they are real.

As I say, an alternative, Heraclitean strain has always existed—one that sees objects as processes, as defined by their potentials, and society as constituted primarily by actions. Its best-known manifestation is no doubt the dialectical tradition of Hegel and Marx. But whatever form it takes, it has always been almost impossible to integrate with more conventional philosophy. It has tended to be seen as existing somewhat off to the side, as odd or somewhat mystical. Certainly, it has seemed that way in comparison with what seemed like the hard-headed realism of more positivist approaches—rather ironically, considering that if one manages to get past the often convoluted language, one usually finds perspectives a lot more in tune with common-sense perceptions of reality.⁴

Roy Bhaskar and those who have since taken up some version of his “critical realist” approach (Bhaskar 1979, 1986, 1989, 1991, 1994a, 1994b; Collier 1990, 1994; Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson and Norrie 1998) have been trying for some years now to develop a more reasonable ontology. The resulting arguments are notoriously difficult, but it might help to set out some of his conclusions, in shamelessly abbreviated form, before continuing:

1. **Realism.** Bhaskar argues for a “transcendental realism”: that is, rather than limiting reality to what can be observed by the senses, one must ask instead “what would have to be the case” in order to explain what we do experience. In particular, he seeks to explain “why are scientific experiments possible?,” and also, at the same time “why are scientific experiments necessary?”
2. **Potentiality.** His conclusion: while our experiences are of events in the real world, reality is not limited to what we can experience (“the empirical”), or even, to the sum total of events that can be said to have taken place (“the actual”). Rather,

Bhaskar proposes a third level (“the real”). To understand it, one must also take account of “powers”— that is, one that defines things in part in terms of their potentials or capacities. Science largely proceeds by hypothesizing what “mechanisms” must exist in order to explain such powers, and then by looking for them. The search is probably endless, because there are always deeper and more fundamental levels (i.e., from atoms to electrons, electrons to quarks, and so on. . .), but the fact that there’s no end to the pursuit does not mean reality doesn’t exist; rather, it simply means one will never be able to understand it completely.

3. **Freedom.** Reality can be divided into emergent stratum: just as chemistry presupposes but cannot be entirely reduced to physics, so biology presupposes but cannot be reduced to chemistry, or the human sciences to biology. Different sorts of mechanisms are operating on each. Each, furthermore, achieves a certain autonomy from those below; it would be impossible even to talk about human freedom were this not the case, since our actions would simply be determined by chemical or biological processes.
4. **Open Systems.** Another element of indeterminacy comes from the fact that real-world events occur in “open systems”; that is, there are always different sorts of mechanisms, derived from different emergent strata of reality, at play in any one of them. As a result, one can never predict precisely how any real-world event will turn out. This is why scientific experiments are necessary: experiment are ways of creating temporary “closed systems” in which the effects of all other mechanisms are, as far as possible, nullified, so that one can actually examine a single mechanism in action.
5. **Tendencies.** As a result, it is better not to refer to unbreakable scientific “laws” but rather of “tendencies,” which interact in unpredictable ways. Of course, the higher the emergent strata one is dealing with, the less predictable things become, the involvement of human beings of course being the most unpredictable factor of all.⁵

For our purposes, the details are not as important as the overall thrust: that the Heraclitean position, which looks at things in terms of their dynamic potentials, is not a matter of abandoning science but is, rather, the only hope of giving science a solid ontological basis. But it also means that in order to do so, those who wish to make claims to science will have to abandon some of their most ambitious—one is tempted to say, totalitarian, paranoid—dreams of absolute or total knowledge, and accept a certain degree of humility about what it is possible to know. Reality is what one can never know completely. If an object is real, any description we make of it will

necessarily be partial and incomplete. That is, indeed, how we can tell it is real. The only things we can hope to know perfectly are ones that exist entirely in our imaginations.

What is true of natural science is all the more true of social science. While Bhaskar has acquired a reputation mainly as a philosopher of science, his ultimate interest is social; he is trying to come up with the philosophical ground for a theory of human emancipation, a way of squaring scientific knowledge with the idea of human freedom. Here, too, the ultimate message is one of humility: Critical Realists hold that it *is* possible to preserve the notion of a social reality and, therefore, of a science able to make true statements about it—but only if one abandons the sort of positivist number-crunching that passes for science among most current sociologists or economists, and gives up on the idea that social science will ever be able to establish predictive laws.

A last word on the Heracleitian perspective before passing on to Marx. This concerns the notion of materialism. In the Marxist tradition as elsewhere, the assumption has usually been that a materialist analysis is one that privileges certain spheres over others. There are material infrastructures and ideological superstructures; the production of food, shelter, or machine tools is considered more fundamentally material than the production of sermons or soap operas or zoning laws. This is either because they answer more fundamental, or immediate, human needs; or else, because (as with law, religion, art, even the state) they are concerned with the production of abstractions. But it has always seemed to me that to treat law, or religion, as “about” abstractions is to define them very much as they define themselves. If one were to insist on seeing all such spheres primarily as domains of human action, it quickly becomes obvious that just as much as the production of food requires thinking, art and literature are really a set of material processes. Literature, from this kind of materialist perspective, would no longer be so much about “texts” (usually thought of as abstractions that can then seem to float apart from time or space) but about the writing and reading of them. This is obviously in every way material: actual, flesh-and-blood people have to write them, they have to have the leisure and resources, they need pens or typewriters or computers, there are practical constraints of every sort entailed in the circulation of literature, and so on.

This might seem a weak, compromised version of “materialism,” but if applied consistently, it would really be quite radical. Something of the power of the approach might be judged by how much it tends to annoy people. Most scholars consider acknowledgment of the material medium of their production as somehow impertinent. Even a discipline like anthropology tends to present itself as floating over material

realities, except, perhaps, when describing the immediate experience of fieldwork; certainly it would be considered rude to point out, while discussing the merits of an anthropological monograph, that it was written by an author who was well aware that almost everyone who would eventually be reading it would be doing so not because they chose to but because some professor forced them to, or even, that financial constraints in the academic publishing industry ensured that it could not exceed 300 pages. But obviously all this is relevant to the kind of books we write. At any rate, this is the sort of materialism I'll be adopting in this book: one that sees society as arising from creative action, but creative action as something that can never be separated from its concrete, material medium.

Marx's theory of value

The first thing one should probably say about Marx's labor theory of value is that it's not the same as David Ricardo's. People often confuse them. Ricardo argued that the value of a commodity in a market system can be calculated in terms of the "man-hours" that went into making it, and therefore it should be theoretically possible to calculate precisely how many people worked how long in the process of making it (and, presumably, making the raw materials, shipping them from place to place, and so on.) In fact, Marx felt Ricardo's approach was inadequate. What makes capitalism unique, he argued, is that it is the only system in which labor—a human being's capacity to transform the world, their powers of physical and mental creativity—can itself be bought and sold. After all, when an employer hires workers, he does not usually pay them by the task completed: he pays them by the hour, thus purchasing their ability to do whatever he tells them to do during that period of time.⁶ Hence, in a wage-labor economy, in which most people have to sell their capacity to work in this way, one can make calculations that would be impossible in a non-capitalist society: that is, one look at the amount of labor invested in a given object as a specific *proportion* of the total amount of labor in the system as a whole. This is its value.⁷

The concept makes much better sense if one bears in mind that Marx's theory of value was not meant to be a theory of prices. Marx was not particularly interested in coming up with a model that would predict price fluctuations, understand pricing mechanisms, and so on. Almost all other economists have been, since they are ultimately trying to write something that would be of use to those operating within a market system. Marx was writing something that would be of use for those trying to overthrow such a system. Therefore, he by no means assumed that price paid for something was an accurate reflection of its worth. It might be better, then, to think of

the word “value” as meaning something more like “importance.” Imagine a pie chart, representing the U.S. economy. If one were to determine that the U.S. economy devotes, say, 19 percent of its GDP to health care, 16 percent to the auto industry, 7 percent to TV and Hollywood, and .2 percent to the fine arts, one can say this is a measure of how important these areas are to us as a society. Marx is proposing we simply substitute labor as a better measure: if Americans spend 7 percent of their creative energies in a given year producing automobiles, this is the ultimate measure of how important it is to us to have cars. One can then extend the argument: if Americans have spent, say, .00000000007 percent or some similarly infinitesimal proportion of their creative energies in a given year on *this* car, then that represents its value. This is basically Marx’s argument, except that he was speaking of a total market system, which would by now go beyond any particular national economy to include the world.

As a first approximation then, one might say that the value a given product—or, for that matter, institution—has is the proportion of a society’s creative energy it sinks into producing and maintaining it. If an objective measure is possible, it would have to be something like this. But obviously this can never be a *precise* measure. “Creative energies,” however they’re defined, are not the sort of thing that can be quantified.⁸ The only reason Marx felt one could make such calculations—however approximate—within a capitalist system was because of the existence of a market in labor. For labor—in effect, human capacities for action, since what you are selling to your boss is your ability to work—to be bought and sold, there had to be a system for calculating its price. This in turn meant an elaborate cultural apparatus involving such things as time cards, clock-punching, and weekly or biweekly paychecks, not to mention recognized standards about the pace and intensity of labor expected of any particular task (people are rarely, even in the most exploitative conditions, expected to work to the absolute limits of their physical and mental capacities), which enables Marx to refer to “socially necessary labor time”. There are cultural standards, then, by which labor can be reduced to units of time, which can then be counted, added, and compared to one another. It is important to stress the apparatus through which this is done is at the same time material and symbolic: there have to be real, physical clocks to punch, but also, symbolic media of representation, such as money and hours.

Of course, even where most people are wage laborers, it’s not as if all creativity is on the market. Even in our own market-ridden society there are all sorts of domains—ranging from housework to hobbies, political action, personal projects of any sort—where is no such homogenizing apparatus. But it is probably no coincidence that it’s

precisely here where one hears about “values” in the plural sense: family values, religious virtues, the aesthetic values of art, and so on. Where there is no single system of value, one is left with a whole series of heterogeneous, disparate ones.

What, then, does one do where there is no market in labor at all, or none that is especially important? Does the same thing happen? That is, is it possible to apply anything like Marx’s value analysis to the vast majority of human societies—or to any one that existed prior to the eighteenth century? For anthropologists (or for that matter, those who would like to think about an alternative to capitalism) this is obviously one of the most important questions.

the “praxiological approach”

It would have been easier if Marx had given us more of a clue in his own writings. The closest Marx himself ever came to writing general social theory was in some of his earliest theoretical writings: his *Theses on Feuerbach, 1844 Manuscripts*, and especially *The German Ideology*, co-written with Engels between 1845 and 1846. This was the period when Marx was living in Paris and making a broad accounting with the radical philosophical circles in which he’d spent his intellectual youth in Germany. In doing so, these works map out a synthesis of two very different intellectual traditions: the German idealism of the Hegelian school, and the materialism of the French Enlightenment. The advantage of Hegel’s dialectical approach to history, Marx felt, was that it was inherently dynamic; rather than starting from some fixed notion of what a human being, or the physical world, is like, it was the story of how humanity effectively created itself through interacting with the world around it. It was, in effect, an attempt to see what the history would look like if one assumed from the start that Heraclitus had been right. Not only was it about action: ultimately, what Hegel’s philosophy was about was the history of how humanity becomes fully self-conscious through its own actions; it was its final achievement of true self-understanding (which Hegel, modestly, believed to have been achieved in himself) which laid open the possibility of human freedom. The problem was that neither the conservative Hegel nor the radical Young Hegelians (who argued the process had not been completed, and more drastic measures, such as an attack on religion, were required) started from real, flesh-and-blood human beings. Instead, their active subjects were always abstractions like “Mind,” “Reason,” “Spirit,” “Humanity,” or “the Nation”. Marx proposed a materialist alternative. But neither was Marx especially happy with the materialism of his day, which was mainly a product of French Enlightenment philosophers like Helvetius. The problem with “all previous materialism,” he noted in

his *Theses on Feuerbach*, is that it did not see human beings as driven by self-conscious projects at all. It saw them as virtually passive: driven by a fixed set of basic, physical needs, simply “adapting” to their environment in such a way as to best satisfy them. What he proposed, instead, was a synthesis: in which human beings are seen as active, intentional, imaginative creatures, but at the same time, physical ones that exist in the real world. That (as he put it elsewhere) “men” make their own histories, but not under conditions of their own choosing.

It’s certainly true that Marx’s work often seems to pull in several different directions at once. Take for example his famous description of the four “moments” in *The German Ideology* in which he and Engels set out the basic material realities that have to be taken into account before one can talk about humans to be able to “make history” (1846 [1970:48-51]). What separates humans from animals is that humans *produce* their means of livelihood. He also notes that human beings, in order to exist, not only (1) need to produce basic requirements, like food and shelter; but that (2) the act of producing in order to meet such needs will always create new needs; that (3) in order to continue to exist human beings need to produce other human beings, which entails procreation, child-rearing, the family. . . and that (4) since humans never produce any of these things in isolation, every society must also have relations of cooperation. It is only after this has been taken into account, Marx notes, that one can begin to talk about “consciousness,” which, he emphasizes, “here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language” (1846:50-51), which in turn arises from people’s needs to talk to each other rather than independently in the minds of individual human beings.

This certainly sounds like it’s moving towards the sort of division between material infrastructure and ideological superstructure laid out, most explicitly, in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). But this also moves away from Marx’s central inspiration: which is that consciousness is not the icing on the cake of production, but rather, fundamental to production itself. For Marx, what sets humans from animals was precisely that humans produce things in a *self-conscious* manner. What makes us human is not so much “reason” (at least in the modern, problem-solving sense) as imagination:

We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the

architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality.
(Capital I: 178)

Humans envision what they would like to have before they make it; as a result, we can also imagine alternatives. Human intelligence is thus inherently critical, which, in turn, is crucial to Marx's conception of history because this which for the possibility of revolution.

If one turns back to the original four moments with this in mind, however, one has the basis (with, perhaps, a tiny a bit of refinement and rearrangement) for a very powerful theory of action (Turner 1984:11; Fajans 1993:3). The result would look something like this. In any society, one might say, production entails:

1. An effort to fulfill perceived needs on the part of the producer (these, as Marx notes, must always include basic necessities like food and shelter, but are never limited to this.). It also includes the key insight that "objects" exist in two senses: not just as physical objects that actually exist in the world, but also, insofar as they are present in someone's (some subject's) consciousness, as objects of that subject's action in some sense or another—even if this is only in the minimal sense of active observation and study. (This is what he argued Feuerbach's materialism overlooked.)
2. Humans being social creatures, this also means producing a system of social relations (families, clans, guilds, secret societies, government ministries. . .) within which people coordinate their productive actions with one another. In part this also means that production also entails
3. producing the producer as a specific sort of person (seamstress, harem eunuch, movie star. . .). In cooperating with others, a person defines herself in a certain way—this can be referred to as the "reflexive" element in action. It also usually means being ascribed certain sorts of power or agency, or actually acquiring them.⁹
4. The process is always open-ended, producing new needs as a result of (1), (2) and (3) and thus bearing within it the potential for its own transformation.

So we start with a notion of intentional action, productive action aimed certain goal. This action produces social relations and in doing so transforms the producers themselves. Stated this way, the model seems straightforward enough. There's no element in it that's not pretty self-evident in itself. But to apply it consistently, one would have to rethink all sorts of accepted elements of social theory. Take for example the notion of "social structure". If one starts from this broad notion of production,

“social structures”—like any other sort of structure—are really just patterns of action. But they are very complicated patterns: they not only coordinate all sorts of intentional human action, they are also the means through which actors are continually redefining and even remaking themselves at the same time as they are reproducing (and also inevitably, changing) the larger context through which all this takes place. Even for an outside observer, it is not easy to keep track of all of this. There are certain points—for example, the precise boundaries between individual and collective creativity—that we can probably never fully understand. From inside the system, it is well nigh impossible.

In fact, individual actors tend to be aware of only the first of the four moments (the specific thing they are making or doing, the specific end they have in mind)¹⁰; it is much harder to keep track of the other three. One could well argue that all the great problems of social theory emerge from this single difficulty—whether it be Durkheim’s famous observation that even though “society” is just a collection of individuals, every one of those individuals sees it as an alien force constraining them, or Marx’s, about the way in which our own creations come to seem alien entities with power over us (cf. Taussig 1993).

Imagination, then, may be essential to the nature of productive action, but imagination also has its limits. Or, to put it another way, human action is self-conscious by nature, but it is never entirely so.

One might say there are two orders of critical theory. The first simply serves to demonstrate that our normal way of looking at the world—or of some phenomena within it—is flawed: incomplete or mistaken, and to explain how things really work. The second, more powerful not only explains how things actually work, but does so in such a way as to account for why people did not perceive it that way to begin with. Marxist approaches hold out the promise of doing precisely that.¹¹ But if one considers the overall thrust of Marx’s writings, from his earlier “philosophical” works to the theory of fetishism in *Capital*, one finds that what he produced was less a theory of false consciousness than a theory of *partial* consciousness:¹² one in which actors find it almost impossible to distinguish their own particular vantage on a situation from the overall structure of the situation itself. Before setting it out, though, I must make a brief detour on the problem of structure.

dynamic structures

Anthropological ideas of structure, of course, largely came out of Saussurean linguistics. I have already described Saussure’s conception of language as a system of

signs that exists in a state of equilibrium, each element contributing to the definition of the others. Applying this to anthropology created notorious dilemmas. Where, exactly, was this abstract system to be found? How was one to relate *langue* and *parole*, synchrony and diachrony, the abstract system, seen as existing outside of time, and the real events—people speaking, writing, and so on, none of them fully aware of the principles that guide their own practice, even though their practice is the only way we have of getting at those principles in the first place? By now it should be apparent that this is just another variation of the same Parmenidean problem: how does one relate the models to reality?

Anthropological wisdom to the contrary, however, Saussurean structuralism was never the only one around. There is a Heraclitean alternative: the structuralism developed by French psychologist Jean Piaget (see Piaget 1970; Turner 1973)—which starts from action, and views “structure” as the coordination of activity.¹³

Anthropologists, however, have rarely found much use for Piaget’s structuralism. When they mention it at all, it’s usually to dismiss it as lacking in cultural depth and sensitivity.¹⁴ Applied to Piaget’s own writings, this is certainly true. Saussure was interested in the different ways different languages define reality; Piaget, in the intellectual development of children. It’s not hard to see why anthropologists were drawn to one and not the other. But it also seems to me the accusation is somewhat self-fulfilling. After all, if Piagetian models lack cultural depth, it’s in part because anthropologists have never seen fit to develop them.

Piaget’s specific arguments about stages of child development are now considered outmoded; what’s important here, though, are not the particulars, but the overall approach. Above all his premise: that “it is always and everywhere the case that elementary forms of intelligence originate from action.”¹⁵ Children interact with their environment; they develop basic schemas of action (grabbing, pulling. . .), and ways of coordinating them. Next, children start to develop more complex and generalized modes of thought through a process Piaget calls “reflexive abstraction,” in which they begin to understand the logical principles immanent in their own interaction with the world, and these same schemes of coordination—which themselves, in turn, become more refined and more effective as a result. (This allows for further processes of reflexive abstraction, and so on.) There’s no need here to launch into details: but there are a few points that will be crucial to bear in mind. The first is that Piaget insists that the basis of any system of knowledge is always a set of practices: mathematics, for example, is not derived from the “idea of number” but from the practice of counting. The abstract categories, however important, never come first. The second, that a

structure can always be seen as a set of transformations, based on certain invariant principles (this can be as simple as a matter of moving pieces across a board, which stays the same): the defining feature of such transformations being that they are reversible (the pieces can be moved back again).

The crucial thing point is that what we call structure is not something that exists prior to action. Ultimately, “structure” is identical with the process of its own construction. Complex abstract systems are simply the way actors come to understand the logic of their own interactions with the world. It’s also crucial to bear in mind that the process of “reflexive abstraction” is open-ended. Piaget does not believe that development is simply a matter of achieving a certain level and then stopping; there are always new and more complex levels one could generate. Here Piaget invokes the German mathematician Kurt Gödel, who managed to show not only that no logical system (such as, say, mathematics) could demonstrate its own internal consistency; in order to do so, one has to generate a more sophisticated, higher level that presumes it. Since that level will no be able to demonstrate its own principles either, one then has to go on to generate another level after that, and so on ad infinitum.

Gödel showed that the construction of a demonstrably consistent... theory requires not simply an “analysis” of its “presuppositions,” but the construction of the next “higher” theory! Previously, it was possible to view theories as layers of a pyramid, each resting on the one below, the theory at ground level being the most secure because constituted by the simplest means, and the whole firmly poised on a self-sufficient base. Now, however, “simplicity” becomes a sign of weakness and the “fastening” of any story in the edifice of human knowledge calls for the construction of the next higher story. To revert our earlier image, the pyramid of knowledge no longer rests on foundations but hangs on its vertex, and ideal point never reached, and, more curious, constantly rising! (Piaget 1970:34)

Just as with Bhaskar’s conception of scientific inquiry, perfectly content to discover ever more basic levels of reality without ever hitting bedrock, we are dealing with an open-ended system. One can always construct a more sophisticated point of view.

This might seem all very abstract, but it suggests new ways to look at any number of long-standing problems in anthropology. Take, for example, Pierre Bourdieu’s work on habitus (1979, etc.). Bourdieu has long drawn attention to the fact—always a matter of frustration to anthropologists—that a truly artful social actor is almost guaranteed not to be able to offer a clear explanation of the principles underlying her own artistry. According to the Gödelian/Piagetian perspective, it’s easy to see why this

should be. The logical level on which one is operating is always at least one level higher than that which one can explain or understand—what the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978:79-91) referred to as the “proximal level” of development.¹⁶ In fact, one could argue this must necessarily be the case, since (explanation itself being a form of action) in order to explain or understand one’s actions fully, one has to generate a more sophisticated (“stronger,” more encompassing) level of operations, whose principles, in turn, one would not be fully able to explain; and in order to explain that one, yet another; and so on without end.

Or consider, again, the phenomenon of rites of passage, a classic issue in anthropology since Arnold Van Gennep’s essay of 1909. Van Gennep argued that all such rituals, across the world, always contain at least three stages. They begin with rites of separation, in which, say, a boy undergoing initiation is separated from his old identity, as a child, and end with rites of reintegration, in which he is reintegrated into the social order in his new identity, as a man. The liminal stage is the one that falls in between, when the boy is as it were suspended between identities, not quite one thing, not quite another. As Victor Turner noted (1967), this stage has a tendency to take on some very strange, “anti-structural” qualities: those who pass through it are at once sacred and polluting, creative and destructive, divine and monstrous, and ultimately beyond anything that can be explained by the order of normal life. But as Terence Turner has observed (1977; see 1993:22-26): according to the Piagetian approach, this is, again, much as should be. Because here too there is a difference of logical levels. To maintain a system of classification—i.e., one that divides males into children, adolescents, adults, and so on—requires a certain level of logical operations; it is, like any set of categories, the “other side” of a set of activities. To operate on the level where you can transform one category into the other implies entering into a higher, encompassing level; or, to put it another way, with powers of a fundamentally different nature than those which operate in ordinary life, in which people “are” one thing or another.¹⁷ Here too, the highest level of operations is one that cannot be represented or fully accounted for—at least in social terms. Representing such powers becomes a problem. Everyday categories do not apply. Hence, the tendency to resort to mystery, paradox, unknowability, or systematic inversions of normal ways of doing things—a “world turned upside down”.

It’s easy to see how this perspective might have all sorts of important implications. Most Durkheimian ritual analyses turn, in one way or another, on the concept of “the sacred,” usually seen a point of transformation or metamorphosis that stands apart from profane existence, and that, for a Durkheimian, is the point where the individual

comes into contact with the power of society itself—society being for Durkheim an emergent reality of its own, standing beyond and constraining the individual. As I have already remarked, the notion ultimately has much in common with Marx’s conception of alienation (which after all, also set off from a study of religion), the most dramatic difference between the two being one of attitude: unlike Marx, Durkheim didn’t see anything particularly wrong with the fact that society seemed to impose itself on individuals as an alien force, any more than he had any problem with the existence of social hierarchies. Marx, who objected to both, saw them as two sides of the same coin. To understand fully the parallels between Marx and Piaget, however, one must look a little more closely at Piaget’s notion of egocentrism.

egocentrism and partial consciousness

One of Piaget’s more remarkable achievements was to take a fact that almost anyone knows—that children tend to see themselves as the center of the universe—and make it the basis for a systematic theory of intellectual and moral development. Egocentrism, according to Piaget, is a matter of assuming one’s own, subjective perspective on the world is identical with the nature of the world itself. Development, in turn, becomes a matter of internalizing the fact that other ones are possible; or, to put it a bit more technically, creating structures which are really the coordination of different possible perspectives. Very young children, for example, do not understand that objects continue to exist when they are no longer looking at them. If a ball rolls out of sight, it is simply gone. To understand that it is still there is to understand first of all that there are other angles from which one might be looking at it, from which one would still be able to see it. In older children, egocentrism might mean anything from a child’s inability to imagine that others might not understand what she’s telling them, to the difficulty (which often endures surprisingly late in life) in realizing that if I have a brother named Robert, then Robert also has a brother, who is me.

Egocentrism, then, involves first and foremost an inability to see things from other points of view. Even if it’s a matter of understanding the continual existence of objects, one is aware of them through potential perspectives: when one looks at a car, or a duck, or a mountain, the fact that there are other sides to it (other perspectives from which one could be looking at it) becomes internalized into the very nature of what one is perceiving. It would simply not look the same otherwise. Hence, for Piaget, achieving maturity is a matter of “decentering” oneself: of being able to see one’s own interests or perspective as simply one part of a much larger totality not intrinsically more important than any other.

In matters social, however, one clearly cannot do this all the time. It is one thing bearing in mind, when one looks at a house, that it has more than one side to it; quite another to be continually aware of how a family must seem to every member of it, or how each member of a group of people working on some common project would see what was going on. In fact, human beings are notoriously incapable of doing so on a consistent basis. Here again, there appears to be a very concrete limit to the human imagination.

Of course, the more complex the social situation, the more difficult such imaginative feats become. Which brings us back to the original point derived from Marx: that it is almost impossible for someone engaged in a project of action, in shaping the world in some way, to understand fully how their actions simultaneously contribute to (a) re-creating the social system in which they are doing so (even if this is something so simple as a family or office), and thus (b) reflexively reshaping and redefining their own selves. In fact, according to Turner, it's really the same point: because in order to understand this fully, one would have to be able to coordinate the subjective points of view of everyone involved—to see how they all fit together (or, in the case of conflict, don't), and so on. . . . That aspect which falls outside our comprehension, even though it is a product of our own actions, tends to seem something which stands alien, apart from us, something that constrains and controls us rather than the other way around. In early works like *The German Ideology*, Marx emphasized the paradoxical nature of the division of labor in modern society: that while it created a genuine common interest on the level of society as it a whole, since people need one another in order to survive, it does so by confining everyone to such limited interests and perspectives within it that none were really able to perceive it. It was precisely the fact that people are confined to these partial perspectives that, Marx argued, gave rise to alienation: the “consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us,” the fact that our powers appear to us in strange, external forms (Ollman 1971). Commodity fetishism is really just another version of the same thing. It is the result, above all, of the fact that the market creates a vast rupture between the factories in which commodities are produced, and the private homes in which most are finally consumed. If a commodity—a futon, a video cassette, a box of talcum powder—fulfills a human need, it is because human beings have intentionally designed it in order to do so; they have taken raw materials and, by adding their strength and intelligence, shaped it to fulfill those needs. The object, then, embodies human intentions. This is why consumers want to buy it. But because of the peculiar, anonymous nature of a market system, that whole history becomes invisible

from the consumer's point of view. From her perspective, then, it looks as if the value of the object—embodied in its ability to satisfy her wants—is an aspect of the product itself. All those intentions seem to be absorbed into the physical form of the object itself, this being all that she can see. In other words, she too is confusing her own (partial, subjective) perspective with the (total, objective) nature of the situation itself, and as a result, seeing objects as having human powers and properties. This is precisely the sort of thing—the attribution of subjective qualities to objects—that Piaget argues is typical of childhood egocentrism as well (cf. Turner and Fajans 1988).

18

The same logic is reproduced on every level of commercial life, where everyone tends to speak of products and money as propelling themselves along, selling themselves, flooding markets or fleeing from adverse investment climates; because, from their own particular, partial, interested perspective, all this might as well be true.

Which allows me to make a final observation about some of the most common objections to a Piagetian approach.

Anthropologists tend to be extremely suspicious of any general theory that even holds out the potential of arguing that certain people are more sane, more intelligent, or more rational than others. They are very right to be suspicious. It does seem that the moment such models are given any intellectual legitimacy, they are immediately snatched up by racists and chauvinists of one kind or another and used to support the most obnoxious political positions. The Piagetian case was no exception: one team of researchers, for example, administered Piagetian tests to Arunda-speakers in Australia, as a result of which they concluded that Arunda adults had not achieved “operational levels” of intelligence (see Piaget 1970:117-19). The result was another attempt to revive the notion, largely abandoned since the days Levy-Bruhl, of “primitive mentality” on Piagetian grounds (e.g., Hallpike 1979). Of course, for the anthropologist, the idea of the Arunda being simple-minded is pretty startling: after all, these are the same people otherwise famous for maintaining one of the most complicated kinship systems known to anthropological science—including an eight-section prescriptive marriage system so intricate it took Western scholars decades to unravel it. To argue that such people are incapable of sophisticated thought seems obviously ridiculous: even if, like people everywhere, they are unlikely to fully grasp the principles underlying their own most sophisticated forms of action.

Even when things are not this blatantly ethnocentric, the normal model for a mature, fully evolved individual is usually pretty culturally specific. It's much the same

as the model “Westerner”. One is, at least implicitly, thinking of some fortyish white guy in a suit, perhaps a banker or a stockbroker. The advantage of a Marxist take on Piaget of course is that said banker or stockbroker is no longer the model of someone who gets it right but of someone who gets it wrong: as he flips through the business section reading how gold is doing this and pork bellies doing that, he is engaging in the very paradigm of adult egocentrism. An Arunda speaker, one suspects, would be much less likely to be quite so naive.

Das Kapital as symbolic analysis

The key to a broader Marxian theory of value, though, lies most of all in Marx’s analysis of money.

Economists of Marx’s day, like economists now, tended to speak of money as a “measure” and a “medium” of value. It is a measure because one can use it to compare the value of different things: e.g., to say that one steak frites is worth the same as five loaves of bread. In this capacity, the money can be a complete abstraction, there’s no need for physical coins or bills to play a part at all. When money acts as a medium of exchange—that is, to actually buy bread or pay for an order of steak—this is of course no longer true. In either case, money is simply a tool. Marx’s innovation was to draw attention to a third aspect of money, what might be called its reflexive moment: money as a value in itself. A tool facilitates action; it is a means to an end. From the perspective of people actually engaged in many financial transactions, Marx observes, money *is* the end. It becomes the very embodiment of value, the ultimate object of desire.

One might think of this as the flip-side of commodity fetishism. When workers agree to work for wages, they place themselves in a position in which for them, money is the end of the whole process. They perform their creative, productive actions in order to get paid. But for Marx this is of special significance, because the value that the money represents is, in the last analysis, that of labor itself.¹⁹

What’s happening here actually goes well beyond the fetishization of commodities. And it is even more fundamental to the nature of capitalism. What money measures and mediates, according to Marx, is ultimately the importance of certain forms of human action. In money, workers see the meaning or importance of their own creative energies, their own capacity to act, and by acting to transform the world, reflected back at them. Money represents the ultimate social significance of their actions, the means by which it is integrated in a total (market) system. But it can do so because it

is also the *object* of their actions; that's why they are working: in order to receive a paycheck at the end of the week. Hence, it is a representation that plays a necessary role in bringing into being the very thing it represents.

Readers coming to *Capital* expecting to read the work of a "material determinist" are often rather surprised to discover that the book starts out with what can only be called a series of detailed symbolic analyses: of commodities, money, and fetishism. But what sort of theory of symbolism, exactly, is Marx working with? The best way to think about it, perhaps, is to say that, like his theory of productive action, it combines elements of two traditions: one that we would now see as essentially German, the other French. One might call them theories of meaning, and theories of signification. The first, which had its roots in Hegel but also gave rise to hermeneutics, sees meaning as essentially identical with intentionality. The meaning of a statement is what the speaker meant to say. One reads a text in order to understand the author's intent; it is this intentionality that unifies the parts of the text into a coherent whole. Hermeneutics first developed in biblical scholarship, where this would have to be true if one assumes (as biblical scholars did) that what the Bible ultimately conveys is the will of God. "Signification"—which later found its exponent in Ferdinand de Saussure—is based on a notion of contrast, the signification of a term being the way it is different from the other terms in a set (slicing the pie of reality again). What Marx is talking about combines elements of both. Money has meaning for the actors, then, because it sums up their intentions (or, the importance of their intentional actions, which comes down to pretty much the same thing). However, it can do so only by integrating them into a contrastive totality, the market, since it is only by means of money that my individual actions and capacities become integrated as a proportion of the totality of everyone's (see Turner 1979c:20-21).

As a first approximation:

Money is a concrete token of value. Value is the way in which an individual actor's actions take on meaning, for the actor herself, by being incorporated into a larger social whole.

Obviously, Marx was no more drawing on the hermeneutic tradition itself than he was the Saussurean; his approach goes back, instead, to Hegel, who also insists on examining actions in terms of how they are integrated into larger "concrete totalities." Any particular action, or process, becomes meaningful (in Hegelian language, takes on "concrete, specific form") only by being integrated into some larger system of action; just as the parts of a watch, say, are coordinated in their motion by the overall

structure of the whole (thus making the parts mere “abstract content,” and the watch, “concrete form”). Of course, there is no end to how long one can continue this sort of analysis: the watch itself might well be integrated into some larger process, say, a race, whereby it too becomes merely the abstract content to a larger concrete form, and so on. So here too, the system is ultimately open-ended.

marketless societies

At this point, armed with this Marxian view of structure, we can once again return to our original question: how to apply a Marxian theory of value to societies without a market.

What Turner suggests (1984) is that most Marxist anthropologists have ended up creating a slightly different version of Substantivism. That is, they too have simply examined the “way in which a society materially provisions itself,” except that where Polanyi’s followers mainly examined different modes of exchange, Marxists shifted the focus to production. Starting from value on the other hand would mean asking: is material production of this sort really what is most important to this social system? If we limit ourselves to stateless societies—the ones that have up until now proved the least amenable to Marxist styles of analysis—it quickly becomes obvious that the sort of activities we would define as economic, particularly subsistence activity, are by no means that on which they spend the greater part of their time, or “creative energies” however defined (Turner 1979c; 1984). Most dedicate far more to what, broadly speaking, could be called socialization, at least if one defines the latter to include not only primary child care but all those other actions that go into shaping human beings. This would make socialization a continual process that does not simply stop with adolescence, or whatever arbitrary cut off point most people implicitly impose: over the course of one’s life, one is almost always engaged in a constant process of changing their social position, roles and statuses, and doing so having to learn how to behave in it. Life is thus a constant educational process.

Myself, I suspect one of the main reason for this neglect is simple sexism. Primary child care is almost everywhere seen as quintessential woman’s work; analysts tend to see socialization on the whole as being too close to nurture and too distant from the kind of strenuous and dramatic muscular activity—burly men hammering away at glowing iron, sparks flying everywhere—the term “production” brings most readily to mind. The model one would start from would have to be essentially feminine. But then,

this only goes to underline that the most fundamental inequality in such societies is indeed that based on gender—something that in theory we already knew.

How does one then go on to analyze this kind of production? Well, in fact, the materials already exist. There is a huge, voluminous anthropological literature on the study of kinship. True, it does not start off from the same premises but it certainly provides plenty material from which to work. And even a more traditional Marxist anthropologist like Eric Wolf (1983) has used the term “kinship mode of production” to describe such societies. While it is also true that Marxist anthropologists have usually insisted that kinship systems are ultimately determined by the production of material things, there’s no reason one can’t simply jettison this bit and keep as much as seems useful of the rest. The real point is how one would go about analyzing a kinship system, or some similar anthropological object, in the same way that Marx analyzed the market system in capitalism.

So in what way do the actions of shaping people become embodied in value-forms: that is, forms that reflect the meaning of my actions to myself in some tangible form as some object or action that I desire? And in what way does this process allow for fetishism—to people failing to recognize the degree to which they themselves are producing value—and for exploitation—a means by which some people appropriate the surplus value generated by others?

the Baining; production and realization

A good place to start with might be Jane Fajans’ work on the Baining of Papua New Guinea (1993b, 1997; Turner and Fajans 1987). The Baining, a population of taro farmers who live in scattered hamlets in the mountainous interior of East New Britain, are somewhat notorious in the anthropological literature for their almost complete lack of any elaborate social structure. Fajans describes their society as a kind of “egalitarian anarchism” because of their lack of political structures; in fact, they lack enduring social structures of almost any kind whatever. Not only are there no chiefs or “big men,” but no clans, lineages, age grades, no initiation societies, ritual or exchange associations, or anything, really, that can be called a “ritual system”²⁰. There was a time when anthropologists used the term “simple society” as a euphemism for “primitive”; normally, the term was an obvious misnomer, but the Baining appear as close as one is likely to find to a genuinely simple society. There are domestic groups and individual kindreds, and that’s about it. Perhaps as a result, Baining society also appears to be singularly lacking in mystification.

According to Fajans, Baining society is based on something very much like a labor theory of value. What distinguishes humans from animals is the fact that humans work; work, or “sweat,” is considered the quintessential human activity. It is conceived largely in terms of the generation of heat: fire or “sweat” in gardening, which is in turn seen as the quintessential form of work. Hence the basic schema of action, or what Munn would call value template, is one of the application of human labor to transform nature into culture, “socialization” in the broadest sense. It’s a template of *value* because the ability to do so is the main thing that brings one prestige in Baining life. While gardening work is the paradigm, raising children (literally, “feeding” them) is seen in the same terms. It is a matter of transforming infants, who are seen as relatively wild creatures when they are born, into fully formed social beings, humans whose humanity, in turn, is defined largely as a capacity for productive action. So even here, there is a sort of minimal hierarchy of spheres. Producing food is not simply a value in itself. The most prestigious act in Baining society is *giving* food, or other consumables. To be a parent, for example, is not considered so much a matter of procreation but of providing children with food (Fajans 1993b, 1997:75-78, 88-100) an attitude reinforced by the very widespread habit of fostering, which ensures that almost every household where food is cooked has at least one child to feed in it.

Food-giving takes a more communal form as well. While the Baining lack elaborate, ceremonial forms of exchange like moka, people are in the constant habit of exchanging food, betel nut, and the like on a less formal basis. If two men meet each other on the road, for example, they will almost invariably both offer each other betel nut to chew, each then taking some of the others”. Families often exchange food, here too almost always in egalitarian same-for-same transactions; for example, two neighbors will exchange equal amounts of taro with which to prepare their dinner. Hence, while giving food to children is seen as ‘reproductive,’ in the sense of producing production, the apparently pointless habit of continually exchanging food is a matter of the continual production of society. In the absence of enduring institutional structures which can be seen as existing apart from individual human action, “society” itself has to be re-created by individuals on a day to day basis. Yet that society has to be re-created, as it is the basis for the existence of any sorts of values at all.

Even in this remarkably minimal, stripped-down version, then, one finds one key distinction that always seems to recur; what in dialectical terms is usually referred to as the distinction between “production” and “realization”. Productive labor creates value mainly in potentia. This is because value is inherently contrastive; thus it can only be made into a reality (“realized”) in a relatively public context, as part of some

larger social whole. Among the Baining, producing food through the labor of gardening is seen as the origin of value, but that value is only “realized” when one gives some of that food to someone else. Hence the most truly prestigious act is being a good provider to children, thereby turning them into social beings; but this in turn requires the existence of society. After all, without society, the socialization of children would not be prestigious; just as without the continual socialization of children as new producers, society itself would not continue to exist.

the Kayapo: the domestic cycle and village structure

The Baining were, as I said, a useful place to start because they lack most of the institutions we normally associated with “social structure”. This is not so of the Kayapo of Brazil, the object of Turner’s own researches for the last thirty years. The Kayapo are one of the Ge/Bororo societies of Central Brazil, who, when they first became known to outsiders in mid-century, were considered remarkable for combining what seemed like an extremely simple technology with an almost bewilderingly complicated social system. Their great circular villages often consisted of several hundred houses, all arranged around a central plaza, normally replete with collective men’s houses and other communal buildings. While the communal structures took different forms in different Central Brazilian societies, there was invariably some form of dual organization: the village was divided into two sides of the village (most often exogamous), there were two men’s houses, identical in all respects, except that one was always for some reason considered superior. The life-cycle was divided into elaborate systems of initiation grades carried out in the village center.

In any structural analysis—and this includes any analysis of social structure—the key question is how to identify one’s units of analysis. Here Turner again hearkens back to the dialectical tradition,²¹ in which the basic principle is that the most elementary unit of any system is the smallest one that still contains within it all the basic relations which constitute the whole. Let me explain what I mean by this. Take the example of a kinship system, of the sort normally studied by anthropologists. The minimal unit would clearly have to be a domestic unit of some sort—a family or household.²² Families of course can take a wide variety of forms in different societies, but whether one is talking about a suburban family in Cleveland, an Iroquois longhouse, or a Nayar matrilineal stirp, there are certain things one can always expect. One can always count on there being a recognized model of what a properly constituted household should look like. And that properly constituted household will always contain within itself all of those relationships (mother-daughter, husband-wife,

brother-brother, mother's brother-daughter's husband, whatever these may be) that are reworked to create the larger system of which it forms a part. The larger systems are just based on extrapolating certain of these relations and principles on a grander scale. A system of patrilineal clans, for example, is based on taking just one of those critical relations (between fathers and sons) and making it a universal principle that can then become the basis for organizations that not only regulate relations between families, but above all (by control of bridewealth, establishment of rules of exogamy, and so forth) regulate the continual process through which new families form and old ones dissolve.

This is really the same sort of relation of mutual dependence between levels that one finds in the Piagetian notion of structure: the higher, encompassing level is entirely presupposed by the lower; yet at the same time, the lower one is not viable without it—since real households are in constant flux, endlessly growing, declining, and dividing up to create new families, and it is the broader system that regulates the process. And here again one can, in principle at least, continually generate higher levels.

In the case of the Kayapo (Turner 1979b, 1980, 1984, 1985a, 1987), the domestic unit is an uxorilocal extended family, usually three generations in depth. In a properly constituted village, there could be hundreds of these, in houses arranged in a vast circle, all opening on a central village plaza that is considered the quintessential social space. The men's and women's societies that dominate the life of the plaza are divided into moieties, though in the Kayapo case these are not exogamous. Rather, a boy needs members of the opposite moiety to provide the unrelated "substitute parents" (*krabdjuo*) who will initiate him into public life by sponsoring his entry into the men's society. Boys are removed from their natal families to live in the Men's House dormitory at about the age of eight, initiated to the next grade at about fourteen, and then, on the birth of their first child, move into their wives' households. They do so as very much junior partners: a husband is at first expected to be highly subservient to his wife's parents (there are all sorts of ritualized gestures of deference and near-avoidance), during the period when he and his wife are raising their own children. At the same time they gradually move upward in the collective organizations of the village center according to the point they have reached in their own domestic cycle (age grades include "fathers of one child," "fathers of many children," etc.). There is a parallel structure for girls: girls too are initiated into a series of age grades by "substitute parents"; however, they are never detached from their natal families in nearly so radical a way, are never dormed in the village center, and, while as elders

they can achieve a dominant position alongside their husbands within their own extended families, never take on a dominant role in the plaza's political life.

In what way, then, are these communal institutions constructed out of relations that exist within the domestic unit? Turner argues that relations within the family fall into two broad groups. The first, and most important, are the very hierarchical sorts of relation that exist between parents and children, and in-marrying husbands and their wives' parents in particular. All these relations are marked by similar forms of deference: the subordinate party is "ashamed" in the presence of the dominant one, is obliged to refrain from any expression or often even reference to appetites for food or sex, the dominant party can express such appetites freely as well as generally telling the other what to do. The second set are the more solidary, comfortable relations of alliance that exist between, for example, grandparents and grandchildren, boys with their mothers' brothers, or girls with their fathers' sisters.

Each of these "complementary axes of the structure of the family" is the basis of recruitment for one of the two sets of communal organizations that dominate the village center. The first are the sets of men's and women's societies I have already partly described: societies which are themselves extremely hierarchical, as well being in principle divided into two ranked moieties. One might call this the political system. The second is the framework of Kayapo ceremonial organization (1987:25-28), which temporarily merges all such divisions together in collective dances and initiations, which culminate in the giving of "beautiful names" to certain privileged children, usually accompanied by certain pieces of heirloom jewelry called *nekretch*, the only real physical tokens of wealth that exist in traditional Kayapo society. Hence the two "complementary axes of the structure of the family" become the "complementary axes of the structure of society" as well. What's more, it is indeed through these larger, encompassing institutions that the minimal units are reproduced: regulating the dispersal of the children of old families and the creation of new ones in marriage. The communal institutions, in Turner's terms, "embody" certain aspects of the minimal units at the same time as they also serve as the necessary means for those units' continual reproduction.

The crucial thing here is that these two "axes" also correspond to the two key values of Kayapo society. Turner refers to them as "dominance" and "beauty" The first is not actually named in Kayapo, but it's exemplified in the sort of authority exerted by a father-in-law over his deferential sons-in-law, as well as that same sort of authority writ large within the age-graded institutions of the village center. The Kayapo notion of "beauty," on the other hand, implies "perfection, completion, and finesse";²³ it is

evinced most of all in the harmony of grand ceremonial that unites an entire Kayapo community, of which the giving of “beautiful names” is perhaps the exemplary form. In the communal sphere, these two are combined in certain forms of public performance. These are, in ascending order of prestige, a kind of mournful keening performed by elder women at public events, the formal oratory with which senior men harangue the community on matters of collective import, and most all, a form of oratorical chanting, called *ben*, whose use is limited to chiefs.²⁴ These represent the pinnacles of social value in Kayapo society because they are seen as combining completely uninhibited self-expression (i.e., a complete lack of deference, hence, untrammelled dominance) with the consummate mastery and fullness of style that is the epitome of “beauty”.

Now, all this might seem a far cry from the analysis of factory production in Marx’s *Capital*. But Turner argues (1984) that one can, in fact, carry out a similar value analysis because there is, indeed, a cultural system by which productive labor is divided up according to standardized units of time. This is the domestic cycle. One such cycle suffices to turn children into marriageable adults (i.e., to produce labor power, the capacity to reproduce the family), a second, to turn the former subordinated couple into the dominant heads of their own extended family. The critical thing, however, is that in that second cycle, the actual labor of socialization is no longer carried out by the couple themselves. Instead, it is their daughters’ and daughters’ husbands’ work that effectively propels them forward into their new status.²⁵ Hence, their labor produces, in effect, a surplus. The surplus, however, is not appropriated on the domestic level—or, better to say, not primarily so—but on the level of the society as a whole. A male elder, for instance, can behave in a dominant fashion in his own household; but even if he has no daughters of his own and hence can never become the head of an extended family household, the collective labors of the younger generation nonetheless propel him through the age grades to the point where he can take on the role of an elder in public life, and accede to the most eminent tokens of value in Kayapo society.

Value, then, is realized mainly in the public, communal sphere, in the forms of concrete circulating media of value—in part, the ceremonial valuables and roles mentioned above but mainly in the forms of access to the most prestigious forms of verbal performance in public (ritual and especially political) life: keening, formal oratory, chiefly chanting. These latter forms are refractions of the most basic forms of value created in the domestic sphere, at the same time as they are realized largely within institutions that are modeled on the key relations through which those forms of value are created. They are also realized in a distinctly unequal fashion; and that

inequality is a direct result of the effective appropriation by some of the products of others' labor.

The overall picture here is not all that entirely different than the sort of thing proposed by Dumont and his disciples. We have the same hierarchical arrangement of spheres, the same paired set of key values, one primarily concerned with individual assertion, the other, more encompassingly social (so power and purity in Dumont's Hinduism, honor and *baraka* among Jamous' Berbers, and so forth.) The same can be said of Fred Myers' analysis of the values of "relatedness" and "differentiation" among the Pintupi (1986), which is inspired mainly by Turner, but draws on certain Dumontian themes as well. The most obvious differences between Turner and Dumont though are the infinitely more sophisticated theoretical apparatus Turner provides, and the fact that, coming out of the Marxian rather than Durkheimian tradition, Turner does not assume that alienation and hierarchy are simply natural and inevitable features of human life.

tokens of value

Now, treating a form of chiefly chanting as a "medium of value" might seem to be stretching the analogy with Marx beyond all reason. What does a genre of public performance really have in common with a dollar bill? If one examines the matter more closely, one finds they have quite a number of things in common. Here is a list of the most important qualities shared by all such "concrete media of circulation" in Turner's terms:

1. they are **measures of value**, as they serve to mark a contrast between greater or lesser degrees of dominance, beauty, honor, prestige, or whatever the particular valued quality may be. This measurement can take any of three possible forms:
 - a) **presence/absence**. Even if one is dealing with unique and incommensurable values, there is still the difference between having them (or otherwise being identified with them) and not. Kayapo "beautiful names" and their associated regalia, for example, are not ranked—each is a value only unto itself—but every name-giving ceremony is organized around the distinction between "those with wealth," who have them, "those with nothing," who do not—even if all other social distinctions are effectively dissolved (Turner 1987:28).²⁶
 - b) **ranking**, as with Gregory's hierarchy of types of gift. Kayapo performance genres are ranked as well: men's oratory is ordinarily seen as superior to women's keening; chiefly chanting, as superior to both.

c) **proportionality**, as with money.

In any of these what is ultimately being measured is the importance of the creative energies (in the Kayapo case, above all those spent in the creation of fully socialized human beings) required to produce them

2. they are **media of value**, as they are the concrete, material means by which that value is realized. In other words, it is not enough for tokens of value to provide a way of contrasting levels of value; there have to be material objects, or material performances, which either bring those values into being in a way that they are—at least potentially—perceptible to a larger audience (this audience, from the actor’s point of view, more or less constitutes “society”), or are translatable into things that do.
3. finally, these tokens almost inevitably come to be seen as **ends in themselves**. Actual people tend to see these material tokens not as “tools” through which value can be measured or mediated, but as embodiments of value in themselves; even, in classic fetishistic fashion, as the origins of those very values (Turner 1979c:31-34).

The last point is crucial, because this is what finally points the way towards reconciling social structure and individual desire, which is precisely what a value theory was *supposed* to do.

Most Kayapo, do, undoubtedly, feel that it is right their own society should continue to exist; in this they are like most people. But in the absence of great catastrophes, the question of the continued existence of one’s society is not something to which many give a lot of thought. Reproducing society is not, normally, seen as an end in itself.²⁷ Rather, most people pursue social values in more or less concrete form: if they are Kayapo, they work their way towards socially dominant positions in the central, communal institutions (if only so that they will be in a position to express themselves freely and not to have to live in constant constraint and embarrassment), they hope to be able to play an important part in the performance of a truly beautiful collective ritual, to give a “beautiful name” to their brother’s daughter, to be the sort of person others listen to as a voice of moral authority, to ensure one’s children might someday be. One is tempted to say that “society” is created as a side effect of such pursuits of value. But even this would not be quite right, because that would reify society. Really, society is not a thing at all: it is the total process through which all this activity is coordinated,²⁸ and value, in turn, the way that actors see their own activity as meaningful as part of it. Doing so always, necessarily, involves some sort of public recognition and comparison. This is why economic models, which see those actions as

aimed primarily at individual gratification, fall so obviously short: they fail to see that in any society—even within a market system—solitary pleasures are relatively few. The most important ends are ones that can only be realized in the eyes of some collective audience. In fact, one might go so far as to say that while from an analytical perspective “society” is a notoriously fluid, open-ended set of processes, from the perspective of the actors, it is much more easily defined: “society” simply consists of that potential audience, of everyone whose opinion of you matters in some way, as opposed to those (say, a Chinese merchant, to a nineteenth century German peasant farmer, or vice versa, or most anthropologists to the janitors who clean their buildings, or vice versa) whose opinion of you, you would never think about at all. But (and this is what I think Strathern, for example, does not take fully into account) value is not *created* in that public recognition. Rather, what is being recognized is something that was, in a sense, already there.

All this I think has a definite bearing on the question of exploitation. Let me return for a moment to Mount Hagen and the argument about Melpa pig exchange. The reader will recall Josephides argued that behind the dramatic, public gestures of gift-giving between men lie hidden a whole history of less dramatic, more repetitive daily actions, largely carried out by women, by which the pigs are produced. Moka ceremonies make it seem as if the pigs’ value is produced by exchange. In doing so, it disguises its real origins in women’s labor. Strathern objects that such a notion presumes a certain attitude towards property, and the idea that carrying out productive labor should give one certain rights to the object produced, that Hageners just don’t have. Hence it would never occur to them they are being exploited. But in fact, when Melpa women feed their pigs, they are not simply fattening animals. They are not even simply, as Strathern would have it, reproducing the relationship they have with their husbands. They are also contributing to reproducing a certain kind of social order: one organized, for example, around a distinction between the domestic sphere, in which pigs are raised, and the public one, in which they are exchanged; one that carries with it definitions of what a man is, what a woman is, what a family is, what a male reputation is, and why it is that the gift of a pig should be the most effective means by which the latter can be created. This social order is not some abstract set of categories that exists prior to action. Actions are what it is, what it primarily consists of. It is a process of constant creation. In this sense, it is not just the pigs but the male public sphere itself which is constructed in large part by female labor, even if it is also one from which women are largely excluded.²⁹

From this perspective one can indeed talk about exploitation. Strathern for example points out that if one claims that Melpa women are being exploited because men control the pigs they have helped produce, you would have to conclude that men are being exploited too, because women control the crops that men have contributed to producing. This sort of logic is inevitable, really, if one thinks of value only in terms of particular objects and particular transactions, refusing to consider any sort of larger social whole in which the production of both pigs and crops take on value in relation to one another. Now, there are good reasons why Strathern wants to avoid talking about “society”. First of all, like most current theorists she wants to emphasize the degree to which what we are used to calling “societies” are not bounded wholes, but open-ended networks. Second, the concept is alien to the Melpa themselves. But by doing so ends up paradoxically depriving her Hageners of almost all social creativity. A constructivist approach—such as I have been trying to develop—might help overcome some of these dilemmas. Such an approach assumes there does have to be some kind of whole³⁰; but it is almost always going to be a shifting, provisional one, because it is always in the process of construction by actors pursuing forms of value—if only because those forms of value can only be realized on some sort of larger stage. If for the actor, “society” is simply the audience one would like to impress; for the analyst, it is all those actions that have gone into making it possible for that actor to make that impression; that have thus, in effect, produced the value realized in this way.

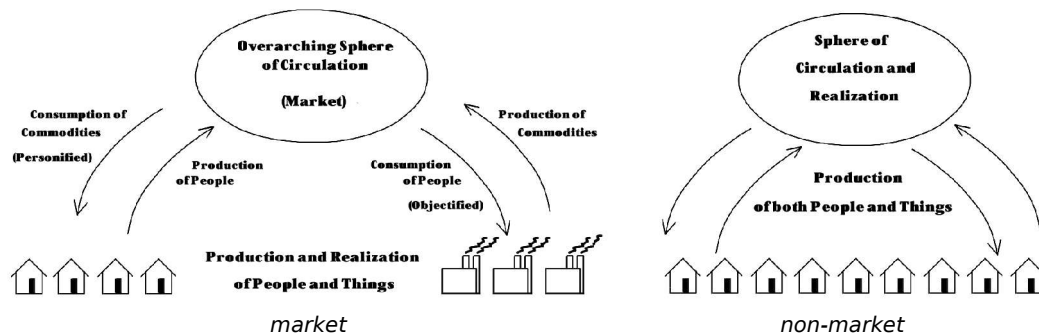
value and values, fetishism

At this point one can return to the question of value versus values; that is, economic price-mechanisms versus the kind of “conceptions of the desirable” described by Kluckhohn: honor, purity, beauty, and the like. I’ve already noted that the latter tend to take on importance either in societies without a commercial market (e.g., the Kayapo) or, as in ours, in those contexts (church, home, museum. . .) relatively insulated from it. According to Turner (1984:56-58), both really are refractions of the same thing; to understand the differences, one has first of all to consider what they are being refracted through. That is, one has to consider the nature of the media through which social value is realized. The key question is the degree to which value can, as it were, be “stored”. Here money represents one logical extreme. Money is a durable physical object that can be stored, moved about, kept on reserve, taken from one context to another.³¹ At the other extreme, one has performances like chiefly chanting, the deferential behavior of subordinates, and so on. A performance is obviously not something that can be stored and “consumed” later on. Hence, as he

puts it, there can be no distinction here between the spheres of circulation, and realization. Both have to happen in the same place.

Here it might help to go back to Marx, who invented these particular terms. In a capitalist system, the typical product is made in a factory and passes from wholesaler to retailer, before finally being bought by a consumer and taken home to be consumed. In Marx's terms it passes from the sphere of production, to that of circulation, to that of realization: the latter by providing the consumer some pleasure, fulfilling some purpose, or adding to its his or her prestige. In a society like the Kayapo, however, the spheres of circulation and realization coincide. Social value may be mainly produced in the domestic sphere, but it is realized by becoming absorbed into personal identities in the public, communal sphere, accessible to everyone.

Marx, of course, was writing mainly about political economy and was not especially concerned with what went on in the domestic sphere. But I think if one expands his ideas just a little, to include the issue of social production (the production of people, and of social relations outside the workplace), one might come up with the following formulation:



In a capitalist system, then, there are two sets of minimal units—factories (or more realistically, workplaces), and households—with the market mediating relations between the two.³² One primarily concerns itself with the creation of commodities; the other, with the creation (care and feeding, socialization, personal development. . .) of human beings. Neither could exist without the other. But the market that connects them also acts as a vast force of social amnesia: the anonymity of economic transactions ensures that with regard to specific products, each sphere remains effectively invisible to the other. The result is a double process of fetishization. From the perspective of those going about their business in the domestic sphere, using commodities, the history of how these commodities were produced is effectively

invisible. Therefore, objects—as Marx so famously observed—appear to take on subjective qualities. Perhaps in part, too, because they are also turned there to the fashioning of people. Most commodities—as critics of Marx so often point out end up marking different sorts of identity, and this is the ultimate social “realization” of their value in the terms outlined above. All of this could simply be considered part of the overall process of “social production”: forming people both in their capacities, and, more publicly, in terms of their identities, of what sorts of person they are taken to be. But I would add: from the perspective of the workplace, everything is reversed. Here, it is the creative energies that went into producing labor power (actual human beings capable of doing whatever it is the boss wants them to do) that becomes invisible. Hence, instead of things taking on human qualities, real human beings end up taking on the qualities of things. It thus we have the “reification” that Gregory talks about, human beings or human powers reduced to commodities that can be bought and sold, and hence put to use in creating new commodities.

In a traditional society, of course, there is only one set of minimal units because the production of both people and things is centered on the household. Still, even in an extremely simple case like the Baining, there is still some kind of larger sphere in which values can be said to circulate and be realized. Still, in the Baining case, probably owing to the very minimal nature of the hierarchy, there is little that could justifiably be called fetishism or exploitation.

The Baining, however, are unusual. In most societies:

The values which the members of society struggle to attain and accumulate in their everyday lives are ultimately a symbolic expression of the concrete realization, in their own social system, of their capacity to produce the material and social wherewithal of their own lives, to coordinate these productive activities in such a way that they form interdependent systems and thus acquire determinate values and meanings, and finally to reproduce the forms of this coordination. Although people created values and meanings through the forms of organized interdependence they assume to facilitate their own productive activity, they remain unaware that they do so. (Turner 1979c:34-35)

Just as higher-level processes, operating on that “proximal level” that tends to elude individual consciousness, tend to be seen as existing outside of human creativity, as something transcendent and immutable, so these tokens of value also tend to become fetishized. People tend to see them as the origin of the values they embody and convey. Just as value seems to come from money, so fame and glory

seems to emerge from the armshells and necklaces exchanged between kula partners, honor and nobility from possession of coats of arms and family heirlooms, kingship from the possession of a stool, ancestral wisdom from the forms of ancestral rhetoric, chiefly authority from a chief's authoritative speech.

Or, of course, "a name" from a Melpa pig—or, to be more precise, from the act of giving one. Because in fact, actions can be fetishized too. In an essay called "Exchanging Products, Producing Exchange" (1993), Jane Fajans argues that this is precisely what happens in dramatic acts of exchange like moka. Like Bloch and Josephides, she suggests that anthropologists—particularly those working in the Maussian tradition—often fall into the same trap. The way out, she suggests, is to make a consistent distinction between exchange and circulation. Exchange occurs when property of some sort passes from one person to another; circulation occurs when values or valued qualities are transferred. Within a commercial market, of course, these usually come down to pretty much the same thing. In other contexts they do not. In some, as we've seen, values circulate largely through modes of performance. Knowledge, rumors, and reputations circulate as well; hence, as Fajans notes, one might in some places be able to realize the value of an heirloom shell only by giving it away; in others, by displaying it in a public ritual; in yet others, by hiding it somewhere (but making sure others know that you have done this.) In either case, values circulate. Exchange, then, is just one of many possible forms circulation might take.

There are a number of reasons why such actions, or objects, are so often fetishized, and treated as the sources of value rather than simply the media through which value circulates. One is because it is often not entirely untrue. Exchange, or chiefly performance, *is* a form of creative action and does, indeed, play a certain role in producing these values—it's just not nearly so great a one as is normally attributed to them.³³ Another even more important reason, Fajans argues, is because both (actions and objects) often have a tendency to become models, representations in miniature, of the broader forms of creative action whose value they ultimately represent. If one examines the symbolic organization of a moka ceremony, or even, that of royal regalia or kula valuables or Hindu temples, one usually finds that they are in their own way microcosms of the total system of production of which they are a part, and that they encode a theory of creativity that is implicit on the everyday level as well, but is rarely quite brought into the open (cf. Turner 1977:59-60).

It's not hard to see how this might be. A great deal of anthropological analysis consists of unearthing just these sort of connections: for instance, finding the same

symbolic patterns in the everyday habits of domestic life and the design of Gothic cathedrals (Bourdieu 1979). This is really just another way of reformulating the same observation, but here emphasizing the importance of creativity. I've already underlined that even the most workaday, least dramatic forms of social action (tending pigs and whatnot) are also forms of symbolic production: they play the main role in reproducing people's most basic definitions of what humans are, the difference between men and women, and so on. I have also emphasized that this overall process is always something that tends somewhat to escape the actors. Insofar as these fetishized objects really do embody total systems of meaning, they represent ones that are in fact produced largely offstage.

It might be useful here to return to Nancy Munn's notion of value templates. In Gawa, the most elementary cultural definitions of value are reproduced every time one gives a guest, or a child, food. Implicit in even such a simple gesture lies a whole cosmology, a whole set of distinctions between the heaviness of gardening and garden products (owned by women), and the lightness and beauty of shells and other circulating valuables (which reproduce the fame of men), one that is, in practice, reproduced precisely through such gestures, which are the most basic means for converting the one into the other. This same structure of meaning is reproduced on ever-higher levels of what Munn calls "intersubjective space-time"; that is, new levels that are created by more dramatic and more broadly recognized forms of action. It is especially in the most spectacular of these: in the creation of elaborately decorated canoes for kula expeditions, the presentation of famous heirloom necklaces, or, for that matter, in the very design of the canoes and necklaces themselves—that something like a model of the whole process is presented to the actors in something like schematic form.

The same could be said for the Kayapo. The values of dominance and beauty are created, in their simplest forms, in the pettiest details of everyday life, particularly in the family: for instance, in the deferential attitudes children should take towards their parents, or the familiar ease they can adopt with certain other relatives. But also in more obviously creative forms: Kayapo women, for example, spend a great of their time painting the bodies of their children, as well as each other, as they do so, according to Turner's essay "The Social Skin" (1980) endlessly re-encoding an implicit model of the human body and society, of the transformation of inner "libidinal" powers into visible social forms. As in the Gawan case, one can say this is itself a kind of theory of social creativity, but only so long as one always bears in mind that there is no way to separate such a "theory" from practice; we are not dealing with preexisting

codes or principles to which people then feel they must conform, but rather a property of the structure of the actions themselves. In the Kayapo case too, of course, these elementary schemas are endlessly reproduced on the more encompassing levels of social action (men's house politics, the ritual clowning of name-giving ceremonies, or for that matter in the structure of Kayapo myths. . .); this is the reason why the passing of the heirloom ornaments that accompany "beautiful names" can seem so significant, or chiefly chanting so powerfully expressive, to begin with.

I have earlier suggested that a materialist analysis need not be founded on some notion of determination, but rather, on never allowing oneself to forget that human action, or even human thought, can only take place through some kind of material medium and therefore can't be understood without taking the qualities of that medium into account. Hence the importance in Turner's analysis of the notion of material media of circulation. The media have qualities in and of themselves. For all the (often quite legitimate) criticisms of Jack Goody's dichotomies between orality and literacy, for example, it is simply obvious that technologies of writing allow for possibilities that do not exist in speech (and equally, vice versa). If one memorializes the past by the performance of ritual dramas, that past will never look quite the same as one memorialized by the preservation of ancient buildings, which will not be the same as one memorialized by, say, the periodic reconstruction of ancient buildings, let alone one kept alive largely through the performances of spirit mediums. It is a fairly simple point. It should be obvious, perhaps. But it's a point that those whose theory sets out with some Parmenidean notion of code (that is, most theoretically inclined anthropologists) often tend to forget.

note one: Negative Value

Before discussing some of political implications of this kind of value theory, allow me two quasidigressions.

The last two chapters of Nancy Munn's *The Fame of Gawa* are dedicated to a detailed analysis of Gawan conceptions of "negative value," as exemplified in the way senior men talk about the threat posed to their communities by witchcraft. Gawans conceptions of witchcraft form an almost exact photo-negative version of the creation of positive value through exchange: where one involves growing and then giving away food so as to create links that will eventually make it possible to spread one's fame in all directions, witches are creatures driven by an insatiable appetite, sucking the life-force from all those around them, but all in utter secrecy.

Combating the threat of such evil in turn requires a communal consensus: at public events, senior men are always inveighing against witchcraft and using their rhetorical powers to convince potential witches to desist from their evil plans. Gawa is, as Munn emphasizes, both a highly egalitarian and a highly individualistic society, and the two principles are necessarily somewhat in contradiction. The pursuit of fame itself tends to subvert equality. As a result, one of the principle ways in which a notion of communal value emerges, in Gawa, is through the negation of a negation. Witches, motivated by envy, attack those who have been too successful in rising above their fellows; in one sense, they represent the egalitarian ethos of the community, in another, absolute selfish individualism and hence, absolute evil. Communal value, what Gawans call the “fame of Gawa,” is seen as directly tied to the ability of its senior men to suppress this destructive hyperindividualism and thus create a situation where everyone is free to enter into exchange relations, engage in kula, and thus, spread their own individual names in all directions

Turner himself never takes up the notion of negative value; neither does Fajans; but this probably has something to do with the nature of the Kayapo and Baining societies. Certainly, the broader process Munn describes can be documented in many other places. Maurice Bloch (1982) has noted that in ritual, probably the most common way of representing a social value is by the very dramatic and tangible representation of its opposite: images of moral evil, of loss or decay, chaos and disorder and so on. Witchcraft is, at least in most times and places, another way of doing the same thing. It affirms certain moral values through a representation of utter immorality. And as authors such as Monica Wilson have shown (1970), these images vary a great deal between societies, in ways that have much to do with differences in their overall social structure.

The overall process Munn describes is quite similar to what I encountered in Madagascar (Graeber 1995): here too, the sense of communal solidarity was largely conceived in efforts to repress witchcraft, a witchcraft that was, however, seen as a perverse version of the very egalitarian ideals that were the basis of that same community. It could be that this will always be one of the most salient ways in which value manifests itself where one has a similar combination of egalitarianism and individualism.³⁴ Such questions could well bear future research.

note two: direct versus indirect appropriation

The reader might well be wondering whether there's any way to square all of this with more conventional Marxist anthropology, what I've called the "mode of production" approach (e.g., Meillassoux 1981; Godelier. 1977). There might not seem to be a lot of common ground. For the MoP approach, as developed by Althusser, everything turns on the appropriation of some kind of a material surplus. Any mode of production is based on the relation of two classes: one of primary producers, the other, which supports itself at least in part by appropriating some portion the product of the first. What makes MoPs different is *how* this extraction takes place: this is what makes the relation between master and slave different from that between feudal lord and manorial serf, or that between capitalist employer and proletarian laborer.

Since such extraction must always, in the end, be backed up by the threat of force, this is essentially a theory of the state. Hence, as I've noted, anthropologists have had a very difficult time trying to apply this model to societies without one. Here Turner's approach might seem the perfect compliment. It was created in order to understand the workings of exploitation within stateless societies; and, indeed, it's not entirely clear what a Turnerian theory of the state would be like.

Could the two then be integrated in some way? Quite possibly. After all, one can hardly deny that where one finds a state, one does also tend to find a material surplus, and a class of people who somehow contrive to get their hands on most of it, and that this is indeed ultimately backed up by the threat of force. Hence, one might suggest that there are two different ways in which a surplus can be appropriated: either directly, in material form, or indirectly, in the form of value. In this sense, the forms of exploitation that exist within societies like the Kayapo, organized around kinship, resemble capitalist ones much more than they do the kinds of direct, tangible, immediate forms of exploitation—driving chained slaves into the fields, collecting quit-rent, having one's flunkies show up around harvest time to appropriate half a peasant's wheat crop—typical of precapitalist states.

This, in turn, has ramifications for any theory of ideology. In this chapter of course I've been emphasizing the notion of partial perspectives, of mistaking one's particular point of view within a complex social reality for the nature of reality itself, which typically gives rise to all sorts of fetishistic distortions. Conventional Marxist analysis has tended to favor a much simpler notion of material base and ideological superstructure, the latter consisting of institutions such as church and law, which mainly serve to validate the interests of the ruling class: priests to explain to slaves

why they should endure their lot, jurists to tell peasants that their relations with their landlords are based on justice. The problem with these methods of ideological control, however, as authors like James Scott have extensively documented (1990) is that they don't usually work very well. The justifications are rarely taken very seriously by the people whose goods are being expropriated, or, even, for that matter, the ruling classes themselves. Such regimes really are based primarily on force. This does not appear to be nearly so much the case either for the forms of hierarchy that exist in stateless societies,³⁵ domestic inequalities that exist within state societies, or even for capitalism itself, which (at least when it does not entirely impoverish or brutalize its proletariat) tends to be far more effective at the ideological game than almost any previously known form of exploitation. In fact, insofar as state structures do succeed in legitimizing themselves, it's almost always by successfully appealing to the values which exist in the domestic sphere, which are, of course, rooted in those much more fundamental forms of inequality, and much more effective forms of ideological distortion—most obviously, gender.

conclusion: a thousand totalities

The reader might find all this talk of totalities a bit odd. The chapter began by endorsing a general movement away from claims to absolute or total truth, an acceptance that human knowledge is always going to be incomplete. It winds up by saying that one cannot have any meaningful approach to value without some notion of totality. The constant reference to totality in Turner's works will certainly seem a bit unsettling to the modern reader; it flies in the face of most contemporary theory, which has been directed at deconstructing anything resembling a closed system. I must admit I'm not entirely comfortable with it myself. But it is an issue that opens up on all the most important questions about freedom, politics, and meaning, and therefore it seems to me that the best way to end this rather long and complicated chapter would be to take it up.

First of all, there is a difference between totalities the analyst is claiming exist in some kind of empirical sense—i.e., a pristine text, a clearly bounded "society," a mythological "system"—and totalities that exist in the actors' imaginations. Social science has long since realized that the former do not really exist, at least not in any pristine form; any closed system is just a construct, and not necessarily a very useful one; nothing in real life is really so cut and dried. Social processes are complex and overlapping in an endless variety of ways. On the other hand, if there's one thing that almost all the classic traditions of the study of meaning agree on—dialectical,

hermeneutic, and structuralist alike—it is that for human beings, meaning is a matter of comparison. Parts take on meaning in relation to each other, and that process always involves reference to some sort of whole: whether it be a matter of words in a language, episodes in a story, or “goods and services” on the market. So too for value. The realization of value is always, necessarily, a process of comparison; for this reason it always, necessarily, implies an at least imagined audience. As I’ve already suggested, for the actor, that’s all that “society” usually is.

Turner’s point, however, is that while such a totality does need to exist in actors’ imaginations, this doesn’t mean that anything that could be described as a totality necessarily exists on the ground. It might. But it might not. This is a matter for empirical observation (as is the question of the level on which the totality exists: a society, a community, a single ritual event. . .) Here the inspiration seems to be in part in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who made a distinction between the ideal closure of “chronotopes”—little universes of time and space constructed in the imagination—and an infinitely complex reality in which meaning is in fact established through open-ended dialogue.

The ideal picture a society has of itself, then, almost never corresponds with how that society actually works. The Kayapo villages discussed above actually provide a dramatic case in point. Turner generally describes Kayapo villages as if they were organized into two opposed moieties; this is because that’s how Kayapo always describe them. In reality, however, no Kayapo village has contained two moieties since 1936. In every case, internal rivalries and dissension have long since caused such villages to split in two. Turner concludes this is due to an imbalance of values: while ideally, dominance and beauty should form a complementary set, in reality, dominance is by far the more powerful of the two. The moiety structure is in fact supposed to represent the highest synthesis of these two complementary principles: while one moiety is considered “higher” than the other, they are in every other sense completely identical, and the ultimate harmony of a Kayapo village is seen to lie in its inhabitants’ ability to cooperate in “beautiful naming” ceremonies and other collective rites that transcend people’s particular allegiances to create a transcendent sense of unity. In reality, however, the lure of beauty is never quite enough. Personal rivalries between important political actors always generate rifts, tensions rise, and finally, one half ends up breaking off to found its own, rival community, normally with no love lost between the two (Turner 1987).

Still, the important thing is not just to ask why Kayapo villages lack moieties, but also why, sixty years later, when Kayapo describe how a community is organized, they

invariably describe one that does not lack them. Dual-moiety communities do continue to exist, but only in imagination. As a result, they represent a permanent possibility: a vision of what Kayapo society really should be like, and possibly still might be like. Political projects of reuniting separated moieties are occasionally discussed, though until now they always seem to end up being overruled by the dangers of having too many people with historical grudges living in the same community (Turner 1979b:210). Still, there's no reason to assume they will always be.

For Marx, of course, it is our imaginations that make us human. Hence production and revolution are for him the two quintessentially human acts. Imagination implies the possibility of doing things differently; hence when one looks at the existing world imaginatively, one is necessarily looking at it critically; when one tries to bring an imagined society into being, one is engaging in revolution. Of course, most historical change is not nearly so self-conscious: it is the fact that people are not, for the most part, self-consciously trying to reproduce their own societies but simply pursuing value that makes it so easy for them to end up transforming those same societies as a result. In times of crisis, though, this can change: a social order can be seen primarily as an arena in which certain types of value can be produced and realized; they can be defended on that basis (imagine any of the societies discussed in this chapter being forcibly incorporated into a modern state), or, alternately, they can be challenged by those who think these are not the sorts of value they would most like to pursue. In any real social situation, there are likely to be any number of such imaginary totalities at play, organized around different conceptions of value. They may be fragmentary, ephemeral, or they can just exist as dreamy projects or half-realized ones defiantly proclaimed by cultists or revolutionaries. How they knit together—or don't—simply cannot be predicted in advance. The one thing one can be sure is that they will never knit together perfectly.

We are back, then, to a “politics of value”; but one very different from Appadurai's neoliberal version. The ultimate stakes of politics, according to Turner, is not even the struggle to appropriate value; it is the struggle to establish what value *is* (Turner 1978; 1979c; see Myers and Brenneis 1991:4-5). Similarly, the ultimate freedom is not the freedom to create or accumulate value, but the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what it is that makes life worth living. In the end, then, politics is about the meaning of life. Any such project of constructing meanings necessarily involves imagining totalities (since this is the stuff of meaning), even if no such project can ever be completely translated into reality—reality being, by definition, that which is always more complicated than any construction we can put on it.

Theories do have political implications. This is as much true of those theorists who shun any notion of totalities as those who embrace them: if there is any difference, it's that the latter feel obliged to make their political positions explicit. So we have, on the one hand, Louis Dumont's "holism," with its self-consciously conservative politics,³⁶ and on the other, Terry Turner's equally self-conscious libertarian Marxism. Not that the work of those who reject totalities on principle lack such political implications, it seems to me; it's just that they rarely work them out to their logical conclusions. These political implications become most painfully obvious when one comes to those who argue not simply that totalizing theories are dangerous (which is of course true enough) but that we have already entered into some giddy new "postmodern" age in which no universal standards of evaluation any longer exist: that everything is endless transformation, fragmentation of previous solidarities, and incommensurable acts of creative self-fashioning. This was a very popular position among radical academics in the 1980s and '90s; in certain circles it still remains so. But as I remarked in the introduction, by now, at least, it is apparent to most people that when the 1980s and '90s are remembered, it will not be as the dawning of a new Postmodern Age (indeed, many are already beginning to find the term a bit embarrassing, not to mention their previous apocalyptic declarations about its significance), but rather as the era of the triumph of the World Market—one in which the most gigantic, totalizing, and all-encompassingly universal system of evaluation known to human history came to be imposed on almost everything. If nothing else it makes it easier to understand why economics was one of the few things about which most postmodern theorists had almost nothing to say. Which is in turn what makes authors like Appadurai, who do address economics, so important: the neoliberal assumptions are all there, plain to see. Behind the imagery of most postmodernism is really nothing but the ideology of the market: not even the reality of the market, since actually existing markets are always regulated in the interests of the powerful, but the way market ideologists would like us to imagine the marketplace should work.

All this is not merely meant to poke fun at some self-proclaimed academic radicals but to make a broader point. Any notion of freedom, whether it's the more individualistic vision of creative consumption, or the notion of free cultural creativity and decentering (Turner 1996) I have been trying to develop here, demands *both* resistance against the imposition of any totalizing view of what society or value must be like, but also recognition that *some* kind of regulating mechanism will have to exist, and therefore, calls for serious thought about what sort will best ensure people are, in fact, free to conceive of value in whatever form they wish. If one does not, at least in

the present day and age, one is simply going to end up reproducing the logic of the market without acknowledging it. And if we are going to try to think seriously about alternatives to the version of “freedom” currently being presented to us—one in which nation-states serve primarily as protectors of corporate property, unelected international institutions regulate an otherwise unbridled “free market” mainly to protect the interests of financiers, and personal freedom becomes limited to personal consumption choices—we had best stop thinking that these matters are going to take care of themselves and start thinking of what a more viable and hopefully, less coercive regulating mechanism might actually be like.

Notes

1. It's been a bit difficult for modern scholarship to figure out precisely what Heraclitus' position actually was; his ideas have to be pieced together through fragments or summaries preserved in the work of later authors who disagreed with them. It's not entirely clear whether Heraclitus ever actually said “you can't step into the same river twice”—Kirk (1962) suggested he didn't; Vlastos (1970) and Guthrie (1971:488-92) that he did, and that the phrase “on those who step into the same rivers, different and again different waters flow” does not reflect his original words. However, as Jonathan Barnes observes (1982:65-69, cf. Guthrie 1971:449-50) the debate rather misses the point, since this later gloss is in fact an accurate description of Heraclitus' position, as it can be reconstructed from comparison other fragments (notably his observation that the “barley drink,” which was made up of wine, barley and honey, “existed only when it was stirred.”). Heraclitus did not deny that objects exist continually over time; he emphasized that all such objects are ultimately patterns of change and transformation. It appears to have been Plato, in his *Cratylus*, who popularized the former interpretation, suggesting that if Heraclitus were correct, it would be impossible to give things names because the things in question would have no ongoing existence (McKirahan 1994:143).
2. Heraclitus of course was the intellectual ancestor of Democritus, founder of atomic theory, who argued that all objects can be broken down into indivisible particles that existed in constant motion. Marx, who harked back to this same tradition via Hegel, wrote his doctoral thesis on Democritus.
3. This “epistemic fallacy,” he argues, underlies most Western approaches to philosophy: Decartes and Hume are two principal culprits.

4. One reason, perhaps, why Marx's dialectic, in however bowdlerized a form, proved to have such popular appeal. At any rate, Hegel's approach was to see models as always relatively "abstract," and hence "one-sided" and incomplete, compared with the "concrete totalities" of actual reality. All of the dialectical tradition assumes that objects are always more complex than any description we could make of them.
5. This does not, incidentally, imply that such events cannot be explained *ex post facto*; Bhaskar also objects to the positivist assumption that explanation and prediction are ultimately, or should ultimately be, the same thing.
6. Of course, having bought the worker's capacity to work, what the capitalist actually gets is their "concrete labor"—whatever it is he actually makes his workers do—and this is how he makes his profit, because in the end workers are able to produce much more than the mere cost of reproducing their capacity to work, but for the present point this is inessential.
7. Note all of this is made possible by the existence of standards of what Marx calls the "socially necessary labor time" required to produce a certain thing: i.e., cultural understandings of what degree of exertion, organization, and so on that can determine what is considered a reasonable amount of time within which to complete a given job. All of this is spelled out very clearly on page 39 of *Capital* (1967 edition).
8. This is true even if one tries to work with some notion like "labor" (a culture-bound notion anyway); certainly it's true if one adopts a more abstract term like "creative energies," which are intrinsically unquantifiable. One cannot even say that a society has a fixed sum of these, which it then must apportion—in the familiar economic sense of "economizing" scarce resources—since the amount of creative potential floating around is never fully realized; it would be hard even to imagine a society in which everyone was always producing to the limit of their mental and physical capacities; certainly none of us would volunteer to live there.
9. Actually, either by dint of identity or simply by dint of learning, or otherwise acquiring certain powers through the process of action itself. "By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature" (*Capital* page 177).
10. Of course, in many forms of everyday action, one is hardly aware even of that. But Turner, like Marx, is concentrating on the sorts of action in which one is most self-conscious, so as to examine their limits.

11. Of course, Freudian ones as well; one reason, perhaps, they are so often paired as critical tools of unusual power.
12. Though false insofar as those who have this partial consciousness do not recognize its partiality.
13. Piaget in fact argues that structuralism in the social sciences made a profound mistake in taking Saussurean linguistics for its model, since language, practically alone among social forms, is based on an utterly arbitrary code that can therefore be seen to stand entirely apart from practice. It is this that allows Saussure's famous distinction between *langue* and *parole*. In almost every other domain of human activity it would be impossible to even talk about a "code" except in terms of practice (Piaget 1970:77-78).
14. So Sahlins 1976:121n49; Bloch (1989:115-16) is only a tad more generous.
15. "...first in sensory-motor action and then practical and technical intelligence, while advanced forms of thought rediscover this active nature in the constitution of operations which between them form efficacious and objective structures. (1965 [1995]:282). As with so many such authors, Piaget develops his own unique terminology, which requires no little study to master fully.
16. This is actually derived a theory of education that assumes that children are always capable of learning tasks and generally operating on a level one step more advanced than they can explain, or in fact, have fully internalized. But one could easily adopt the idea to adult operations as well.
17. As Turner notes (1979c:32): in our own society, it is common at weddings to acknowledge that individual marriages are created by real-life men and women but assert that the institution of marriage was created by God.
18. Piaget himself never much elaborated on the similarities between Marx's ideas and his own (but cf. "Egocentric and Sociocentric Thought," 1965 [1995:276-86]), but he made it clear that he was working in the same dialectical tradition. That egocentrism tends to involve an inversion of subjects and objects similar to that which Marx thought typical of fetishism is a theme that recurs throughout his work. He makes the interesting observation, for example, that children have a systematic tendency to describe almost every feature of the physical world as if it had been instituted by some benevolent intelligence for their benefit; though of course, from a Marxist perspective, this is not entirely untrue, as it is precisely the means by which everything in our environment has been designed for our convenience in one

way or another that becomes disguised by the market, leading to very similar attitudes on the part of many adults.

19. Actually in this case, technically, “abstract labor” or the worker’s capacity to labor—which is formed in the domestic sphere in ways that are effectively invisible from the sphere of production, just as much as the work that formed the product becomes invisible from the other side (see diagram below).
20. The one exception are certain elaborate and beautiful masquerades, about which, however, they offer no exegesis, dismissing the whole business simply as “play”. I might remark in passing that as anarchist societies go, they fall about as far as one can go on the collectivist (as opposed to individualist) side of the spectrum.
21. As for example in the debate in Russian psychology about the minimal units of analysis, starting with Vygotsky, and running through later “Activity Theory” (see Turner and Fajans 1987).
22. He has been known to refer to it as a “minimal modular unit of articulation,” which admittedly lacks a certain elegance. According to Turner this concern with the minimal unit of structure also helps explain Marx’s approach to Capital, in which the factory fulfills a similar role.
23. “Beauty” is a quality which the Kayapo attribute to things or actions which are complete, in the sense of fully realizing their essential nature. potential, or intended goal. “Completeness” in this sense thus has the connotations of “perfection,” and also, considered as action, of “finesse”. Ceremonial activity, properly and fully performed, is “beautiful,” but the capacity to perform certain of its most essential and specialized roles, like the distribution of its most prestigious valuables, is not evenly distributed in the society.” (Turner 1987:42).
24. The term translated “chief” in fact literally means “those allowed to chant”.
25. Their new status can be seen as a proportion of the totality of social labor time, as measured by those units, though in this case in an infinitely less complicated sense. This is because the young adults are the products of two consecutive cycles of social production, and the elders, of three.
26. Incidentally, this does not mean that all systems of value must be socially invidious: it just means a distinction must be made. The comparison could also be made, say, in temporal terms, between a previous state in which one did not have said value, or a future on in which one might not.

27. As in most societies, it's not even something that human beings feel they are themselves really responsible for.
28. A process that, we have seen, tends to have emergent properties not entirely comprehensible to the actors involved. This is actually quite similar to Roy Bhaskar's "transformational model of social action" (1979:32-41), though the latter is formulated much more broadly.
29. Strathern does acknowledge this in a sense when she says that the "aesthetic" rules according to which some things are recognized as valuable and others not tend to become invisible in a gift economy. In this way, she suggests, it is the opposite of a commodity economy, in which the external forms of the objects are all that are stressed and the human relationships involved disappear. This is to my mind a fascinating suggestion, quite brilliant actually, but it does rather dodge the question of how that aesthetic code is produced and reproduced to begin with. Probably this is inevitable considering the British social anthropology tradition in which she is working: it has always insisted on a clear divide between "culture," seen as a set of expressive meanings, and "society," seen as a web of interpersonal relations—which in the American cultural anthropology tradition tend to be seen as two aspects of the same thing. Strathern has little use for either "society" or "culture" as explicit concepts; but she ends up reproducing the division between in her distinction between the social relations, which people are consciously trying to reproduce, and the hidden "conventions of reification" that determine which forms (a pig, a shell, a woman's body) can embody certain types of social relations and which cannot (compare, e.g., Leach 1954).
30. Or more likely, perhaps, different ones that exist on different social levels.
31. As the example should make clear, I am talking not merely about the physical properties of the media (though these do indeed make a great deal of difference), but also the ways in which they are used. "Abstraction" is not a physical quality.
32. Obviously this is a total simplification: I am, in effect, fusing all sorts of social organizations in which people realize themselves personally into the "domestic sphere," ignoring the fact that formal education is separated from the home, and so on. But such simplifications can sometimes be useful, always provided one does not confuse them with reality.
33. It does, as Strathern puts it, tend to "eclipse" all the other, less dramatic actions involved.

34. The Baining, after all, seem to be remarkably nonindividualistic egalitarians; for the Kayapo, egalitarianism does not seem to be all that important a factor.

35. Indeed, almost by definition, since states are normally defined by the systematic use of force.

36. Dumont obviously likes hierarchy and feels that modern, individualistic/egalitarian societies are in some sense abnormal or even perverse—though he also seems to feel that it is impossible to get rid of them (see Robbins 1994, especially his amusing conclusion, “what does Dumont want?”).

Massimo De Angelis

Value(s), Measure(s) and Disciplinary Markets

Introduction

In whatever mode of production and forms of social relation, it is the meaning people give to their action that in the end guides their action, including the actions that reproduce their livelihoods. In a general sense, we understand “value” this meaning. Value, anthropologists tell us, is the way people represent the importance of their own actions to themselves.¹ By representing this importance they have a guide to their action. Value however does not spring out of individuals isolated from the rest of society. Any action, or process, “only becomes meaningful (in Hegelian language, takes on ‘concrete, specific form’) by being integrated into some larger system of action”(Graeber 2001: 30, note 16). Human values of whatever kind cannot be intelligible “without some notion of totality.” That human meaning is a matter of comparison, is something that

almost all classic traditions of the study of meaning agree on — dialectical, hermeneutic, and structuralist alike.... Parts take on meaning in relation to each other, and that process always involves reference to some sort of whole: whether it be a matter of words in a language, episodes in a story, or ‘goods and services’ on the market. So too for value. The realization of value is always, necessarily, implies an at least imagined audience (Graeber 2001: 23).

The articulation between individuals and whole, parts and totality, implies that it is by pursuing value that we reproduce societies. Therefore, different types of value pursuit, hence of value practices, reproduce different types of societies, of wholes, of self-organising systems. Hence the study of how we reproduce capitalist society is a study of how we pursue the values that is characteristics of it. The politics of alternatives is ultimately a politics of value, that is a politics to establish what value, connecting individuals and wholes, is.²

When we approach the question of the production of monetary value therefore, the form of value and value practices endlessly promoted by that social force we call capital, we have to investigate this articulation between the way people represent the importance of their own action to themselves in the form of monetary value, and the *whole* that constitutes their system of reference. Indeed, the problem becomes *how* the former constitutes the latter and the latter is a condition of the former.

Measure, Feedbacks and Networks

For the individual actors in a capitalist market, money as value is the way people represent the importance of what they do. This is measured by the pay check they receive at the end of the months, whether it is a wage or a profit share, a state social security benefit or a 'housekeeping' allowance.

Money represents the ultimate social significance of their actions; the means by which it is integrated in a total (market) system. But it can do so because it is also the *object* of their actions; that why they working: in order to receive a paycheck at the end of the week. Hence, it is a representation that plays a necessary role in bringing into being the very thing it represents (Graeber 2001: 15).³

From the perspective of an individual actor or social "agent", value is also about selecting out, comparing within a system of reference, and acting upon this comparison. The question of "measure" is therefore fundamental in any evaluation processes that guide people action. What distinguishes different evaluation processes is *how* we measure what we measure. In this section, before tackling the specific form of capitalist measure of value, I want to provide some general reflections — that is not specific to the capitalist form — on the activity of measuring as activity integrating parts and wholes, individual and societies, body-subject and social body.

A measure is *always* a discursive device that acts as point of reference, a benchmark, a typical norm, a standard. It is thus a *relational* concept that guides action of the singular body-subject, yet it carries the weight of the habits, traditions and cultures of the social body. In our discourse therefore, the question of measure is the entry point in the study of the interrelation between body subjects and social body.

We measure distance between A and B by a socially defined standard of length, a yardstick. The child playing with fire has *learned* a physical, rather than social, norm (fire hurts), and acts accordingly. By approaching fire she measures her current action in relation to that standard she has learned: fire hurts, stay at a safe distance.

Obviously, the child can also decide to play with the norm, to challenge it, and learn to fine-tune the precision of the measure: fire hurts, but if I quickly pass my finger on the candle-light I will only feel gentle warmth and impress my younger friends.

Any of our actions can be mapped in relation to given norms, in this sense, to a variety of degrees, they are alter-norm. These norms can be set from outside and internalised or contested, welcomed or despised, forced upon the body-subject or chosen by the body-subjects themselves. In other words, when we pose the question of measure here, we only intend to draw attention to the fact that in daily intercourses among body-subjects we measure all the time and that a plurality of measuring processes are possible. Indeed, any degree of coordination and cooperation among the social body or any section of it is possible only through some types of measuring processes which let the individuals' practices to gravitate around given norms and/or constitute new ones, and in either case result in common actions.

Also, measure should not be intended necessarily as a rigid and mechanical comparison between a *given* norm-standard and an object. This might be the case of course, as any time we pick up a tape and measure the length of the new closet to see whether it really fits in the bedroom. But in our experience we can also see that a particular measure can be the result of social practice rather than its condition. A little domestic vignette will do as example: my partner and I have just reached an agreement to leave a space in our small kitchen clear, always, so us to make it easier for any of us to prepare food, whatever is the condition of the rest of the kitchen! Now, that space is now a socially defined norm, in which individual body-subjects will use to measure their activities. What was the *result* of a decision making process (in which the new was formed), will now become the standard *condition* of future production. Not only, but degree and forms of commitment to that norm by each body-subject becomes a *centre of gravity* of a relational dance, in which play and conflict, pleasure and frustration, will emerge out of the social interaction *around* that norm. Norm and the activity of measuring here is the parametric centre around which the *community* is organised. This centre is a *common*, what particular body-subjects share notwithstanding their *difference* in attitudes, needs and desires. No social relation among people can do without some types of commons that act as a centre of their interaction. Not even in capitalist production as we will see.

It goes without saying that norms need not be *decided*, they can as well emerge out of a social interaction, and become normalised without the body-subjects becoming aware of these norms. All the same, social actors, depending on the powers they can exercise and their aspirations, can strive to dictate or abolish norms and

corresponding measuring activities, or keep them unchanged or modify them in different circumstances. And circumstances will in turn depend on the interactions among body-subjects redefining their needs and desires as well as the modalities of exercise of power in the establishment of new norms and the measuring activity.

To introduce the question of measure is thus to introduce the question of *process* and *feedback* in the articulation between the social norm and the actual practices of the body-subject. It is to open up the question: *how* do we measure what we measure? Who or what sets the standard for the measurement? What forms of measurement are used in different discourses? What powers have been deployed and/or repressed with this or that measuring processes? And what loops articulate human practices to practices of measures?

The problematic of measure is central to the articulation between the reproduction of body-subjects and the social body. This articulation can be conceptualised as in a *feedback* relation, that is the modern way to say and work with an old insight, namely that we are *social* individuals (or subjects), and that we change the world but in conditions that we do not choose (yet it is *us* who change it!).

Body subjects and singularities in general, act through measure, and their activities are moments of feedback loops. Feedbacks are relational, that is put singular body-subjects into given relations to each other, following certain patterns. The extent to which these loops are iterations repeated in certain ways, they give rise to certain networks patterns constituting the social body. Social networks therefore are the emergent outcome of activities of singularities and in turn they are the premise to individual body-subjects being in the world. Homeostatic processes can therefore only occur *through* networks and vice versa, networks are the organising of the social body going through its homeostatic processes (Capra 1997: 82-83). Our study of social networks thus must always reflect the awareness of their link some type of homeostatic processes.

Furthermore, to understand networks as emergent from repetition of homeostatic processes, implies to reconceptualise the problematic of “center” of power. Castell (2000) and Hardt and Negri (2000) are part of a trend that have recently argued, although from different premises, today’s “global flows” cannot be understood in terms of a center of power. In the global field of social interactions, there is indeed no one visible center of power that can be held responsible of how social relations are articulated and lived. Yet, there is a multilateralism of “centers”, a plurality of institutions such as the IMF, WB, Governments, and so on that are responsible — in

different ways — to make sure that our interactions in the planet, what they call “the economy”, follow certain general modalities, is organized around a certain *parametric center*, the norms and values of market relations. While the making sure that our interactions increasingly take the form of market interactions is the realm of what we call enclosures, the sustaining and reproducing of this parametric center is a matter of disciplinary integration of singularities across the social body.

Thus, although it is important to reject those discourses that see social transformation in terms of the “seizure of power” of a center — when in fact there is no one center of power to rule over our lives as such, although we would be all better off without IMF, WB, WTO and similar institutions to structurally adjust our lives— we must not dismiss the problematic of center around which our actions gravitate. We need instead to recast it in terms of a *strategic* center that promotes enclosures and commodification of life on the social body and a consequent emergent parametric center, a center of gravity of capital’s homeostatic reproduction that seems today pervading all networks in the social body, all spheres of life. The study of this emergent parametric center is the study of capitalist commodity production.

Toni Negri has also argued repeatedly in several places, the most visible of which is *Empire* written with Michael Hardt, that today capital’s “value is beyond measure”. Harry Cleaver’s and George Caffentzis’ contributions in this issue of *The Commoner* argue quite the opposite, both emphasizing in different ways how Marx’s “law of value” is still relevant in contemporary capitalism as it was at the time of Marx, if by it we mean a theory that help us to uncover and problematise “work” as the terrain of class struggle.

My task here is to add to these contributions by approaching value from a more general angle, one that not only wants to take the approach that studies value as process and class struggle very seriously, but want enquire *how* commodity values are about processes of class struggle. To pose the question of the *how* is to me to highlight the question of the *mode* of relation/production/articulation linking up individual and society, singularities and social body. Now, if we understand value in general as the importance people give to their action and understand the norms and standards through which people judge this “importance” as emerging from a continuous interacting *process* of social constitution, then in conditions in which this process takes the capitalist form Negri’s claim simply does not make sense. In this and following sections we revisit a classic preoccupation of political economy, capitalist production of value, in light of our previous discussion that emphasizes the articulation between singularities and social body and understand this articulation as a social *process* of

measuring. To readers who are familiar with debates on the labour theory of value — which we cannot survey here — this approach shall strike as different from the traditional approach taken by Marxist economists. In the latter the concept of socially necessary labour time (that for Marx constitutes the “substance” of commodity value) is regarded as *distinct* and separated from *the process* of the constitution of commodity values, in that it is the result of *past* processes. This is not in the approach I take, for which socially necessary labour time is a sequential loop which articulates the past as the perception of the future that guides the *present* action; a social standard and an individual singularity’s positioning in relation to it; the pervasive micro-conflictuality of “isolated individuals” as well as sharp macro-conflicts; and, although we can only touch upon it here, the link between production and reproduction as terrain of this struggle. Furthermore, and as anticipated by Cleaver (1979), unlike the approach taken by traditional Marxist economists, competition among capitals is not distinct from the process of class struggle, but is one and the same thing, that appear as competition or social conflict depending on the discursive political positionality of our reading.

Indeed, this “sequential” way to look at the formation of capitalist value — which to me is the only obvious way to look at commodity values as constituted by a continuous social process of struggle over work (its degree, nature, intensity, extension, rationales and pays off) — plays odd with traditional Marxist approaches to political economy stressing instead the “structure” of quanta of labour-values across society through input-output tables and simultaneous equations.⁴ Since this structural approach is also — and paradoxically giving his otherwise emphasis on social conflict and processes of constitution— the starting point of Negri’s critique of the law of value, by recasting the law of value in terms of processes and class conflict, I hope we can dispense with the “dirty water” in Negri approach *without* throwing the baby.

Commodity Values

To understand the general feature of capitalist social relations is to understand the loops or feedback mechanisms articulating individual singularities *acting* in the *process* of reproducing their livelihoods. In a capitalist system, in which what is worth, “wealth”, takes the form of commodities, the reproduction of people’s livelihoods and correspondent value practices is largely waived into production of commodities.

As we have seen, value is the importance people attribute to action and as such is measured by discursively and culturally given units of measurement. Commodity value

is this importance turned upside down, it is the importance people attribute to the *products* of their action, in so far as these products are object of market exchange and the production is production for profit. When things have a price tag, it is these things that have value, not the human labour that has produced them. The importance of all commodities here is measured through money, i.e. units of a particular commodity (gold, silver, etc.) or, in modern times, a sign of value (dollars, euros, etc.). We call this, the external measure of value, and this is the most obvious one we are all familiar with. It is obvious that any product of human action presupposes action, but when we measure things by money, it is like we have become myopic of this action, of *its* value. This myopia leaves us with problematic effects when we put on some spectacles, and we realise that we socially value the action of arm dealers hundreds of times more than that of nurses, we value the actions of stockbrokers hundreds of times more than that of fire-fighters: their respective pay checks bear witness to this. We must of course be aware that there is an ongoing struggle against this myopia, a struggle over visibility of the connection and articulation between human values and commodity values. These struggles are actually struggles among different value practices, and they actually *constitute* the social production of commodities.

It is the way this importance is effectively attributed, the *mode* in which this is done, that interests us here. It is in this mode that we uncover the secret of the reproduction of capitalist society and the connection between individual and social body peculiar to it. When we reflect on this connection, we encounter another measure of commodity value, a translation of the external one and that shifts our attention from the done to the doing, from commodities to work, from things to life processes and their correspondent social relations. Following Marx (1867) we can call the immanent measure of value that labour which is socially necessary for the production of a commodity. As its correspondent external measure, also *this immanent measure of value is constituted by the ongoing working of capitalist disciplinary processes (and therefore value struggles) passing through markets* as well as their state implanted simulations. To appreciate this immanent measure we must look at the market as a *continuous* process of value (price) formation through distribution of rewards and punishments and not, as in mainstream economics and a variety of strands of radical political economy, as a static picture.

This immanent measure of value is hidden from the view of daily working of markets, from my or your experience as commodity sellers and buyers, because it is a property that *emerges out* of the continuous process of our interaction. Yet, it somehow fits with the experience of you and I being caught in a rat race to reproduce

our livelihoods. And when we bring this reflection to the foreground, we realise that the disciplinary mechanism that create commodity values is at the same time the disciplinary mechanism that attributes value to the social actions that produced those commodities, that creates patterns of how we produce them, what we produce, how much we produce them, how we relate to each other in producing them, what system of needs we create, and how we distribute our social doing, our *social labour* across the social body. Patterns in our social cooperation in other words, are to a large extent emerging from a disciplinary process we have subjected ourselves to, a process that *includes* struggles against it.

But as we have argued, value is the meaning we give to action. Individuals pursue value, by comparing and referring to a whole. It is pursuing value within the confinement of market relations that individual “actors” compare values of different products or compare among values of the same products produced with different methods and conditions of production and *act upon* this comparison. The *effect* of this acting enters into feedback relations with millions of others, it contribute to produce new average prices and profit and it produces effects that act as material forces for other actors making similar comparison and acting upon them. The ongoing process of this act of measurement of value and *action* upon it, is what gives rise to what we value socially, and it does so *whatever* is our individual or collective aggregate *ethical* standpoint. In other words, “it is the system, man!”

In order to see this more in detail, let us enter one of these loops among millions, and see how it articulates individuals and totality, parts and whole, hence how it creates values and reproduces the corresponding system of value. Along with Marx, the movement of the social force that we call capital in the pursuit of its own self-expansion, can be portrayed with the money circuit M-C-M' which is composed by the act of “buying,” M-C and selling, C-M'. If buyers are found and the sale realized at sufficient unit prices, investors will be able to pocket the difference between the two sums of money as profit, that is $M' = M + \Delta M$, in which ΔM is the extra amount of money (profit) obtained. The M-C-M' circuit embeds a process of production in which, according to Marx, values are created by the activity of doing, labour. Linked to millions of similar M-C-M' loops, the money circuit of capital integrate different branches of social cooperation of labour.

The integration occurs through the construction of a nervous system across the social body called price system, a nervous system that carries information of a particular type and that take the form of monetary values. Dear or cheap, commodities are sold or bought as a means to fulfill particular desires by the actors in the markets,

or, to put it with Hayek, particular “plans”. Whether the end of these desires or plans is to meet the immediate need of the body or the spirit, or rather these commodities serve as means for the production of other commodities, is, from the perspective of markets, irrelevant. In both cases, to individual actors in the market the information carried by prices is a condition for action. “Shopping around” is common to both “consumers” on a tight budget and wishing to make ends meet, as well as capitalist investors wanting to maximize profit and needing to buy machines and hire workers. There is a difference however. While in the former case the flow of monetary value represented by those purchased commodities disappear from circulation with the act of consumption and correspondent satisfaction of desire, in the latter case the desire or plan of the actors who purchase the commodities is to receive a greater flow of monetary value that is, a profit. Monetary value is therefore not only retained, there is also the expectation of an extra value added on to it.

From the perspective of the investors therefore the information received from the purchase price of the material components of production is not only measured in terms of alternative purchase prices. It is also measured in terms of the *expected* price that the commodity produced with the purchased machines and raw materials as well as the hired or subcontracted workers is able to fetch. An expected profit (the desire or plan of the investor) obviously corresponds to this expected sell price, profit calculated from the difference between expected sale price and purchase price of the inputs of production. In turn, the expected sale price and correspondent profit is measured by, that is *compared to*, the given *average* prevalent in the market. For new commodities, for which no correspondent market prices can serve as yardstick, or for commodities that take a long time to produce, a greater dose of risk is involved, a risk that investors seek to minimize with market research on our desires on one hand, and advertisement to “persuade” us on our needs, on the other.

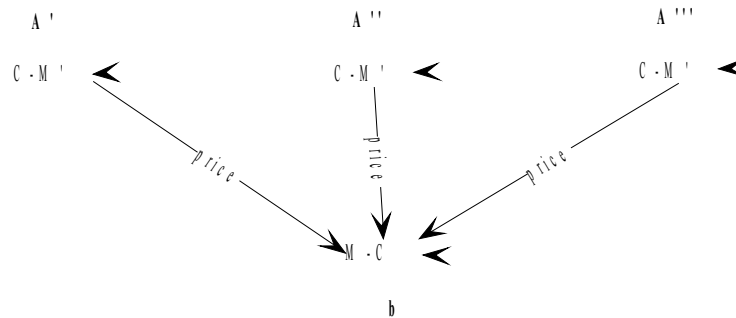
But the information carried by flows of monetary values in the forms of purchase and sale prices, only stops at the gates of production, with the purchase of the material conditions of production such as machines and raw materials and of labour power, i.e the M-C moment of the money circuit of capital. It is also a flow of monetary value that reappears in the sale of the finished product or service, that is C-M'. As Marx argues, in between these two moments there is the moment of production, in which the flow of value transmutes into a flow of different form. From flows of monetary value it turns into flow of human activity, doing, *labour*. Hence, when we look at this flow we cannot avoid interrogating the subjects doing the doing and their system of relations and understanding this flow of labour as a turbulent flow of

emotions, energies, affects, which turbulence reflects a struggle among *conflicting* values and value practices. On one side, the value practices that aim at maximizing flows of monetary values upon which survival in the market rat race depend on. From *this* perspective, all other human value practices are subordinated to the monetary measure and profit. On the other side, there are the value practices that constitute the social flows of doing understood as a network of affects and reproduction, hence not simply as means to an end, but as *life processes*.

The lives of the doers, the subjects, are thus traversed by different value practices that often conflict with each other, those that originate from their own experiences and images, their own bodily needs, desires, plans and correspondent modes of measures, those in a word that constitute their own *conati* of self-preservation and well being and are relationally linked to their own communities, and those instead that reproduce capital. To come out of the other end of the M-C-M' and meet the plans of the investors the flow of monetary values has to go through this process of transfiguration, taming and subordinating the values and value practices of the doers and directing them towards a purposeful action the end of which is not theirs, but fulfill as much as possible the expectations of those who have "invested" money in them.

Now, let us consider this process of transmutation of flows of monetary values into flows of doing and again into flows of monetary values as we follow the sequence M-C . . . P . . . C'-M' as a *continuous* process, and in which, following Marx, . . . P . . . represents the production process . And as we do that let us consider the fact that this loop, this particular sequence M-C-M', is linked to others similar (M-C-M') or dissimilar (C-M-C) loops: those who sell or would like to sell them their inputs of productions (MP and LP), those who buy or could buy their commodities, and their direct or indirect competitors. All these links among loops are, in the form that interests us here, information flows of the types described before when talking about prices. Yet let us also keep in mind that in each of these loops, whether other capitalist producers (M-C-M'), or subsistence producers (C-M-C) there is a life process of doing, although in quite different organizational and motivational forms.

Figure 1: The Formation of SNLT



For example, let us imagine we are the executives of a company producing toys, say A' in figure 1, competing with other toy firms A'' and A''', and the price signals we receive from the market, b, tell us that someone out there, say A'', is producing similar toys and sell them at lower prices, thus threatening our market shares and profit. In figure one, this is symbolized by the fact that all toys producers A', A'' and A''' try to sell their commodities at given prices in market b. As a managing director I must intervene and make sure that we take measures to defend our survival as profit making firm (indeed, within the present rules of the game, this is the only way for us to survive). So we act, we look at ways to reduce our unit price without affecting our profit margins (we will have here strike a strategic balance between short terms and expected long terms), on which our existence depend through the perceived solidity of our shares (and thus their market value). Somehow, there are always plenty of efficiency savings we can do, plenty of trimming, of things that we find redundant, that *from the perspective of the monetary value we seek and guides our action*, are not really needed to the process of production. Of course somehow, whenever we try to cut, there is always someone who complains, who has reason to object, who counterpoises *other values* to those we seek as competitive and profitable firm. Surely we could always identify pockets of resistance of people wanting to live beyond our means, rent positions of “shirkers” who are undermining the competitiveness of all. The degree of resistance will of course depend on a variety of factors that does not interest us here, but that of course are fundamental for the definition of the actual *form* of the strategy and outcome. But the point here is that the reaction to a market signal of this kind corresponds to the deployment of strategies to overcome some internal resistance. *The first systemic effect of our acting from the information signals we have received is our attempt to overcome resistance.*

So let us assume that, to a variety of degrees depending on the net result between social forces running in opposing direction and correspondent value practices, the usual menu of options is deployed: cuts are implemented, new ways to organize production are introduced, new requests for speed ups of bodies and minds, new emotional strain, new forms of labour organizations. And if this is not sufficient, automation is introduced, machines that are supposed to increase productivity and thus reduce unit costs. Also, new product design ideas are promoted, including brand design. Finally, wages could be cut, workers turned from permanent to temporary contracts, or vice versa reward those with permanent contract in exchange with exceptional dedication to the monetary values pursued by the firm. In any case, the community in which the workers reproduce their labour power will be affected; will have for example to compensate different rhythms and forms of work with different reproduction work. Two pay checks today buys a standard of living that one wage bought yesterday for example, and this goes along with different types of organization of reproduction at home, different types of input of reproduction such as purchasing more ready meals and less preparation of home made stew. A variety of processes of relational feedbacks will affect the changes occurring here. The point of this pretty obvious story is simply that whatever I am doing, the effect of the price signals I received as *benchmark* from the market has reverberated throughout a production and reproduction chain, both of which are today increasingly taking up a global dimension, affecting the lives and livelihoods of few people as of few millions, depending on the scale of the production and reproduction network.

Finally, I am ready to throw my new commodities back on the market, but this time it is my price that will be able to send signals to the world. It will do that by virtue of a price that, to the observers and decision makers of other capitalist loops, will be object of comparison, evaluation, measure in the same way as it was for our original firm. After all their own rate of profits and market shares (affecting the volume of profit) will be threatened if the new resulting *average* market price puts them off the market. Indeed, the process of restructuring in our original toy firm, a process that followed the information received by the market, has now produced an information flows that has affected the market average. However, if from the perspective of the competitors this is only an information flow that informs their own action, from the perspective of the doers whose doing has allowed producing commodities at the new price, it meant and still means particular forms of life flows and processes, work.

To us who are conceptualizing this process and observing it as a whole, the two flows of monetary value and work cannot be but *related* and indeed what we called

external and immanent measure of value cannot be but two sides of the same coin, distinguishable when we look at things from different perspectives. To us the new prices will signal for example whether and to what extent that resistance has been overcome in that company, whether and to what extent the fragment of social doing that occurred within the confinement of that firm conforms to a social production norm, and to what extent and direction it deviates from it. Whatever is the result, one firm has now contributed to change the average price and thus *the benchmark* against which both our and our competitors' actions must be measured. From the perspective of the competing firms, with the ongoing process of measuring deviations from a benchmark *and* contributing to the formation of price benchmarks, the system creates a web of signals that constitutes the market system redistributing rewards and punishment in the forms of profits and losses.

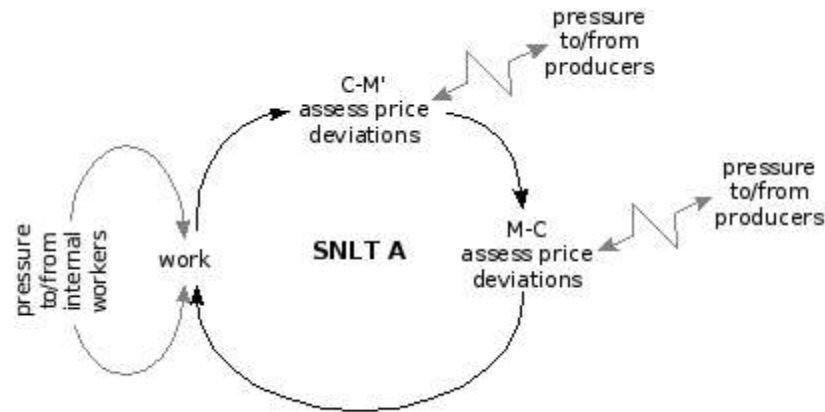
From the perspective of the doers in all competing firms, as well as their communities, rewards and punishment in the forms of wages, job security, entitlement, contractual forms of labour, rhythms and form of work organization, as well as conditions of reproduction make sure that their lives are articulated in a rat race ruled by values posited *outside* them. Looking it from their perspective, the result is similar to looking it from the perspective of the companies they work for because also from the perspective of the doing new benchmarks are created for others to measure. But benchmarks here are not only informational flows, rather concrete socially defined norms of production that describe how we produce, what we produce, how much we produce. It is also clear that individual parts of the social body might *deviate* from this social definition of norms. Indeed, in disciplinary markets the ongoing opposition among these deviations *constitutes* what Marx calls socially necessary labour time (SNLT) the norm that emerges from this ongoing opposition across the social body in the production of commodities. SNLT has a double meaning, depending on whether we look at it from the perspective of the whole of the social body or its parts. From the perspective of the whole, this is an average, the average labour time which is necessary in society for the production of a particular commodity. But from the perspective of individual productive nodes, the same average is a *benchmark*, a discursive device that signals a particular type of information, in aid of decision making and action with respect of conditions of production and working rhythms. But as we have seen, these two perspectives, the perspective of the part and of the whole, are *articulated* by a *process*, a feedback loop that constitutes the norm and that catch our life-activities within it.

It must be pointed out that the same mechanism can occur on the other way round. Rather than receiving from the market a benchmark, firms might as well receive from communities a “signal” of a different kind, a benchmark for “environmental and labour standards”, pollution levels or wage level and union rights. The extent to which communities are successful in making their “signals” discipline firms to different norms, to different concepts of what is *socially necessary*, depends of course on the social force they are able to deploy, that they are able to mobilize, and the degree of their coordination and solidarity so as to minimize the effects of their being pit against each other. Thus, in the end, the socially necessary labor time of any commodity is the ongoing result of an interaction that passes through the market. However at its core we find the struggle of communities over the doing of social life processes and the conditions for the reproduction of their livelihoods. Capitalist value is a relation of struggle (Clever 1979).

We can illustrate the general feature of this process of competitive interaction among different capitalists as an articulation among feedback processes as in figure 2. Each of the phases of accumulation of branch A (the toy industry) plays a role in the formation of a SNLT, a standard of production. In the phase of sale (C-M'), each company will assess market average, and consequently make their decisions. At the same time, they will also receive information from the market of their own inputs, and will ponder on whether it is convenient or not to continue hire the same groups of workers, or purchase from the same suppliers. These assessments of price deviations that occur in the two moments of circulation (M-C and C-M') will demand different strategies, and indeed will have different implications, depending whether the degree of monopoly or monopsony of the industry, but it does not change on its essential feature according to market structure. The information collected in the process of circulation is then evaluated in such a way as to give rise to specific set of strategies, all of which will have an effect on communities, near or distant, whether through change in the labour compositions, whether through effects on wages, whether through change in suppliers or whether through direct interventions on their own workers' rhythms.

The communities will then have to compensate, and compensation is always through some type of struggle, whether the struggle of copying with new rhythms, and the juggling of overlapping responsibilities between waged and unwaged work, or the struggles to get organized and collectively set a limit to the race.

Figure 2: The Homeostasis of SNLT

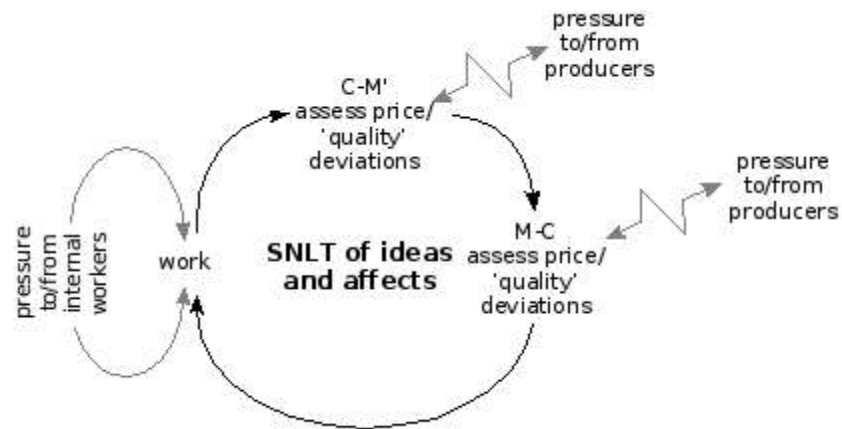


It may appear that the discussion as presented thus far has at least two limitations. One is that our emphasis on the doing as moment of conflict seems to portray the doers as victims of the initiative of capital and therefore putting up a struggle in the form of *resistance* to this initiative. I have here only followed a conventional Marxist narrative to seek to open it up. As I have indicated, from the perspective of the general features of this process the initiative can come — and indeed often comes — from the doers themselves and their communities. In this case, it is this initiative that sends a signal to the owners of capital and their administrators. But it must be pointed out that even in the classic case in which the initiatives comes from the latter, the resistance which is put by the doers can and often will take novel organizational and relational forms, that gives voice to new subjectivities.

There is also another limitation that may be pointed out. It is the fact that our treatment seems not to include a particular form of doing in production, a form that many observers believe is a peculiar contemporary future of what they call post-fordism, namely the doing that creates the new, that imagines, that innovates, and that is based on team work, forms of cooperation and relational labour among the doers which give them a higher autonomy of conceptualization and production than the classic mass workers tied to assembly lines have. Hardt and Negri (2000) among others refer to this as “immaterial labour” and go so far as to believe that this form of labour is beyond capitalist measure precisely because it is a form of social cooperation that is constituted by relational and communicational patterns defined by the doers themselves (hence measured by themselves).⁵

But the ongoing creation of a SNLT is not only a feature of what is called, “material” (capitalist) production, but also what is referred to as “immaterial” (capitalist) production, i.e. the production of ideas and affects (See Figure 3). Also here we can have *ongoing* competition among producers who are then locked in the feedback loop of their own rat race against each other. What is continuously compared in order to give rise to differentials, here are the perceived quality of ideas, whether in the form of creative work for advertisement or those leading to products or process innovation, and the time and efficiency of their execution, of getting the job done. All the same, in terms of affects, what is measured is not only the speed of service, but also the perceived service quality as measured by given indicators: smile, ‘customer satisfaction’, and so on. In both these cases, the set of systematic pressures work all the same as in the traditional case of “material” work. The work of a waitress *having* to smile to a nasty customer, or a cashier instructed to utter a sentence “how-are-you-doing-do-you-have-a-loyalty-card-have-a-nice-day” not only reproduces within the doing subjects the conflict among value practices we were talking about in the case of material workers, but also poses specific *limits* to the communicational range and forms of immaterial works. Indeed, with respect to this immaterial labour, the degree of autonomy of the doers has precise limits defined by processes of capitalist measure and *not* by the creative workers themselves. The *selection* of new ideas that can be turned into products or processes of doing, occur with respect of the SNLT process of measurement. The communicational patterns within work teams, is supposed to be bounded by the priorities of their employers or the market goals as measured by price-quality and profit-benchmarks deviations. Nurses, doctors, teachers have a variety of degrees of autonomy but are increasingly exposed to a measure which is posed *outside* them, which is heteronymous, which instruct them, *in a context of declining resources and number of staff*, to meet certain quality targets that relates in a way or in another to external benchmarks (Harvie 2005).

Figure 3: SNLT of ideas and affects



In many public services in which competition *does not* exist and workers have a long tradition of cooperation (education, health), competition is thus literally *invented and simulated by state bodies*, league tables are constructed according to given criteria, and funding is linked to the meeting of these criteria. The ultimate market punishment — bankruptcy — is “simulated” for those schools and hospital that are said to “fail” to meet those criteria and thus closed down, with the effect that the children and the patient displaced will be going to other schools and hospitals starved with resources thus intensifying the waged work of teachers, nurses and doctors left on the job and the unwaged work of communities who have now to balance their life, sending children to more distant schools, going through the emotional work of compensation to heteronomous forces whose reasons are difficult to rationalize.

Prices, by representing rates of transformation of flows of commodities and money, act as signals to the parts involved in taking decision. The set of prices and the set of signals they send to the different actors of the global economy constitute a sort of map of the nervous system of what we may call the global factory. The process of neoliberal globalization that has intensified market interaction across the globe, implies to articulate every region in the world and every areas of social practice through monetary “nerves ending” (in forms of prices) that can signal back to the “matrix” of the global market as to the productive state of the living productive cells (individuals) or complex of cells (from families and communities to firms and nations, depending on the level of discursive aggregation). The global market thus is suppose to operate in this way as a central nervous system, although its place is itself a network of places.

The signaling is highly complex, and is part of the homeostatic mechanism of self-preservation of capital which pits livelihoods against each other and enforces work discipline and the rat race over the social body. As any nervous system, price signals are not just a matter of “zeros” and “ones”. They do not simply say that a given productive cell is on or off, that a commodity producer is out of business or is working fine, that in a region people are starving and not meeting their needs and in another they are flourishing. Instead, price signals capture in a simple quantitative monetary expression a highly variegated range of states and their *differential*. For example, price signal can index the cost effectiveness in which a commodity is produced in relation to the same commodity produced in another place. They can signal the future prospective cost of producing a given commodity. They can register the effect of floods, strikes, social unrest and political instability, tax policies, advertisement and similar brain washing, “brand fidelity” and so on. They can, in other word, put order into chaos, but of course, a particular *type* of order, one that is founded on the *self-preservation* and therefore *self-expansion* of capital.

Measure and Struggles

We have seen that to investigate the specific form of value of the capitalist mode of production, is to investigate this articulation between the way people represent the importance of their own action in terms of money and the *whole* that constitutes their system of reference. But, since the values that guide people action are also *non-monetary values*, to investigate commodity values is to investigate the *articulation* between them, the articulation between the actions sparked by different *ways and meanings* that people have to represent the importance of their own action. At any given moment, both non-monetary and monetary values guide people’s action, and they often do it in clashing ways, as they point at different directions, telos or conati. It seems to me that this articulation between different value practices, both at the level of the subject and at the level of the social forces that their networks give rise to, is what we call class struggle. This struggle is *class* struggle in so far the social forces guided by non-monetary values posit themselves as a limit, in given contexts and conditions, to capital’s accumulation, to the pursuit and accumulation of monetary value at whatever scale of social action.

It is obvious that stated in these terms, class struggle is pervasive in society. It is in the workers demanding higher wages, and in “consumers” boycotting a brand. It is in environmentalists stopping the construction of a new airport terminal, and in women questioning traditional division of labour and correspondent relations. It is in refugees

crossing the borders, in landless peasants reclaiming land and in indigenous people reclaiming dignity. But it is also in the universe of micro-conflictuality happening at any scale of social cooperation. All these and many others are instances of non-monetary values practices and correspondent social forces that in given contexts and circumstances posit a limit to capital and its own specific value practices. Unless the different value practices posited by these movements are able to waive themselves into self-sustaining social feedback processes that are alternative to the parametric centre of capital's value mechanism and correspondent mode of relations, these struggles risk to be either repressed or assimilated into capitalist evolving forms. We need to work through a politics of value that problematises strategically how we sustain new social relations of production, new value practices through which we reproduce our individual livelihoods and their articulation, vis-à-vis the value practices of capital that all want to enclose so as we run in a pointless rat race., reproducing scarcity while we could celebrate abundance.⁶

Notes

1. See David Graeber's article in this issue of *The Commoner* extracted from his book (Graeber 2001).
2. "We are back, then, to a 'politics of value'; but one very different from Appadurai's Neoliberal Version. The ultimate stakes of politics, according to Turner, is not even the struggle to appropriate value; it is the struggle to establish what value is . . . Similarly, the ultimate freedom is not the freedom to create or accumulate value, but the freedom to decide (collectively or individually) what it is makes life worth living. In the end, then, politics is about the meaning of life. Any such project of constructing meanings necessarily involves imagining totalities (since this is the stuff of meaning), even if no such project can ever be completely translated into reality—reality being, by definition, that which is always more complicated than any construction we can put on it." (Graeber 2001: XX)
3. In this sense, Marx's *Capital* can also be seen as symbolic analysis, but one that is rooted in a material process that ties together meaningful internationalities and social production of meanings in the process of reproduction of livelihoods. "Money has meaning for the actors then because it sums up their intentions (or the importance of their intentional actions, which comes down pretty much the same thing). However, it can only do so by integrating into a contrastive totality, the market: since it is only by means of money that my individual actions and

capacities become integrated as a proportion of the totality of everyone's" (Graeber 2001: 16). See also Turner (1979: 20-21) for which "money is a concrete token of value. Value is the way in which an individual actor's actions take on meaning, for the actor herself, by being incorporated into a larger social whole."

4. In the last few years there has been a lively debate between "equilibrium" and "non-equilibrium" Marxist economists over two famous traditional areas of controversy, namely the "transformation of values into price of production" and the "falling rate of profit." See for example Freeman, Kliman and Wells (2004).
5. Hardt and Negri for example refer to labour being "outside measure" today due to the impossibility of calculating and ordering production at a global level. So "in fact, from our perspective the transcendentalism of temporality is destroyed most decisively by the fact that it is now impossible to measure labor, either by convention or by calculation. Time comes back entirely under collective existence and thus resides within the cooperation of the multitude" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 401). They also refer to labour being "beyond measure" in its ability to constitute the biopolitical fabric of Empire from below (Hardt and Negri 2000: 357).
6. Many thanks to David Harvie for his useful comments on an earlier version of this paper. The usual caveats apply.

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George Caffentzis

Immeasurable Value? An Essay on Marx's Legacy

Dedicated to Sol Yurick

Introduction: A Bleak House legacy?

"The Lawyers have twisted it into such a state of bedevilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared from the face of the earth. It's about a Will, and the trusts under a Will—or it was, once. It's about nothing but Costs, now. We are always appearing, and disappearing, and swearing,, and interrogating, and filing, and cross-filing, and arguing, and sealing, and motioning, and referring, and reporting, and revolving about the Lord Chancellor and all his satellites, and equitably waltzing ourselves off to dusty death, about Costs. That's the big Question. All the rest, by some extraordinary means, has melted away."

"But it was, sir," said I, to bring him back, for he began to rub his head, "about a Will?"

—Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853)

Opposition to capitalism was not invented by Marx. Anti-capitalist movements had an enormous presence before his time and they continue to "change the world" long after the collapse of the governments run by self-defined Marxist parties in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.¹ Surely, reading and accepting Marx's work was never a necessary condition for opposing capitalism, but is it still sufficient?

Whatever the answer to that question, surely Marx's textual legacy stimulates tremendous ambivalence in the anti-capitalist movement. For it is hard to imagine a serious analysis and critique of capitalism that would not use at least some of this mountainous legacy, but there is an anxiety in approaching it due to its alleged associations with Stalinism, 19th-century capitalism and its political economy,

totalitarianism, secular humanism, or any of a thousand other contemporary phantoms haunting one or another person's imagination. Is Marx's textual mountain something of a cursed (though tantalizingly huge) legacy like the one in Dickens' *Bleak House* which literally drives a number of characters insane in their futile efforts to appropriate it through endless legal procedures in a hellish "Court of Chancery"?

The ambivalence expressed in this question cries out for a criterion that would neatly separate the useful parts of Marx's work from the out-dated or even reactionary. There have been a variety of efforts in the past to provide such a criterion. For example, the famous "early" versus "late" Marx debates from the 1950s to the 1970s provided simple temporal dichotomies between acceptable and unacceptable texts—before or after 1848, before or after 1858, before or after 1867 (cf., the *locus classicus* of this effort being (Althusser 1996)). But they have proven as interminable and indecisive as the "Jarndyce and Jarndyce" case of *Bleak House*.

In this essay, I will investigate whether there is an appropriate criterion to distinguish the useful from eliminable works of Marx. I will do this indirectly via an analysis and critique of Antonio Negri's and his collaborator Michael Hardt's work on these issues, since Negri, to his credit, has enthusiastically addressed the "Marx ambivalence" syndrome thoroughly, positively, and often unseasonably for decades while Michael Hardt has joined him in the last decade in presenting a widely discussed and conceptually simple answer to the "Is there Marx after Marx?" questions. They claim that though much of Marx's work is still vital to the anti-capitalist movement, the part of Marx's work that logically depends upon the Law of Value should be rejected while that part that is not dependent on the Law could be usefully introduced into the anti-capitalist philosophy of the future. I will call this dichotomy of Marxist texts, Negri and Hardt's "*criterion of viability*." They justify this criterion on two counts:

(i) the Law of Value is obsolete, i.e., it was applicable, at best, to 19th century capitalism, but it has lost all grip on the reality of contemporary postmodern capitalism [e.g., (Hardt and Negri 1994: 9, 175), (Hardt and Negri 2000: 209, 355-359);

(ii) the Law forms the ideological basis of unacceptable socialist and Stalinist reactions to capitalism.

Surely Negri and Hardt are not alone in trying to rid the anti-capitalist movement of Marx's rather embarrassing continuity with the "classical tradition" in political economy which is presumably typified by Marx's presumed adherence to the Law of Value. Marx's Labor Theory of Value with its Law of Value corollary, is continually attacked as being either empirically passé or conceptually incoherent. Sraffians like

Ian Steedman and “analytic Marxists” like G. A. Cohen and Jon Elster argue that the key question for the anti-capitalist movement is simply whether the capitalists can justly divide the productive results of the system [(Steedman 1977), (Cohen 1988), (Elster 1985)]. If the answer is “no,” then that is reason enough to challenge it. Why be saddled with an elaborate and, in the bargain, mythical “value-foundation” for an anti-capitalist ideology, especially in an era when “foundationalism” is out of favor as a philosophical/political attitude (Derrida 1994: 170)?

Negri and Hardt differ from such critics in that they claim to find this rejection of the Law of Value in Marx's own work, especially the “Fragment on Machines” in the *Grundrisse* and in the unpublished Part Seven of *Capital I*, “Results of the Immediate Process of Production”). They claim that Marx—in Cassandra-like moments between 1858 and 1866, especially while writing the midnight notebooks later called the “Grundrisse,” (translated as the “Foundation of a Critique of Political Economy”) and the “Results”—prophesied that the development of capitalism would undermine the Law of Value...*in the future*. Negri and Hardt argue that Marx's “future” is simply now. That is, capitalism came to a point during the late 20th century when:

(i) science and technology which are the products of the “general intellect” and “immaterial labor,” not material labor, dominate the productive metabolism with nature;

(ii) capitalism subsumes under its own control not only the productive process, but all of the allied processes of social reproduction (education, sexuality, communication, demography, etc.), i.e., “biopolitics” in the terminology that Negri and Hardt borrow from Foucault.

They claim that these developments literally “explode” (to use Marx's term in the *Grundrisse's* “Fragment”) the older value form and put the Law of Value in crisis.

In this essay I will show why Negri's and Hardt's criterion of viability based on the rejection of the Law of Value is not the best way to “save” Marx's work for the anti-capitalist movement.²

Part I: Marx on Value and the Law of Value: Prolegomena

A necessary step and, at the same time, an important problem for Negri's and Hardt's criterion of viability is simply that what they refer to as the “Law of Value” is *not explicitly defined* in Marx's work. There are many explicitly stated laws (e.g., the law of the tendency of the falling rate of profit, the general law of capitalist

accumulation) and many explicitly identified values (e.g., use-value, exchange-value, surplus value) in Marx's texts, but there is little evidence of a "Law of Value." Although Engels seems to have used it often, Marx rarely employs the phrase in *Capital I, II, III* or in the letters and unpublished manuscripts, and, when he does, he uses the phrase loosely and in passing. For example, in the 860 pages of *Capital III* attributed to Marx there are only seven uses of the phrase according to the index and it is difficult to "abstract" a law-like statement of the Law of Value from simply putting all these different uses in Marx's texts side-by-side.

This paucity of use might be surprising, since the phrase was often deployed as if its meaning was obvious by many writers after Marx to describe complex relationships among a set of "hidden variables" below the level of overt economic discourse which is normally dominated by prices, wages, profits, interest rates, rents expressed in monetary terms. Perhaps that is why Negri seems to be so nonchalant about the phrase; it was so commonly used during his youth in the pages of Italian Communist and Socialist Parties' newspapers and pamphlets that it didn't need explicit definition.

Certainly, even if it does not have a central role in Marx's writings, "the Law of Value" is a widely used technical phrase in the Marxist tradition. The problem with this traditional use is simply that the Law of Value has been given a wide variety of definitions by Marxist economists and politicians. Thus in Leontyev's Soviet-era textbook on political economy, the Law of Value is narrowly defined as claiming that "the value of a commodity is determined by the amount of socially necessary labour expended on its production" (Leontyev 1974). But Fredrick Haffner in his encyclopedia article on "the Law of Value" provides a maximal definition having four different, but related meanings:

(i) a "price theory" version of the law, similar to Leontyev's definition, which claims that the exchange values and production prices of goods are "established according to the labour socially necessary for their reproduction;"

(ii) the Law explains the market-price mechanism in quantitative terms;

(iii) the Law explains class relations, alienation and impoverishment in capitalism;

(iv) "the laws of development of capitalism in history (concentration, theory of crises, etc.) can be incorporated, too, so that the law of value embraces the economic law of motion of capitalist society" (Haffner 1973: 268-269).

If one accepts the "maximal" definition, then most of Marx's typical tenets would be identified with the Law of Value. Consequently, there would be few Marxian

“phenomena” to “save” once one applies Negri’s and Hardt’s “everything but the Law of Value” criterion of viability!

Does that mean that we should use the “restricted” Leontyev definition for the purposes of our discussion?

The difficulty with making such a decision is simply that the phrase is not in common use outside of the pages of post-Marx Marxist and Soviet-era economists who were dealing with a crisis of planning immediately after the Russian Revolution. The Communist Party had to make good on its claim that a planned economy is not only possible, but it is superior to one based on “the anarchy of production.” The discussions of a “Law of Value” really took off during the debates about the transition from capitalism to socialism and the nature of economic planning.² Questions like, “Is there a law of value that is either fully put into play in socialism [as Leontyev argued] or is capitalism, much less socialism and communism, beyond the law of value [as Stalin insisted]?,” were frequently posed [(Leontyev 1974: 166), (Stalin 1972: 473-475)] However, there is no doubt that these debates, which now appear to many as baroque verbal jousting over the corpses of millions of workers, would fill Negri with contempt or despair, inspiring him to say, “Basta!” But unless we are to practice the *ad hominem* fallacy and find concepts guilty by their historical associations, we are still left with the problem: what is the Law of Value and can its rejection be used to differentiate “the quick from the dead” in Marx’s work?

In order to best decide what meaning “the Law of Value” might have that can give Negri’s and Hardt’s criterion of viability some plausibility, we must briefly consider the value-discourse Marx validates, since that discourse sets the parameters of the Law’s meaning. Marx’s work is certainly replete with value-discourse. The key text of the nineteenth century anti-capitalist revolution, *Capital I*, not only begins with Value, its first chapter is a detailed, scholastic and, some would say, pedantic disquisition on value (in all its forms and their tensions) which eventually leads to a sort of “dialectical deduction” of money (*the language of capitalism*). Why did Marx require his readers to climb this dialectical purgatorial mountain before they could fly to paradise of class struggle? Marx was certainly conscious of the heavy demands on his readers. But he brushed them off by proudly inverting Dante’s *Purgatorio*: “Segui il tuo corso, e lasci dir le genti” (“Follow your path, and let the people talk.”)

It is no accident that Marx begins his major critique of political economy in *Capital I* (1867) with Value. That was the originary axiom of the genre Marx was critiquing, after all. But there are other, contextual reasons as well to account for the attractiveness of

the concept of value, for during *Capital's* composition in the 1850s and 1860s, the concept of value transcended the boundaries of political economy into ethical and mathematical discourse, especially in Germany. On the ethical side, "value" marked out a new terrain of volitions and affective dispositions versus the realm of fact and the norms of pure reason, and on the logical and mathematical side, value marked a shift from a substance-abstraction to a function-relational formation of concepts and mathematical ontology.

Value in the ethical region refers to a forceful vector of desire irreducible to either reason, utility or instinct. But value in this sense is not autonomous, it needs an object to be manifested. Hence, at this time, ethics becomes a field of propositional *attitudes* and a behavioral *dispositions*. In effect, the ontological features of economic value became generalized, but the converse movement prevailed as well and political economy became ethicized.

This interplay between ethics and political economy can be illustrated in the comparison between Marx's and his younger contemporary, Friedrich Nietzsche's critical projects. Whereas Marx identified his project in the 1850s and 1860s as a critique of political economy (and hence a critique of the notion of value as enshrined by that discipline), Nietzsche in the 1870s and 1880s defined a parallel project in the *Genealogy of Morals*: "we need a *critique* of moral values, the value of these values themselves must first be called in question" (Nietzsche 1968: 456, Nietzsche's italics). Just as Marx looked on the "the immense collection of commodities" comprising capitalist society to self-reflexively question the value of exchange value and surplus value and to show that a notion like the "value of labor" is as meaningless as a "yellow logarithm" [(Marx 1976: 125), (Marx 1966: 818)], Nietzsche was able to judge value judgments and evaluate the tables of values generated by the Christian good and evil, simply because the whole field of ethics had been "valorized" by the mid- to late-19th century. Objects and actions lost their inherent moral characters (or "virtues") and became functions, attitudes, or judgments of value.

Nietzsche recognized this logical revolution in ethics (as Marx did in political economy) and saw the inevitable next step: the self-reflection of the ethical function, attitude or judgment. This is the conceptual source of Nietzsche's "tremendous new prospect" and existential "vertigo," not some über-relativism of personal preferences (Nietzsche 1968: 456). For moral and aesthetic values were only gradually being distinguished from economic values, and they still shared a strict objectivity with them in Nietzsche's writings. As Robert John Ackermann pointed out: "Nietzsche's values are still related to these objective economic roots in that they are capable of objective

assessment of their impact on our interactions with the surrounding world" (Ackermann 1990: 90).

The critique of value in ethics and political economy was also deeply involved in a great development in the mathematics and logic of the later nineteenth century: the transformation of substance into function.⁴ The new 19th century model of the universal rejects abstraction from thing-like substances. The mathematician Drobisch in 1875, for example, characterized it as "the mathematical function [that] represents a universal law, which, by virtue of the successive values which the variable can assume, contains within itself all the particular cases from which it holds" (quoted in Cassirer 1923: 21). A value arises therefore from a relation to other values determined by a universal principle of serial order. Values are determined not by increasing abstraction from properties (as in the Aristotelian paradigm), but by being engaged in an increasing density of relations and series. Moreover, values are dependent upon variables, laws, sets and series that can become values of further variables, laws, sets and series, i.e., they are open to being reflexively *transvalued*. This laid the basis for the many revolutionary mathematical insights of the period including Set Theory and Hilbert Space Theory.

The "value" of mid- to late-19th century mathematics and logic and the "value" of political economy (as Marx analyzes it) are not mere homonyms. In Marx's critique of political economy the notion of value arises not through the stripping of the qualities of the commodity to find an "inherent" property, but through its manifold actual and potential exchange relations with other commodities (especially that prime self-reflexive universal commodity, money).⁵ Value discourse, then, allowed Marx to both use the language of the object of his critique, political economy, and to be able to transvalue the values he criticized. In other words, valuation and transvaluation in their political-economic, ethical and logical dimensions were the entrée to a set of conceptual revolutions in his era that Marx could hardly resist.

But Marx not only used, criticized and transvalued value discourse, he employed a specific variant of that discourse, i.e., labor-value, to both analyze capitalism, and its science, political economy, as well as to criticize, overturn and transvalue them. He saw in his use of labor-value discourse a political-philosophical epoché (i.e., a suspension of conceptual capitalist "business as usual") and a scientific invitation to go below the "surface" of capitalist society (to its inferno and pandemonium in the process of production) to solve a number of problems faced by the anti-capitalist movement of the time.

* First (analytic), labor-value discourse allows for an apparently precise and measurable definition of exploitation in capitalist society. This clarity is especially crucial in capitalism because exploitation is formally and legally hidden by the wage form. As Marx frequently points out, it is clear to the serf when s/he is working on his/her land versus on the land of the lord, whereas for the waged worker the moment when the labor-time necessary to create the value of his/her wage is finished and surplus labor-time begins is systematically obscured by the wage form and the general process of valuation.

* Second (critical), labor-value discourse provides a narrative (i.e., the class struggle) that workers' can use in an antagonistic way to describe themselves as fundamental actors in the drama of history and the capitalists and landlords as parasitic upon their labor, anxiety and suffering. It allows the worker to view the totality of capitalist relations from his/her point of view and not from the perspective of the capitalist (Cleaver 2001).⁶ For the capitalist perspective, as expressed in the "illusions" of the Trinity Formula (Marx 1966: 814-831) and the actual increase of the productivity of labor due to application of scientific knowledge to production (and reproduction), inevitably leads to the view that capital (not labor) is productive and is the legitimate force to determine the future of humanity.

* Third (revolutionary), if labor is the ultimate force of value creation (as the Law of Value claims and gives a measure to), then laborers are valuable and creative in themselves. A revolutionary corollary follows: workers are capable of creating non-capitalist "tables of values" and, indeed, an autonomous world beyond capitalism. This conviction is crucial for the development of a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. Without it, the class struggle becomes a form of "bad infinity," always there, always producing the next step, but never the last step.

This discussion establishes the centrality of Marx's value discourse, but it still leaves the question of the meaning of the Law of Value open. In order to proceed in the spirit of charity, I will assume that the best meaning of "the Law of Value" is the most restricted one, i.e., the value of a commodity is determined by the socially necessary labor-time required for its production.

Part II: Negri's critique of Marx (from *Marx Beyond Marx* to *Empire*); a transvaluation of the Law of Value

According to the argument of the last section, there are a number of good scientific and political reasons why Marx developed a labor-value discourse (along with an

occasional mention of a Law of value) in the 1850s and 1860s. Does one need to go beyond labor-value discourse in general and include the notion of a Law of Value in order to answer the basic questions of the anti-capitalist movement today? If the answer is “no,” and there are enough texts in the Marxist canon that could survive the result of excising those that rely on the Law of Value, then Negri’s and Hardt’s criterion of viability would create a useful dichotomy. In this section I shall examine the development of the criterion in Negri’s and Hardt’s writings and in the next I will demonstrate its strengths and weaknesses.

It is important to recognize, however, that Negri first attempted to construct a criterion of viability for Marx’s texts long before he began his collaboration with Michael Hardt. He attempted this in his lectures in the École Normale Supérieure on the *Grundrisse* in 1978 which were published in Italian and French the following year. Negri found that Marx’s decision to “begin” the *Grundrisse* with Money instead of with the Commodity or Value to be a sign that the Law of Value and the other parts of the labor-value apparatus can be excised from Marx’s theoretical writings to create a viable (and revolutionary) Marx *beyond* Marx:

The theory of value, as a theory of categorical synthesis, is a legacy of the classics and of the bourgeois mystification which we can easily do without in order to enter the field of revolution. That was true yesterday for the classics, as the attack of the *Grundrisse* demonstrates; today, one can show in the theory that is still applicable that it is in this way that we must begin, against all the repeaters of the theory of value, from *Diamat* to Sraffa (Negri 1983: 23).

In an amazingly “this sided” fiat of interpretation, Negri claims that “there is no logical way [in the *Grundrisse*] which leads from the analysis of commodities to that of value, to that of surplus value; the middle term does not exist; it is—that, yes—a literary fiction, a mystification pure and simple which contains not an ounce of truth” (Negri 1984: 24). This interpretation clearly distinguishes the *Grundrisse* from Marx’s later work including, by the way, the *Contributions to a Critique of Political Economy* that was published a year after the last *Grundrisse* notebook was completed and which entirely devotes itself to an analysis of the commodity and value, i.e., engages in literary fictions, according to Negri! Negri has even harsher words for *Capital*:

The passage from the money-form to commodity-form, from the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*, only adds abstraction and confusion. Despite all the intentions and declarations to the contrary, that which the attack on the problem of

commodities determines, it is a more idealist, Hegelian method (Negri 1984: 39)

Indeed, the polemic against the “the abstract void of the discourse on value” and the “law of value” is continued throughout the text with Negri drafting a none too enthusiastic “Marxism of the *Grundrisse*” into his crusade against value discourse. In effect, Negri argues that monetary values are adequate for the definition of the most important concepts of Marxism that are still relevant to contemporary anti-capitalist thinking. Though Negri’s argument in *Marx Beyond Marx* is based on a rather peculiar hermeneutical method (clearly rejecting any reading that is sympathetic to Marx’s intentions and his historical context), the result is not too different from the more mathematical and analytic critiques of the Labor Theory of Value in Steedman, Elster and Roemer.

The problem with Negri’s early criterion (which literally banished any role for labor-value discourse in a viable anti-capitalism) is simply that almost all of the Marxist canon would be rejected, if the criterion were to be applied scrupulously. Thus the criterion would not be a criterion at all, but simply a broad negation of Marx’s whole *opus*.

Some time after the publication of *Marx Beyond Marx*, especially with his collaborations with Hardt in the 1990s, Negri ended his hostility to value discourse *per se* (but not to the law of value which presupposes a *measurable* value). In *Empire*, Negri and Hardt welcome the return of value and living labor as “powerful and ubiquitous” components of postmodern capitalism, with a catch: their notions of value and labor are unrecognizable from Marx’s perspective. Negri and Hardt reject Marx’s Labor Theory of Value which is “really a theory of the measure of value” (Hardt and Negri 2000:355). The value they cherish and refer to in one of their many sibylline passages (354-361) is both *immeasurable* and *beyond measure*.

(Economic) value is *immeasurable*, in the context of what Hardt and Negri call Empire, because it cannot be measured by labor-time or any other “fixed scale.” At best, value can be indexed “on the basis of always contingent and purely conventional elements” imposed by “the monopoly of nuclear arms, the control of money, and the colonization of ether” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 355). In other words, there is no “objectivity” to the economic statistics, the stock market indexes, and the commodity prices that stream forth daily. These numbers *measure* nothing, not because they mismeasure, but because the measuring methods are continually open to revision and are imposed by pure power considerations that can change without warning so that

“contingency becomes a necessity and does not descend into disorder” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 356). These numbers and their “enforcers” are the result of “the impossibility of power’s calculating and ordering production at a global level.”⁷

Value also is *beyond measure* according to Hardt and Negri, because though value is created by living labor, that labor is identified with “general social activity” or “a common power to act” which cannot be regimented by clocks or any other economic and/or political measures. In making this identification, Negri and Hardt seem to willfully ignore the well known ontological distinction between labor and action from Aristotle’s day to the present via Marx [cf. (Aristotle 1981: 64-65, 183-185), (Arendt 1998 [1958]), (McCarthy 1990)].

Labor has traditionally been conceptualized as having a beginning-middle-end temporal structure, as being able to be planned, repeated, reproduced and imposed externally while action is spontaneous, creative, unique and cannot be imposed externally. One can force another to labor again and again, but one cannot force another to act even once. In Aristotle’s terminology, a master can compel a slave to labor, but action can not be compelled by masters, for action must be the product of free men participating in the work of the state and constitution. Surely by identifying living labor with action, and communal social action (or *vita activa*, in Hannah Arendt’s parlance) at that, Negri and Hardt can easily demonstrate that the values created by that labor are beyond measure, since (i) the very products of such “labor” could not be foreseen before the action itself and (ii) real action is not reproducible. They seem to justify their blurring of the distinction in the following words:

This leads us to a paradox: in the same moment when theory no longer sees labor, labor has everywhere become the common substance. The theoretical emptying of the problem of labor corresponds to its maximum pregnancy as the substance of human action across the globe. Although it is obvious that in this totality of reference—given the impossibility of considering labor as actually (or even simply conceptually) transcendent—the law of value is blown apart, it is equally obvious that this immersion in labor constitutes the fundamental problem not only of economics and politics but also of philosophy. The world is labor (Hardt and Negri 1994: 11).

Of course, one must question such a notion of labor *cum* action, for it does not seem to refer to what billions of people across the planet do every day under the surveillance of bosses vitally concerned about *how much time* the workers are at their job and *how well they do it again and again*. The world might indeed be labor, but if the bulk of labor in the early 21st century was as Negri and Hardt describe it—“Labor

that has broken open the cages of economic, social, and political discipline and surpassed every regulative dimension of modern capitalism with its state-form now appears as general social activity" (Hardt and Negri 2000: 357)—then surely capitalism, the law of value and much else would have been a thing of the past! But, indeed, capitalism is quite present and seems to have a future.

In order to critically examine Negri's and Hardt's criterion of viability and their substitution of action for labor, it is important to introduce a basic premise of their critique of Marx's Law of Value: 19th century modern capitalism is logically a different entity than post-1968 postmodern capitalism. Capitalism during Marx's time constituted a *formal* subsumption of society, but after 1968 capitalism has finally consummated a *real* subsumption of society. Their idea of periodizing capitalist history is based on an important distinction Marx made between *formal and real subsumption of labor by capital* in the previously mentioned unpublished section of *Capital I*: "The Results of the Immediate Process of Production" (Marx 1976: 1019-1025) Negri and Hardt describe this distinction in the following words:

Marx uses the term "formal subsumption" to name processes whereby capital incorporates under its own relations of production laboring practices that originated outside its domain...Through the real subsumption, the integration of labor into capital becomes more intensive than extensive and society is ever more completely fashioned by capital (Hardt and Negri 2000: 255).

The putting-out system for textile manufacturing or share-cropping are fine examples of formal subsumption of labor by capital whereas the development of "post-Fordist" "just-in-time" techniques of production would be examples of real subsumption. For in the putting-out system merchants would "put out" raw material inputs to cottagers who continued to work with archaic production techniques and collect textile outputs to in turn sell them on the world market. The merchants never tampered with production. Contrast this with "post-Fordist" production that studies all the ways that human psychology (social and individual) can be used to make workers more productive and put the results into practice. Such managers never let the production process rest. Negri and Hardt expand this distinction between formal and real subsumption into one between capital and society and use it to define different phases of capitalist history (Hardt and Negri 1994: 15).

Capitalism, they claim, managed this transformation from formal to real subsumption through the increasing employment of the "General Intellect" and "immaterial labor" in the production process and a regime of control over the

reproduction process. The connection of this historical transformation and the Law of Value is straight-forward: the Law might have been appropriate to a period when capital had only formally subsumed society, but with the real subsumption of society the notion that a commodity's value can be measured by "socially necessary labor time" is worthless. Value, in the period of real subsumption, is now created by living immaterial labor coordinated across continents via informatic planning and is increasingly directed at biopolitical objectives. The notion of a discrete amount of socially necessary labor time "pumped" into and "crystallized" in a commodity is completely inappropriate (Caffentzis 1997).

Negri and Hardt provide a paradigm for understanding both capital's post-Cold War tendency towards constituting a new legitimacy (which they term "Empire") based upon a "global" state and a bio-political regime (released from the constraints of the Law of Value) and the new anti-capitalist movement taking shape in the 1990s and resisting this tendency. Their paradigm challenges both traditional Marxism and postmodernism. The failure of the former is simple, for it is that of "Marx as the author of the old competitive capitalism, incapable of coping with the social capitalism of the present age" (Negri 1984: xv). The Law of Value might have been appropriate for the period of formal subsumption, but it is definitely inoperative in the period of real subsumption. Postmodernism as a theory for anti-capitalists fails because of its mystification of struggle: "In reality, the operation of real subsumption [which Negri identifies with the 'postmodern condition'] does not eliminate the antagonism, but rather displaces it to a social level. Class struggle does not disappear, but it is transformed into all the moments of everyday life."

Certainly, Negri and Hardt seem to dismiss any of Marx's texts that try to explain the whys and hows of the capitalist "surface structure" (since it is those texts employing labor-value discourse and at least the restricted Law of Value that purport to do so). Consequently, they seem to be unconcerned about the loss of explanatory power in any anti-capitalist theory of the future. If value is beyond measure, while the quantities of everyday life (from the prices of basic consumer commodities to stock futures and currency exchange rates) are measured arbitrarily in Humpty-Dumpty style, then either Negri's and Hardt's ideal anti-capitalist theory is a self-proclaimed failure at quantitative explanation or the very task of quantitative explanation is to be rejected because its object, postmodern capitalism, is lacking any feature worth measuring.

Part III: Critique of Negri's and Hardt's criterion

In order to evaluate Negri's and Hardt's criterion of viability, I should begin by noting one of its strengths. It is definitely superior to Negri's *Marx Beyond Marx* criterion of the late 1970s for accepting or rejecting Marxist texts. The latter simply espoused excising the whole value discourse from the "usable" part of the Marx's canon and thus threatened to eliminate nearly everything in it. Negri's and Hardt's criterion of the 1990s is a sharper tool, for the texts in the Marxist canon that referred to labor and value (if they don't presume the law of value) could escape their new textual razor. Labor and value should continue to play an important role in the anti-capitalist movement, according to Negri and Hardt, but the cost of their preservation, however, is that they become something like unmeasurable "things-in-themselves." Much that is qualitative in Marxist theory might survive, but the quantitative aspects should be totally eliminated post-Negri and Hardt.

Is the Negri-Hardt criterion useful? There are at least two reasons why it is not: (1) *quantity* is still a crucial aspect of capitalism, and (2) the notion of *subsumption* has quantitative aspects in the Marx's work that would make it impossible to use the notion while neglecting these aspects.

Quantity

Capitalism imposes an extremely quantified form of life on its constituents. Indeed, early post-Marx thinkers like Simmel and Weber identified capitalism with the domination of quantitative reasoning in social life while early twentieth century "avant garde" artists and writers often pictured the resistance to capitalism as a revolt against the rule of the number. Surely, any anti-capitalist movement must have a quantitative capacity to deal with such an obvious feature of its antagonist. Marx was committed to creating a theory that could explain capital's quantitative character though he was not a professional mathematician. Even with this limitation, he proved to be surprisingly successful in a number of his mathematical efforts. His most impressive achievement was presaging the linear algebraic approach to social reproduction (in *Capital II*). Of course, his lack of formal training (and the horizon of mathematical technique during his lifetime) led to certain lapses (especially in his mathematical effort to solve the "transformation problem" of converting values into prices of production in *Capital III*.) But Marx's work definitely has served as a "core" for a research program that has generated an enormous amount of mathematical

analyses of capitalism and of post-capitalist possibilities (cf., Howard and King 1992a and 1992b).

Marx's assumption of the measurability of value is crucial to the creation of his quantitative analysis of capitalism. The Law of Value, however interpreted, clearly presupposes this measurability as does most of the other quantitative indices Marx uses in *Capital* from surplus value, to the rate of profit, to the rate of exploitation, to organic composition, etc. Negri and Hardt challenge this assumption by claiming that though value exists, it is both outside and beyond measure in contemporary capitalism. By implication then, the quantitative aspects of Marx's work must be rejected by their criterion of viability. Only the qualitative aspects and relations of value and living labor, e.g., the existence of exploitation, in Marx's work would survive Negri's and Hardt's razor.

But how does one prove that something is immeasurable? One thing that the history of mathematics teaches is that such proof claims have often proven false. One might go back to one of the first "discoveries" of immeasurability, the "irrationality of square root of 2," to remember the precariousness of such claims. Indeed, the very notion of an "irrational" number expresses the horror of the *initial* confrontation of this anathema among the Pythagoreans. But as Eudoxus and Euclid, in their theory of proportions, pointed out: the "irrational" is perfectly measurable (a.k.a., rational), the problem is simply that the methods of measurement cannot be limited to ratios of whole number units.⁸

Indeed, one can look at the development of the notion of number as the continual confrontation with the "immeasurable" that is then integrated into a enlarged domain of number. The vocabulary of mathematics is littered with terms like "imaginary number," "complex number," "transcendental number," "a cardinal number of an uncountable set" that are semantic fossils of this transformation of the immeasurable into measurable.

The difficulty in measuring values (including the notion of value based on preferences used in neoclassical economics) is well known and was the source of debate even in the 19th century. There was no doubt that labor value was a "field" quantity and not a "substance" quantity then, to use Philip Mirowski's dichotomy (Mirowski 1989). Marx certainly recognized the field aspect of value in his many efforts to point out that value of a commodity produced at point A might be dramatically reduced (or increased) due to changes in the production process at point B, thousands of miles away. The field aspect of value *qua* socially necessary labor time has only

intensified as capitalism is globalized, biopoliticized and organized according to intricate divisions of labor, it is not new. But “field measures” are just as objective as “substance” ones (e.g., temperature of gases versus velocities of individual particles). They are not “immeasurable” simply because their measurement requires indirect and “conventional” methods.⁹

Negri and Hardt base their claim for the immeasurability of value on two grounds—historical and philosophical. Historically, they point to the arbitrariness and conventionality in the measurement of value in contemporary capitalism brought about, paradigmatically, by the unilateral decoupling of the dollar from gold and abrogation of the Bretton Woods accords by President Nixon in August 17, 1971. This led to the explosion of a worldwide currency market that was not restrained by any commodity base (like gold or silver). From then on, Negri and Hardt claim, the economic, political, social and personal weave together so that “in the globality of biopower every fixed measure of value tends to be dissolved, and the imperial horizon of power is revealed finally to be a horizon outside measure” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 384). That is, the post-1971 period of “free floating” currencies is one where there is no economic determinant of the last degree. The prices of commodities, say Negri and Hardt, are based on so many woven together elements that it is impossible to see them as indicators of any one quantity like socially necessary labor time. At best, “the indexes of command [e.g., currency exchange rates] are defined on the basis of always contingent and purely conventional elements” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 355).

However, Negri and Hardt place too much historical importance on Nixon’s abolition of the gold standard in 1971. On the one side, specie-backed monetary systems were always subject to “contingent and purely conventional elements” from debasements to bullion export restrictions, on the other side, the determination of the socially necessary labor time required for the production of a commodity inevitably wove together a wide variety of economic, political, social and even personal-cultural considerations in determining its value. The post-1971 monetary environment might be more subject to political power than the previous periods, but that does not give us any reason to think that Nixon’s fiat caused a historical leap from the finite to the infinite in economic value. After all, one can hardly claim that there are no continuities in ratios of economic ratios (e.g., of profitability, exchange rates, and exports) between the pre- and post-1971 periods.

The second source of Negri’s and Hardt’s rejection of the measure of value is the evocation of a philosophical curse. Negri and Hardt identify measurability with all that is intellectually hateful to the rebel soul: “the great Western metaphysical tradition,”

“a transcendent order,” “God,” “cosmos,” and “epistemological prohibitions,” etc. Negri and Hardt apparently believe that any claim to be able to measure a phenomenon legitimates it and the social form it is a constituent of: “Even Marx’s theory of value pays its dues to this metaphysical tradition: his theory of value is really a theory of the measure of value” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 355).

The curse attached to measurability deepens when Negri and Hardt link it with “the transcendent” and then point out “When political transcendence is still claimed today [CGC: perhaps a good example is when George W. Bush evokes God as the inspirer of the invasion of Iraq], it descends immediately into tyranny and barbarism” (Negri and Hardt 2000: 355). The implication being: if you insist on measuring value, then you are on the way to supporting genocidal “shock and awe” displays!

After such a performance, our authors rightly pause to ask: “Are we thus simply making a nonsensical nihilist claim when we assert that in the ontology of Empire value is outside measure?” Their answer is “No,” and then they invoke, contra those reactionary measuring philosophers Aristotle, Hegel and Marx, unnamed Renaissance humanists (perhaps Pico della Mirandola, Machiavelli, Bruno) to support their own transcendental insistence that “no transcendent power or measure will determine the values of our world. Value will be determined only by humanity’s own continuous innovation and creation” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 356).

What is the source of Hardt’s and Negri’s philosophical curses and transcendental assurances? My answer is: Hardt’s and Negri’s confusion of two distinct kinds of skepticism. For in agreement with Marx’s transvaluation of value, one might question the value of value and ask why indeed should the value of a commodity be “the material expression of human labour expended to produce them.” This skepticism towards the “false” objectivity of value, however, is often confused with a skepticism towards the value of objectivity itself. Whatever one might think about the value of objectivity, one should not confuse skepticism with regard to it and skepticism with regard to the value of commodity values. For very different arguments and considerations must apply in support of either. This confusion has a tradition in the history of Marxism that goes back to Georg Lukacs and continues to other contemporary theorists beside Negri and Hardt like John Holloway [(Lukacs 1971), (Holloway 2002)]. But it is a confusion just the same and I believe that it lead to Negri and Hardt questioning and even putting a curse on measurement, scientificity, and any other objectifying process.

However, such a approach would inevitably disqualify these two authors from explaining the major phenomena in contemporary capitalism (postmodern or not!) The most important being, why is the average rate of profit positive? Moreover, their Renaissance insouciance toward measuring in a post-capitalist world would strike anyone who is tempted to think that “another world is possible” with fear and trembling, for s/he might wonder how bread would be baked in the measureless ovens of the future. For bread baking does require knowing how many cups of flour must be mixed with how many cups of water to make dough, i.e., there is a value to objectivity.

In other words, whatever one thinks of the correctness of the Marx's texts dealing with the metrics of capitalism and their relevance to the debates on post-capitalism, they at least entertain the problems that any adequate anti-capitalist revolutionary theory must pose. The Negri-Hardt criterion would simply relegate these texts to the “dust bin of history” and leave the anti-capitalist movement bereft of the only thoroughly discussed body of thought on these vital matters. Consequently, their criterion decisively fails on this count.

Subsumption

The second reason for the failure of the criterion is that it undermines the analysis of capitalism that Negri and Hardt themselves present. In other words, their criterion's razor threatens to cut apart their own work. This is due Negri's and Hardt's enormous emphasis on Marx's distinction between formal and real subsumption of labor by capital. They use the term “real subsumption” to refer to social-cultural phenomena otherwise associated with “postmodernism” and with productive phenomena otherwise associated with “post-Fordism.” It is their primary Marxian loan word.

This conceptual move is attractive, but it certainly does not fit Marx's historical assumptions. For Marx real subsumption was not a thing of the “future,” it was fully present in his time. Indeed, he devised a set of conceptual pairs that parallel each other:

Formal subsumption	Real subsumption
Absolute surplus value	Relative surplus value
Commodities exchanged at value	Commodities exchanged at their price of production
Most industries operating with a low organic composition	Industries operating with a widely dispersed composition

There are vertical as well as horizontal relations between these columns of pairs. The vertical connections are logical and roughly as follows:

- With *formal subsumption* of labor by capital there is little effort made to increase the productivity of labor and so the productive (and reproductive) routines and techniques used are largely “as is.” Consequently, the only way to increase surplus value is by extending the working day (i.e., through *absolute surplus value* creation). Since there is little investment in equipment, the *organic composition* (the ratio of constant capital to variable capital, i.e., investment in machines and plant) is relatively and uniformly low in most industries and human labor (direct application of muscle, bone and brain) is the prime “input.” Consequently, the primary determinant and differential of exchange *value* is direct socially necessary labor-time.
- With *real subsumption* there is a “revolutionary” application of science and technology to the productive process making it possible to decrease the necessary part of the working day and to intensify its productive density (hence producing *relative surplus value*). This leads to a great variety of investment possibilities both within and among branches of production, hence there develops an *immense vertical spectrum of organic composition possibilities* (from almost labor-less production in atomic power plants to labor-intensive production in sweat shops and plantations). Since any source of commodities must be owned and invested in by capitalists, they will demand an equal rate of profit as their brethren (in the long run) even if “their” workers produce next to no surplus value. In other words, these capitalists will demand *the price of production* (i.e., the sum of their constant capital and their variable capital plus the product of this sum and the rate of profit) in value terms instead of the actual value of their commodities.

The horizontal relations among the rows of pairs are historical, in the sense that capitalism tends to move from the left to the right element of the pair simultaneously. That is why Marx writes in the *Grundrisse* that the notion of value “explodes” in the period when science and technology takes an increasing role in the production process in many industries (Marx 1973: 705). For in these industries there is no correlation between the labor-time expended there and the price of the commodities sold. But it is not that the value of these commodities is immeasurable. Marx introduces a notion of “price of production” after the *Grundrisse* to point out that this situation will not automatically lead to a fundamental breakdown in capitalism. On the contrary, the

prices of the commodities produced in many branches of production with relatively little labor have a mathematically determined character: their price of production includes surplus value created in other branches of production of lower organic composition in proportion to the capital invested in the industry.

Consequently, Negri and Hardt use of Marx's notion of subsumption (formal and real) is fundamentally distorted, because for Marx this notion is logically connected with value phenomena (indeed with the law of value as expressed in the notion of the price of production). A judicious application of the Negri-Hardt's criterion would cut off the very Marxian concept that they hoped to save and hence mangle their own texts. For any such criterion needs to conserve the logical structure of the text it is operating on.

Another consequence of my textual analysis of Marx's work is the recognition that Marx was not prophesying about the deep future when he was writing in the *Grundrisse* about production being dominated by machines and their operators becoming mere appendages. Or, at least, he turned that prophetic vision into an everyday observation by the time he described an "organized system of machines" in *Capital I* (Marx 1976: 503). The moment of real subsumption had already occurred in "modern industry" along with the allied value phenomena: increasing relative surplus value creation, increasing organic composition differentials, and increasing deviation of prices of production from values. These tendencies were common phenomena in the mid-19th century as well as in the beginning of the 21st century.

"General Intellect" and "immaterial labor" are not invitations to go beyond capital, as Negri and Hardt claim, but rather have always been part of the work capital has exploited whether it was waged or not; the recent crisis of the "New Economy" (the capitalist expression of Negri's and Hardt's "real subsumption" description) has shown that the amount of labor involved in computerized labor does not change the dynamics of capitalist accumulation. Bangalore's high tech workers are more terrifying to US "symbolic analysts" than the Taliban fighters in Kandahar because they are their real competitors in the international labor market. In fact, the Law of Value has been most tyrannical in the current neoliberal period! Any reading of the financial press and economic policy makers' positions statements would give one the impression that the Law of Value, as usually understood, is a truism. Surely what is the prescription for any economic problem but more discipline of labor, more labor flexibility and productivity, a reduction of labor costs, and so on? This is so obvious one must be incredulous in hearing the snide comments academic economists make about the law of value. Of

course, if you want your products to compete on the world market you need to reduce the socially necessary labor time required to produce them, by any means necessary.

By applying to Hardt's and Negri's theory Marx's observations of what occurs to social perception in the transformation from formal to real subsumption one can understand how Marx would explain why Negri and Hardt might be tempted to reject the Law of Value. When one moves both mentally and socially from the items on the left column of our Table to those on the right a process of occlusion and oblivion prevails: the productive powers of labor seemed to be transferred to those of capital. As Marx writes in *Capital III*:

Capital thus becomes a very mystic being, since all of labour's social productive forces appear to be due to capital, rather than labour as such, and seem to issue from the womb of capital itself...Not only does it appear so but it is true in fact that the average prices [of production] of commodities differ from their value, thus from the labour realised in them, and the average profit of a particular capital differs from the surplus value which this capital has extracted from the labourers employed by it...Normal average profits themselves seem immanent in capital and independent of exploitation (Marx 1966: 827-9)

Negri and Hardt simply inverted this mysticism of capital to a mysticism of an immeasurable value-creating labor process.

Though Marx clearly believed that over time the second column of phenomena under "real subsumption" in the Table becomes more dominant than the first, *it never becomes a totality as long as capitalism continues to exist because of the crises associated with the Falling Rate of Profit*. That is, if the branches of high organic composition increase without limit, the rate of profit will fall to zero...unless there are countervailing forces that shift the weight back to the column of formal subsumption. The major countervailing force is the creation of new areas of absolute surplus value creation among populations that are formally out of the capitalist system, either due to their ability to preserve their pre-capitalist subsistence economy in the face of centuries of capitalist threat or due to their ability to recreate some new form of non-capitalist subsistence in post-colonial or post-capitalist settings.

In conclusion, Negri's and Hardt's use of the notion of subsumption detached from the Law of Value in even its more restricted sense is problematic, for the notions of real and formal subsumption in Marx's texts are part of a network of concepts defined in labor-value terms like organic composition, surplus value, price of production. By stripping "subsumption" from "labor-value" discourse Negri and Hardt provide only a

distant approximation to Marx's concept to the point that it appears to be a little like the imaginary togas of the French revolutionaries of '89.

Conclusion: A Broken Heart?

"Mr. Kenge," said Allan, appearing enlightened all in a moment. "Excuse me, our time presses. Do I understand that the whole estate is found to have been absorbed in costs?"

"Hem! I believe so," returned Mr. Kenge. "Mr. Vholes, what do *you* say?"

"I believe so," said Mr. Vholes.

"And that thus the [Jarndyce and Jarndyce] suit lapses and melts away?"

"Probably," returned Mr. Kenge. "Mr. Vholes?"

"Probably," said Mr. Vholes.

"My dearest life," whispered Allan, "this will break Richard's heart!"

—Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853)

Negri and Hardt presented a relatively simple criterion for determining what part of Marx's works are still relevant to the struggles of the anti-capitalist movement in the 21st century. My rejection of their criterion is not only a reflection on the limitation of their effort, however. Their failure, when added to the more than half century-long failure of efforts to devise a satisfactory criterion to determine the "true" Marx, the "scientific" Marx, the "humanistic" Marx, the "subjective" Marx, or the "revolutionary" Marx is evidence for a wider claim that appears on our horizon: no criterion will be able to create a dichotomy among Marx's texts that will isolate the acceptable kernel for today's anti-capitalist movement.

Is the result of this essay, then, that Marx's texts cannot be used for the anti-capitalist movement or that the cost of "saving" Marx's legacy has used up its value, as the Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit used up the Jarndyce estate in *Bleak House*? Is this a prescription for suffering with a Marxist broken heart? No. It is a call, however, for *defetishizing* the vast collection of texts that come to the anti-capitalist movement under the name of Marx or, to use another metaphor, for Marx's texts to be used as a *common* instead of as a *memorial park*. Marx's texts should not be seen as a legacy. He set the model for dealing with his texts in the way he related to the texts of the political economists, the philosophers, the chemists, mathematicians, biologists and physicists of his day. He "borrowed" massively from them without apology and without permission. If an organic chemistry model worked in describing the micro-exchanges that made up the reproduction (and rupture) of capital, Marx used it. If a piece of

Hegel's dialectical logic would make the point he wanted to make, he "coquetted" with it. Marx was a shameless bricoleur on the commons of knowledge.

At the moment, unfortunately, Marx's texts are treated like nuggets of always fluctuating political exchange value instead of use values for anti-capitalist thought and action. For example, the century-long discussion of the transformation of values into prices "problem" revolves around the vindication or the public humiliation of Marx's texts instead of whether this transformation tells the anti-capitalist movement anything useful about the structure and vulnerability of capitalism. The struggle over the transformation problem has been largely a game of "got'cha" with the bourgeois academics (whenever they are politically threatened) pointing out the logical and mathematical infelicities of *Capital III* and Marxists running to provide ever more weighty mathematical retorts. The animus on all sides of the debate is a struggle of worth (of the preservation of tradition and honor) instead of use.

But the key question in this matter is: does the transformation of values into prices have explanatory power to help in understanding the structure of capitalism or not? What are the areas that this transformation helps to explain the operation of capital? If there are such areas (e.g., in the examination of "unequal exchange" or of the "energy crisis"), then the logical and mathematical difficulties can and will be overcome. For as any student of the history of science knows, there are no interesting theories without logical and mathematical infelicities (quantum mechanics and general relativity theory included).

Notes

1. The study of anti-capitalism in the pre-Marx period is becoming increasingly sophisticated. Two important recent books in this literature are (Federici 2004) and (Linebaugh and Rediker 2001). The first deals with the anti-capitalist struggle at the originary moment of capitalism (in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth century) and the second with the rise of anti-capitalist movements in the Atlantic world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An important collection of immediately pre-Marx communist writings is to be found in (Corcoran 1983).

The term "anti-capitalist movement" that I am using here is broader (both temporally and socially) than the one developed by Alex Callinicos in his *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (Callinicos 2003), where he relegates the referent of the term to the post-Seattle movement against the G-8, WTO, World Bank and IMF.

2. Instead of, for example, expanding of the notion of value into the realm of the labor of reproduction or into the natural environment, as advocated by some feminists and ecologists. For efforts along these lines see (Dalla Costa 1973) and (Salleh 1997).
3. For acerbic accounts of these debates see (Steele 1992) and (Rutland 1985). However sourly one might depict these debates, they are still important to study for any movement that wants to say more than "Another World is Possible." For without saying more, one is in the position of being a logician instead of a revolutionary.
4. This development was described retrospectively by the neo-Kantians like Simmel and Cassirer in the early 20th century [(Simmel 1990), (Cassirer 1923)].
5. Similar to the neo-Kantian critique of Marx, Philip Mirowski's main criticism of Marx is that he was not attentive to the transformation of substance to field theories in the physics of his day (Mirowski 1989). He claims that Marx's economics was still "substance" based and that he saw labor as a substance (like caloric) that is stored in the commodity. But this critique is off the mark for two reasons: (i) Marx was quite familiar with the development of field theories in physics and (ii) his notion of "social necessary labor time" was a "field" concept since it can change independent of the local condition of production.
6. It is interesting that in the late 1970s Harry Cleaver and Negri were equally interested in reading Marx's texts "politically." They published their results nearly simultaneously (Cleaver in 1977 and Negri in 1979). In doing so, Negri expunged Chapter I of *Capital I* from the roster of "quick" texts of Marxism since it clearly was dependent upon the Law of Value and labor-value discourse. Cleaver rejects this conclusion in his Introduction to *Marx Beyond Marx* and tries to "save" all of Marx's writings (Negri 1984: xxvii).
7. Negri's and Hardt's implication being that there was a historical era when power could calculate and order production at a global level. The period of the gold standard is the most likely candidate for such an era, since gold became the common standard of world trade then. One could directly measure the value of a commodity anywhere.
8. In the early twentieth century there was much discussion about kinds of measurements that parallel this discussion of substance versus field quantities. These included direct versus indirect measurements and extensive versus intensive

measurements. Thus the measurement of length would be direct and extensive measurement, while the measurement of temperature would be indirect and intensive (Savage and Ehrlich 1992: 2-3).

9. According to the legend, the Pythagoreans both discovered the “irrationality of the square root of two” and kept it hidden, threatening to kill any member of their society that revealed it to outsiders. The proof is very simple and, if one believed that only those entities that can be expressed by ratios of whole numbers are measurable, then the square root of 2 (and infinite other such entities) would be immeasurable. The solution to this problem was devised by Eudoxus and later formalized by Euclid. He denied the definition of same ratio as the following: P/Q is said to be the same as X/Y when, m and n being any (positive) integers whatever, mX is greater than, equal to or less than nY according as mP is greater than, equal to, or less than, nQ (Koslow 1992: 151). In other words, the test for proportional equality is infinite, but determinate.

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Harry Cleaver

Work, Value and Domination

On the Continuing Relevance of the Marxian Labor Theory of Value in the Crisis of the Keynesian Planner State

During the last decade or so, in the midst of a profound and lengthy international crisis of capitalist command, the Marxian labor theory of value has been subjected to severe critiques on both theoretical and historical grounds. The major theoretical critique—from Steedman and other Social Democrats—reformulated earlier attacks on the so-called metaphysical character of the theory and called for the abandonment of a value theory that was neither meaningful nor necessary. This attack, as others before it, has been rejected, more or less convincingly depending on the character of the arguments, by Marxists of all stripes. More serious than this rejection on abstract grounds, have been a series of arguments that the Marxian labor theory of value, while perhaps once pertinent for the understanding of the dynamics of capitalist development, has been rendered obsolete by the historical evolution of capital accumulation. In other words, new theory is needed to understand and fight new forms of domination which emerged out of the old dynamics of the class relationship itself. This paper analyses and responds to two of the more interesting formulations of this perspective: those of Claus Offe and Toni Negri.

Offe and the Displacement of Work

Offe's argument, similar to many associated with contemporary critical theory, implies that the labor theory of value has become obsolete because labor as such has ceased to be the most fundamental form of social organization in modern capitalism.¹ In his article "Work: The Key Sociological Category?" where he addresses this issue most directly, Offe argues his case at two levels: that of the objective centrality of work

in the structuring of life and, necessarily a subset of the first, that of the subjective role of work for those whose lives are being structured.²

At the level of the objective role of work in the structuring of life time, Offe argues first that an observable trend toward increasing differentiation and heterogeneity in work, especially the displacement of industrial labor by service labor, is making it impossible to talk about work as such. "One can no longer," he writes, "talk of a basically unified type of rationality."³ Service work, in particular, he argues, is fundamentally different from traditional kinds of "productive" labor in that it is "reflexive"—it "produces and maintains work itself."⁴ Such work, he claims, is not only heterogeneous but lacks any common measure of productivity or efficiency. Such differentiation renders any discussion of "work" in general, then, misleading. Second, he then goes on to argue that the power of work—however differentiated—to structure society has been declining not only because of the reduction in work time as a proportion of life time, but because non-work time has become less structured by work.⁵ Along with a growing divorce of such activities as education, family life, and leisure consumption from work, he includes the growing failure of unemployment to coerce employment—a result of the rise of welfare state.⁶

At the level of the subjective significance of work, he points to the decline in the centrality of the work ethic or of work related activities to people's sense of self-definition and purpose. To begin with, the increasing heterogeneity of work suggests that it is unlikely that work as such can provide "a precise and shared significance for the working population," i.e., the sense of being part of a working class becomes impossible.⁷ Moreover, he points to the voluminous evidence that people have become increasingly conscious of the "disutility" of work, indeed have come to struggle against work and have turned to non-work activities for life satisfaction.⁸ These changes which have undermined the central role of work in organizing society, both objectively and subjectively, Offe argues, not only have created a "crisis of the work society" but call for the replacement of all work-focused social theories—including those of Marx. Therefore, he concludes, recent trends in social theory toward the abandonment of class concepts and their replacement with new concepts appropriate to the analysis of such issues as gender, ethnicity, peace and disarmament, environmental protection and human rights is well conceived.⁹ Offe's theoretical contribution was clearly designed to provide support for replacing the analysis of class struggle with that of "new social movements"—a replacement which has accelerated in recent years and formed an essential bulwark to the rising edifice of an anti-Marxist social democracy in both Western Europe and the United States.¹⁰

If it is true that labor has been displaced by a structured and manipulated consumerism, whether of the modern or post-modern variety, if it is true that labor has ceased to be the central organizing social activity, if it is true that work no longer plays an essential role in structuring people's subjective evaluation of themselves and their place in society, then certainly Marx's labor theory of value, and everything it teaches about class struggle, needs to be replaced by some theory that speaks more directly to the new categories of domination and the struggles against them. If we can say farewell to the working class, then certainly we can say farewell to Marx. However, while we must certainly recognize that capitalist society as a work-centered social order is in "crisis," neither the objective nor the subjective displacement of labor has been such as to warrant the conclusion by Offe, and others who follow similar lines of thought, that either class struggle or Marxian theories of labor can be safely put behind us. On the contrary, we can argue, and demonstrate, that not only are most, if not all, of the mechanisms of cultural domination which preoccupy the post-Marxists, still intimately linked to and shaped for the reproduction of a labor based social order, but more importantly, a successful conclusion to the struggles which have thrown that social order into crisis demand not only a theorization of their new directions but also continued attention to the (capitalist) forces arrayed against them.

Let us examine Offe's arguments in the order presented above. First, he argues that work has become so differentiated as to make it uninformative to talk about work in general. Is service labor so fundamentally different from the kind of traditional productive labor we normally associate with commodity production as to exclude the use of the same theory to discuss both? Does either "the vast empirical heterogeneity" of work in general or the "reflexive" focus of service work on ordering and normalizing the reproduction of labor itself exclude the use of a generalized concept of labor? I think not. In the first place, the heterogeneity of useful work, irrespective of tendencies toward deskilling, has always been a characteristic of work under capitalism. Such heterogeneity has always been fundamental to the capitalist use of labor for social control. While such developments as the shift from manufacture to machinofacture and Taylorism have tended to deskill workers within affected labor processes, such movement toward homogeneity has always been complemented by a growing diversity of products and technologies which have provided the technical basis for the repeated decomposition of working class power through new divisions of labor. The existence of such phenomena as segmented labor markets, the diffusion of factory production into the home, and the differential distribution of managerial authority through the work force constitute historically specific aspects of such heterogeneity

rather than new “fractures” which make it impossible to understand the organization of work in terms of the class struggle over valorization. The challenge of understanding these developments in terms of the Marxian concepts of class has already been met by many researchers and activists.¹¹

In the second place, some kinds of service sector labor Offe discusses, such as those of teaching, curing, and counselling can all be understood quite well in terms of the reproduction of life as labor power—a kind of labor that has always been performed in capitalism. The rise of these aspects of the service sector has occurred as what was formally unwaged labor performed in the home or community was transformed into waged labor. Teaching, healing and counselling once performed by unwaged housewives or other family members became new domains of business activity where those providing the services were waged (from high paid “professionals” to low paid attendants) and a profit was earned on the sale of the service.¹² The commodity produced—labor power—has been the same in both cases, only the form of organization has changed. As for the other kinds of services he discusses—planning, organizing, negotiating, controlling, administering—these too have always been aspects of capitalist production and social reproduction, from the role of managers in production to that of the state in both production and reproduction. His description of both kinds of service activities as those of “preventing, absorbing and processing risks and deviations from normality” is apt enough—once we recognize that “normality” means “life as worker.” From the unwaged mother who is supposed to rear children to be obedient workers (which involves curbing any juvenile delinquency) through the factory managers who weed out high entropy workers, to the arbiters, police and military who are called in when the others fail, all such tasks can be understood as the work of reproducing life as labor power. The differentiation of tasks among such guarantors of order should not keep us from understanding their role in maintaining a work-based social order. The growth in their numbers is a reflection of the struggle against work rather than the sign of its disappearance from the social scene.

The difficulties in finding any direct quantitative measure of the productivity of such service labor—which has been much discussed by economists since the onset of the “productivity crisis” in the late 1960s—should obscure neither its qualitative role nor the very real quantitative options which are possible, and used, for such measurement. For example, Offe is correct that the outcome of education, for the capitalists who have overseen the construction and management of the educational system, is certainly not direct “monetary profit” (except in the case of private schools).

But the “concrete uses” he sees as the real outcome can all be understood in terms of the use-value of labor power. The work of teachers and administrators is primarily to produce labor power in general, i.e., the ability and willingness to work, and secondarily to produce particular skills and abilities. The productivity of such work is today measured at the individual level by grades on particular and standardized tests which measure primarily the ability and willingness to study, and thus to work. The productivity of such work is also measured at the social level by the adequacy with which it tracks students into the heterogeneous categories of work required by capital, from dropouts who will do unskilled unwaged or low-waged work to highly skilled professional labor. It is only because capital has such norms that today we can talk about a crisis in the work of education. From Reagan and Bush’s disinvestment in education to Thatcher’s attempts to impose more top-down control, what we are seeing are responses to a crisis in the productivity of the work of producing and reproducing life as labor power.¹³

Offe’s second argument about the declining objective role of work in structuring social life concerns the reduction in work time and the growing independence of non-work time from work time. On the one hand, he is certainly correct that there has been a long-term trend toward a reduction in the number of hours of waged labor. However, the rise of so-called “cultural mechanisms of domination” such as public education and consumerism which have colonized the associated expansion of “free time,” have been shown to involve precisely a continuing effort by capitalism to guarantee the predominance of labor—the keystone of its way of organizing society. The vast escape by children from the mines and mills and factories in the first decades of this century was met with a new form of incarceration: the public school. As argued above, and amply demonstrated in numerous studies, the key role of business in fashioning the system of public schooling was aimed at creating a new social institution that would guarantee that learning would be subordinated to the reproduction of labor power.¹⁴ If young people could not be put to work until they were 15 years old, then by God and Mammon, they would be kept occupied, ordered and disciplined to fit into the labor force once they came of age. Moreover, if their parents—and adult workers in general—were winning more and more time away from work and more money to spend in such time, then both that time away from work, the way the money would be spent and the attitudes of children toward it, would be shaped in ways compatible with the continued subordination of life to work. Thus consumerism which seeks to shape the transformation of the wage into use-values in ways compatible with capitalist growth and thus the content of education which seeks to channel young energy into job

training and home economics rather than into learning how to enjoy life or to struggle against domination. If it could be demonstrated that the role of education has changed, that it is no longer organized to shape people for a work-centered social existence, that it has become a form of domination unconnected with work, then we could accept Offe's assertion that these things are so. Unfortunately for his argument, not only have these things not been demonstrated, but there is plenty of evidence of the contrary: that the "service" work of education is work done in service to capital in the disciplining of its labor force.

What of consumerism which, according to so many—and apparently including Offe though he doesn't dwell on this—has displaced work as the central mechanism of domination? The first thing to note, and keep in mind, is that consumerism is a capitalist response to successful working class struggle for more income and less work, it is not just one more devious capitalist plot to expand its social control. Consumerism emerged out of the working class struggles of the 1930s which forced capital to shift from its traditional reliance on the business cycle to regulate wages to the plans of the Keynesian and welfare state.¹⁵ Consumerism is thus another mechanism, analogous to public schooling, of the capitalist colonization of the sphere of working class independence. Just as school subverts free time by making it into time for the production and reproduction of life as labor power, so consumerism seeks to subvert the autonomous power of the worker's wage by turning it into a vehicle of capitalist expansion and a tool of capitalist domination. The question then is not whether consumerism is a form of domination but rather whether it is something separate whose expansion has displaced work as domination. I think not.

The key issue concerning the relationship between consumerism and work is the same as that which concerns education and work. Does consumerism function in a manner analogous to education or not? Does it function to reproduce the consumer as worker or just as consumer. Certainly we know that a great deal of capitalist production and marketing is designed to reproduce the consumer as consumer. Planned obsolescence, model changes, fashion and so on, all are designed to get the consumer to keep buying —because previous purchases no longer work or to remain fashionable. But what is the substance of consumption? What do people consume for? We know that people consume to live and the subjective reasons for living are quite diverse. But beyond this subjectivity (to which I will return) what is the role of consumption in their lives. Given that the majority of most people's active life time continues to be taken up with work, it should not be surprising to discover that most consumption is related to work, whether that consumption be material or symbolic.¹⁶

When work took up all waking hours this was fairly obvious; there was no time for anything else. As the “working” class succeeded in forcing down the length of the working day, week, year and life cycle, and more time became available, at least potentially, for other activities this has become less obvious. Yet, when we examine any average slice of life time (day, week, etc) it becomes obvious that the bulk of that time is still shaped by and around work.

The day begins by getting ready for work and then by traveling to work—a matter of several hours for a great many. The work which follows takes up most of the daylight hours—not for nothing do we speak of Monday through Friday as “work days.” The period at work is followed by the trip home and partial recuperation from work—full recuperation will require most of the night’s sleep. Part of the evening will be taken up with housework required to be able to go back to work the next day (washing clothes, etc). Perhaps an hour or two will be left for some activities unrelated to work—assuming you didn’t bring any work home and don’t have night classes or social obligations to “get ahead” at work. Which part of daily consumption is geared to work and which to something else, even itself? If what we are interested in is the issue of domination—the way people’s lives are structured by external powers—the answer is given by the relative distribution of their time and energy. For the tired worker, the evening meal or the exhausted sprawl before the television are primarily acts of recuperation, of regaining energy stolen by capital on the job. The money spent on TV dinners or high cuisine, television sets, stereo equipment or novels under such conditions is money spent reproducing labor power.

The working week begins with “blue Monday,” is dominated at its beginning by psyching one’s self up for work, gets into average gear by Wednesday and terminates with “TGIF —Thank God It’s Friday.” Part of the weekend will be eaten up by recuperation—thus the Saturday morning TV cartoons to entertain the kids so parents can sleep in. Part will be consumed by necessary housework, work that could not be done during the previous five days: washing work clothes, grocery shopping, house or apartment repairs and so on. Part will be spent forgetting about work so it can be faced once again on Monday morning without suicide or murder. Depending upon circumstances a few hours or something over a day’s time may actually be “free” for the pursuit of non-work related activities. Which part of weekly consumption is independent of work? Again that depends on the relative distribution of time and energy.

Of the working month, year and life cycle we can observe much the same phenomena: whichever slice of life time we choose the vast majority of people find

their waking (and sleep) lives dominated by their work. They are either getting ready to work (from breakfast to 12-20 years of schooling), working (producing labor power or some other commodity) or recuperating from work (from exhausted weekends and too short vacations to retirement). Instead of the divorce of family life and leisure consumption from work we find that most such time is still shaped by work or geared to the reproduction of labor power.

Let us now examine the other side of Offe's argument: the assertion that people's attitudes towards work and the importance of work in their lives has changed, changes he discusses in a section of his article entitled "The Decline of the Work Ethic." To begin with there is little evidence that the "work ethic" —through which people embraced their work as the central activity which gave positive meaning to their lives — has ever played a major role in the history of capitalism, except for limited numbers of skilled craftspersons. The vast majority of those made "worker" in capital's social order have been semi-skilled or unskilled laborers for whom the experience of work was primarily an experience of coercion and domination. There have certainly been communities of skilled workers whose non-work lives were directly shaped by their occupations, whose leisure time associations and activities involved not only their families but also co-workers and their families, from taverns to lodges to community celebrations.¹⁷ But this kind of shaping, albeit more diffuse and less community creating as a function the hegemony of work time, has not only effected all workers but has never resulted in a replacement of the struggle against work with a struggle for work. Even the skilled craftspersons, who controlled their tools and rhythms of work and who conceived of revolution in terms of taking complete control of the means of production, fought against the subordination of their lives to work.¹⁸ Their partial identification with their work may have led them to form workers councils rather than to burn their factories during periods of revolutionary upheaval, but there is no evidence that I know of to suggest they held any kind a "work ethic" which they accepted as an expression of their desire to shape all their existence around their jobs.

While it is undoubtedly true that the implementation of Taylorism and Fordism managed to create a labor force of "mass workers" who wanted less to take over their factories than to escape them, those workers were not the first to discover the "disutility of work." Herbert Gutman has shown how generation after generation of immigrant workers had to be socialized by capital into accepting the rhythms of American industrial labor.¹⁹ From the struggles against primitive accumulation that required "bloody legislation" and colonial violence to overcome, to the long struggle over the length of the working day that achieved the five day week and the weekend,

working class history shows just how strongly people fought against working for capital long before Taylorism and Fordism.²⁰ Offe's suggestion that the working class only came to be "sensitized to (and critical of) the physical and psychological stresses of work and its associated health hazards and risks of deskilling" in the 1970s bespeaks a vast lack of familiarity with the history of working class struggle. What is new in the recent period is not the rejection of the work ethic but the power of workers to implement that rejection.

It is precisely the power of workers in recent years to resist the subordination of their lives to labor and to elaborate alternative, autonomous projects that underlies and gives credence to Offe's arguments. It is not that capital has ceased to impose work or that some other social power of domination has arisen to replace capital and its work ordered society. The question of the centrality of work in society is being raised by intellectuals because that centrality has been challenged by people who have achieved the power to refuse, to some degree, to be defined as workers. This is a refusal we can find among all sorts of people. From the so-called skilled service "professionals," whom Offe joins with others in calling a "new class," to so-called unskilled blue collar industrial workers, whether mass workers or "social" workers, we can observe such a spreading refusal of work that the few enthusiastic workers are now pejoratively labeled "workaholics" and considered by their peers to be pathological cases, needful of therapy. What Offe calls the "implosion" in the power of work to determine social life, is really the explosion in the power of people to refuse that determination. Offe and other anti-Marxists who would "go beyond" Marxist categories merely express the struggles of people to cease being workers and to become something else.

Can the Marxian categories of class and labor value be set aside as outdated vestiges of a bygone era? Not yet. Not only are most people's lives still dominated by work, despite their struggles against it, but capital still constitutes the most coherent and powerful obstacle to the escape from work, to the creation of a new social order in which work can be transformed from a mechanism of domination to one creative social activity among others. As long as capital is able to impose work on us we cannot escape having our lives, at least partially, defined in class terms. As long as this situation endures, Marx's labor theory of value still provides us with an irreplaceable theoretical framework for understanding the kind of social order we are attempting to escape and capital is attempting to maintain. To set aside that framework in a period of crisis would be to willfully blind ourselves to a crucial aspect of current conflicts — capital's projects and strategies.

At the same time, the nature of current struggles, especially that part of their content which we can characterize in terms of autonomous self-valorization, demands theoretical efforts to grasp emerging realities that constitute real alternatives to capital.²¹ Few are the Marxian categories which evoke such alternatives. Most Marxian concepts were developed for the comprehension of capital's strategies and mechanisms of domination—and they continue to be indispensable for that purpose. Some point beyond capital, especially those which contribute to our understanding of the insurmountable class antagonism posed by workers. Living labor, the collective worker, the working class for-itself, the working class as revolutionary subject, these are all concepts which emphasize a fighting alternative to the subordination of life to capital. But when Marx cogitates on the moment of revolutionary rupture and subsequent becoming he is intentionally vague with a vagueness that is the hallmark of his refusal of utopianism. Beyond capital's work centered social order where labor is the measure of value, in a beyond created through the revolutionary rupture of capital, Marx saw open potentiality. Beyond labor value he saw disposable time as a measure of value.²² But that "disposable time" was clearly time for an open ended self-valorization that could grow in many directions. Unlike capital, which imposes work as an end in itself, as the meaning of its social order, Marx's post-capitalist society has no telos, no pre-determined end, but is both a refusal of any one telos and an openness to a multiplicity of simultaneous futures. To talk concretely about movement in such directions, to understand such movements, will require the elaboration not just of one discourse but of many. Nor are such alternative discourses sometime future events. They are being elaborated now amongst the participants in such self-constituting communities of struggle as the women's and gay movements or the environmentalist movement. Many are those who are striving to invent new and more adequate ways to both create and talk about such phenomena as androgyny or biocentrism which they desire to be part of a post-capitalist world. There will be no adequate way of understanding their creations in terms of old categories and frameworks, including those of Marxism. But, to repeat, there will be no achieving the continued elaboration of such projects of self-valorization without clear understanding of the enemy constantly trying to divert or subvert or harness those projects in order to reduce them to mere moments of itself. Organization without such understanding is doomed to being outflanked or reduced to reformism. Marxism remains the clearest, most powerful framework for grasping the mechanisms of control we wish to avoid. As long as we must struggle against the efforts of capital to bind us within its world of work, new vocabularies and new theories must deal with the class nature of our efforts. Today, as in the past, all struggles are class struggles. They will continue to be until

capital is destroyed. Only then will be be able to do without Marx and his theories of work-centered capitalist society.

Negri and the Crisis of the Law of Value

Negri's argument takes exactly the opposite view of the contemporary role of labor within capitalism but comes to similar results with respect to value. Instead of labor being displaced as a major mechanism of domination, in Negri's view it has been transformed from the hidden secret of commodity fetishism and market relations whose workings could be understood through Marx's labor theory, to an unmediated vehicle of capitalist command. In his theoretical formulation this is understood in terms of a crisis in the law of value brought on by class struggle, a rise in the organic composition of capital and the displacement of labor in the production process. The crisis of labor value, he argues, has given way to the attempt by capital to impose labor not to produce wealth but as pure domination.

One of Negri's first formulations of his thesis of the crisis of the law of value appeared in "Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization," which was written as a discussion paper for the 1971 conference of Potere Operaio, one of the most important organizations of the extra-parliamentary Left in Italy.²³ In that paper, Negri elaborated an analysis of the crisis of class relations brought on by the international cycle of working class struggles in the late 1960s—a cycle to which the struggles of Italian workers and students had contributed on a large scale. He argued that those struggles—not only of the waged but also of the unwaged (e.g., students, housewives)—had ruptured the ability of the Keynesian state to plan capitalist development (thus the "planner state") by harnessing workers struggles (e.g., through wage-productivity deals) to become the motor of capitalist growth within the social factory. This crisis included the defeat of the Keynesian efforts to use money to mediate and manage the class relations, especially the dynamic proportionality between (social) wages and (social) productivity.²⁴ While the wage-productivity relations was ruptured in many countries, this defeat received its clearest expression in Italy in overt demands for "equal wage increases regardless of productivity" and direct struggle against work.²⁵ For Negri this rupture amounted to a crisis of the law of value understood as "the law governing the social recomposition of labour."²⁶ Taking as his theoretical point of reference the discussion in the Grundrisse of the evolving role of labor in capitalism, Negri argues that Marx's projection of crisis as a result of the rise in the organic composition of capital (in response to workers struggles) was realized through the Keynesian state. The continuing displacement of labor from

production through replacement by fixed capital, Marx argued, would produce a crisis in the role of labor and thus in the law of value. As immediate labor as such ceased to be the basis of production of wealth, labor value ceases to be a relevant category.²⁷

At this point, one might imagine Negri's argument to parallel those who would say goodbye to the working class because of the supposed dramatic drop in the numbers of workers involved in commodity production. But this is not the case. Despite the reduction in the contribution of labor to production, Negri argues that money and work both persist and remain central to capitalist command. "Money," he writes, "still remains to enforce the capitalist appropriation of commodities."²⁸ "Money no longer represents a moment in the class relation, merely mediating exchange between labour and capital. It now comes to embody the one-sidedness of the relation, the unilateral, irresolvable, antagonistic, capitalistic will to domination."²⁹ At this point the law of value "exercizes its sway entirely at this level of arbitrariness and force."³⁰ In other words, the capitalist imposition of work is now separated from wealth creation; it is purely a repressive mechanism of social control. Capital "becomes more and more dissociated from a purely value definition and operates more and more in a context of relations of force."³¹

This line of argument not only provided a theoretical understanding of the effectiveness of the struggles of Italian workers for wage equalization but also provided a theoretical justification for the other side of their struggles: the refusal of work. A year before Negri's discussion paper, the militants of Potere Operaio had written: "First comes the working class hatred for work, and then the discovery that at this stage of development of the productive forces mass industrial production is essentially makework."³² What Negri has done is to show how Marx's theory of capitalist development in the Grundrisse provides an explanation for this phenomenon; for what is "makework" if not work for work's sake as pure domination? Thus, not surprisingly, Negri reaffirms Potere Operaio's political strategy of the refusal of such makework.

But he also went beyond this; while rejecting both reformism and revolutionary terrorism, he embraced a parallel strategy of mass working class direct appropriation of wealth—one being practiced in the streets of Italy during the early 1970s in the form of proletarian shopping, the self-reduction of prices, the use of public transportation without paying and the take-over of empty houses.³³ If wealth is no longer produced primarily by direct labor, but by a "social labor" embodied in fixed capital, then "the mass content of any working-class revolutionary organizational project today . . . can only, under these conditions, be based on a programme of direct

social appropriation of the wealth that is socially produced.”³⁴ “The mass organization of an attack on social wealth as something that should be regarded as our own. Through this programme, the social individual, in the present given conditions of production, can recognize the present mode of production as a straitjacket constraining his own possibilities, and communism as the only reality which is adequate to his emergence as a new social subject of production.”³⁵

In his subsequent writings, Negri has continued to view the continuing crisis of class relations in capitalism in terms of the crisis of the law of value. In his lectures presented at *L’Ecole Normale* in Paris in 1978 and collected in his *Marx Oltre Marx*, he expanded upon his reading of the *Grundrisse* to further develop his arguments.³⁶

The problem with this view, however, is that it artificially separates the concepts of labor as producer of wealth and labor as means of domination, associating only the former with value. Marx’s concept of value, I argue, has always designated primarily the role of labor as undifferentiated capitalist command rather than its role as producer of wealth. Indeed, the very distinction between use value and value is that between wealth understood as that which labor produces of use to the working class and that which labor produces of use to capital, i.e., command. From this point of view the crisis of value which Negri sees at the heart of the crisis of the Keynesian state must be understood essentially as a crisis of command, and the various ad-hoc strategies capital has tried to use to restore its command as means to the restoration of a dynamically stable labor-based social order. Thus I can agree with Negri’s conclusions concerning the centrality of the struggle against work and the potentialities of self-valorization to create a new social order, while disagreeing with his view of the obsolescence of value, and hence of the labor theory of value.

Austin, Texas, June 1989

Notes

- The original Frankfurt School theorists extended the analysis of domination to the sphere of culture —largely taking the vision of capitalist despotism over work for granted (Pollock’s work being the obvious exception). It has been their followers who have downplayed the centrality of work, arguing that the cultural mechanisms of domination have replaced work as the major vehicles of social control. Among those who began to spell out this argument, besides Offe, have been the currently fashionable Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production*, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975

(originally published in French in 1973) and John Alt, "Beyond Class: The Decline of Labor and Leisure," *Telos*, Number 28, Summer 1976, pp. 55-80,

- Claus Offe, "Work: The Key Sociological Category?" in Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1985, pp. 129-150.
- *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- *Ibid.*, p. 145-146.
- *Ibid.*, p. 136.
- *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- *Ibid.*, p.148-150.
- Among other contributions to this new anti-Marxist wave of social democracy we should mention: Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London: Verso, 1985, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism*, New York: Basic Books, 1986,
- On understanding the segmentation of labor markets in terms of class decomposition see Yann Moulier, "Les théories américaines de la 'segmentation du marché du travail' et italiennes de la 'composition de classe' à travers le prisme des lectures françaises," *Babylone*, no. 0, Hiver 1981-1982, pp. 175-214. On the diffusion of the factory as both capitalist strategy and response to workers struggles see the various early issues of *Quaderni di Territorio* (Milano), English Phil Mattera, "Small is Not Beautiful: Decentralized Production and the Underground Economy in Italy," *Radical America*, Vol. 14, No. 5, September-October 1980 and Jean-Paul de Guademar, "L'usine éclatée: les stratégies d'emploi à distance face à la crise du travail," *Le Mouvement Social*, Nol. 125, Octobre-Décembre 1983, pp. 113-124. On the class struggles of those "diffused workers" see Sergio Bologna, "The Tribe of Moles: Class Composition and the Party System in Italy," in Red Notes and CSE, *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, London, 1979. The hierarchical distribution of imposed work and managerial responsibility for imposing work has developed apace with the heterogeneity required for control over work. This development poses a problem only for "sociological" theories of class of the sort critiqued by Richard Gunn in "Notes on 'Class,'" *Common Sense*, No. 2, July 1987, pp. 15-25.

- While it is undoubtedly true, as he says, that such work “in both private and public enterprises” is “overwhelmingly wage-dependent,” he ignores both the way this work has always been done, and the tremendous amount still being done, by unwaged housewives. On the takeover of women’s work and their very bodies by capitalism, see Silvia Federici and Leopoldina Fortunati, *Il Grande Calibano: Storia del corpo sociale ribelle nella prima fase del capitale*, Milano: Franco Angeli Editore, 1984 and Silvia Federici, “The Great Witch Hunt,” *The Maine Scholar*, Vol.1, No. 1, Autumn 1988, pp. 31-52. On the class struggles in these areas of the “service sector” see such works as: *Dietro La Normalità del Parto: lotta all’ospedale di Ferrara*, Venezia: Marsilio, 1978 and the section on nursing in Wendy Edmond and Suzie Fleming, *All Work and No Pay*, Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975.
- For an early analysis of the crisis in education in class terms which is still methodologically useful, see George Caffentzis, “Throwing Away the Ladder: the Universities in the Crisis,” *Zerowork* #1, December 1975, also see Bologna, op. cit..
- Among such studies see Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*, New York: Vintage, 1964, Joel Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1972, Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*, New York: David McKay, 1974, and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, New York: Basic, 1976.
- A seminal article on the rise of the Keynesian state which is the political framework for the management of consumerism is Antonio Negri, “Keynes and Capitalist Theories of the State Post-1929,” in Toni Negri, *Revolution Retrieved: Selected Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis & New Social Subjects*, 1967-1983, London: Red Notes, 1989, pp. 9-42.
- Baudrillard’s work on consumption of symbols in *Pour une critique de l’économie politique du signe* (1972) emphasizes an interesting side to the class politics of consumption but in no way undermines the argument that most consumption is still geared to the reproduction of life around work. Indeed much of the consumption of symbols has to do with the social reproduction of the wage hierarchy.
- See John Alt, op.cit. who summarizes the literature on “occupational communities.”
- See Sergio Bologna, “Class Composition and the Theory of the Party at the Origin of the German Workers’ Council Movement,” *Telos* #13, Fall 1972, pp. 4-27. (Originally published in *Operai e Stato*, Milano: Feltrinelli 1972)

- Herbert Gutman, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 78, No. 3, June 1973, pp. 531-588.
- Marx's sketchy treatment in *Capital* of the resistance to induction into capital's labor force and the subsequent struggle to limit then reduce the time costs of that induction has been followed by considerable labor history which has documented, even if in passing, those struggles against the subordination of life to work. We should take that history seriously and recognize how the struggle over work has always been at the heart of the class struggles of capitalism.
- On the concept of self-valorization see Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx*, South Hadley: Bergin & Garvey, 1984, especially Lesson Eight on Communism & Transition, Harry Cleaver, "Marxian Theory and the Inversion of Class Perspective in its Concepts: Two Case Studies" (typescript) 1989 and Ann Lucas de Rouffignac and Harry Cleaver, "Self-Valorization and the Mexican Peasantry," (typescript) 1989.
- The key discussion of this concept is in the "Fragment on Machines" in Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1973, pp. 699-711.
- Toni Negri, "Crisis of the Planner-State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization," in Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, op. cit., p. 101.
- That is to say the management of the more or less equal growth of working class income (necessary labor) and its productivity both in the production of surplus value bearing commodities and in the production of labor power.
- "The Italian workers have now proposed the total rejection of work and the rejection of the idea that wages must be rewards for work. We are asking for equal pay for everyone, a demand which renounces the division of skilled and unskilled workers, unemployed and employed, developed areas and , employed and pre-employed (students and youth), employed and post-employed (the aged). The workers ask that wages no longer be geared to productivity. . ." *Potere Operaio*, "Italy 1969-1970: A Wave of Struggles," a supplement to *Potere Operaio*, no. 27, June 27-July 3, 1970.
- Toni Negri,
- "As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value." *Grundrisse*, p. 705.
- Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, op. cit., p. 101.

- *Ibid.*, p. 102.
- *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- *Ibid.*, p. 127. In Negri's view at that time, the major vehicle for the imposition of work as domination was the multinational corporation which had eclipsed the nationstate to form an "Enterprise State," *Ibid.*, pp. 118-124.
- Potere Operaio, "Italy 1969-1970: A Wave of Struggles," op. cit..
- See for example, Bruno Ramirez, "Working Class Struggle Against the Crisis: Self-Reduction in Italy," *Zerowork* #1, December 1975, pp. 143-150.
- Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, op. cit., p. 118.
- *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.
- Antonio Negri, *Marx Oltre Marx*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1979. Available in English as *Marx Beyond Marx*, op. cit.

David Harvie

All Labour Produces Value For Capital And We All Struggle Against Value

Introduction

For most Marxists, and Marxist economists in particular, the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is of key importance, essential to a proper understanding of variables such as the rates of surplus value and profit, and hence of capitalism's development and tendency towards crisis. Indeed, those who deny this distinction are frequently portrayed as of dubious adherence to Marxism's central tenets and, in particular, to the labour theory of value.

[I]f the distinction between productive and unproductive labor is rejected, then other fundamental categories of Marx's theory lose their theoretical coherence. It is not possible both to maintain the labor theory of value and to dispense with its fundamental building blocks. (Mohun 1996: 31)

Yet, a number of Marxists working outside of the economics discipline, and many of those outside of Marxist orthodoxy — in particular those within the tradition of *autonomia* ('autonomist' Marxism) — have allowed the distinction to fall by the wayside. For them such a distinction is (implicitly) illusory:

One can only conclude that the definition of productive labor which we begin to find in these pages of the *Grundrisse* and which we will find in other works is a *heavily reductive definition* in the literal form it assumes. We reject it in the literal form which it takes because it is invalidated by an objectivist, atomized, and fetishist consideration of theory of value: it is the consideration which is exactly the one one would want to attribute to Marx in order to make him an old materialist of the 18th century. (Negri 1991: 64; emphasis in original).¹

But despite continuing development of thought within both these traditions, there has been little mutual engagement. In this paper I propose a rereading of Marx's

distinction between productive and unproductive labour. I suggest that Negri et al. are too hasty in rejecting the distinction — in doing so they discard an important analytical tool for understanding our struggle against capital. However, I also suggest also that we should rethink this distinction, such that it becomes a category of struggle, rather than a classificatory basis from which we analysis capital's 'laws of motion'. That is, we should start from the struggle between capital and labour — from human activity itself — and from this emerges the productive-unproductive labour distinction. Thus the distinction thus becomes an *open* category and inherent to the concept of value, not one of its 'building blocks'.

I structure the paper as follows. In the first section I briefly and uncritically review Marx's explicit writings on productive and unproductive labour (PUPL) and those of some of the staunchest defenders of the distinction. I am more critical in section 2, in which I suggest that although this Classical Marxist position may not be untrue as such, it is of limited use in interpreting the contemporary social struggles surrounding capital's attempt to impose ceaseless work and colonise new areas of human activity. The paper's heart is section 3. Here I interrogate the PUPL distinction starting from a number of key categories in turn, namely: *value*, the substance of which is *abstract labour*; *production and the commodity*; *capital*; and *labour-power*. I argue that capital's tendency is to (attempt to) make *all* labour productive of value. In the paper's final section, section 4, I suggest that much human activity remains (or becomes) *unproductive* of value for capital and that the productive-unproductive labour distinction should be understood as contingent upon class struggle, that is, as an *open* category. I suggest that this understanding retains the fundamental relation between the distinction and the labour theory of value, but *contra* most Classical Marxists, as an *internal* relation. The law of value is then nothing other than capital's, which humanity struggles to undermine and transcend.

1 Marx and Classical Marxists on Productive and Unproductive Labour

1.1 Marx on the productive-unproductive labour distinction

Marx touches upon PUPL in passages scattered throughout his writings, including the three volumes of *Capital*. He explicitly discusses the distinction in a few passages of the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973), in a section of the so-called 'unpublished sixth chapter' of *Capital's* first volume, 'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' (Marx

1976b) and, most extensively, in a lengthy chapter in Part One of *Theories of Surplus Value* (Marx 1969). His position seems quite clear.

Marx begins the chapter on 'Theories of productive and unproductive labour' in *Theories of Surplus Value* with a definition:

Productive labour, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage-labour which, exchanged against the variable part of capital (the part of the capital that is spent on wages), reproduces not only this part of the capital (or the value of its own labour-power), but in addition produces surplus-value for the capitalist. It is only thereby that commodity or money is transformed into capital, is produced as capital. Only that wage-labour is productive which produces capital. (Marx 1969: 152)

This definition is echoed in the 'unpublished sixth chapter' of *Capital*:

Since the immediate purpose and the *authentic product* of capitalist production is *surplus value, labour is only productive*, and an exponent of labour-power is only *a productive worker*, if it or he creates *surplus-value* directly, i.e. the only productive labour is that which is directly *consumed* in the course of production for the valorization of capital. (Marx 1976b: 1038; emphasis in original)

From this follows the definition of the productive worker:

The *worker* who performs *productive work* is *productive* and the work he performs is productive if it directly creates *surplus-value*, i.e. if it *valorizes* capital. (Marx 1976b: 1039; emphasis in original)

A second part of Marx's own definition of productive labour is borrowed from Adam Smith, who 'defines productive labour as labour *which is directly exchanged with capital*' (Marx 1969: 157). In the 'unpublished sixth chapter' Marx writes:

Productive labour is exchanged directly for *money as capital*, i.e. for money which is intrinsically capital, which is destined to function as capital and which confronts labour-power as capital. (Marx 1976b: 1043; emphasis in original).

From this, Marx is able to define unproductive labour:

This ... establishes absolutely what *unproductive labour* is. It is labour which is not exchanged with capital, but *directly* with revenue, that is, with wages or profit (including of course the various categories of those who share as co-partners in the capitalist's profit, such as interest and rent). (Marx 1969: 157)

Marx develops his understanding of productive labour and unproductive labour on the basis of these definitions. Two points are of particular importance.

First, the social form under which labour is performed is all-important, whilst the material content of the labour is irrelevant:

These definitions are therefore not derived from the material characteristics of labour (neither from the nature of its product nor from the particular character of the labour as concrete labour), but from the definite social form, the social relations of production, within which the labour is realised. (Marx 1969: 157)

The determinate material form of the labour, and therefore of its product, in itself has nothing to do with this distinction between productive and unproductive labour. (Marx 1969: 159)

Second, it is not necessary to *directly* produce a product in order to be a productive labourer, particularly with the development of the division of labour:

With the progressive accentuation of the co-operative character of the labour process, there necessarily occurs a progressive extension of the concept of productive labour, and of the concept of the bearer of that labour, the productive worker. In order to work productively, it is no longer necessary for the individual worker himself to put his hand to the object; it is sufficient for him to be an organ of the collective labourer, and to perform any one of its subordinate functions. (Marx 1976a: 643-44)

For example, Marx considers that the labours of organising, conceiving and designing production and production processes are all productive:

Included among these productive workers, of course, are all those who contribute in one way or another to the production of the commodity, from the actual operative to the manager or engineer (as distinct from the capitalist). (Marx 1969: 156-7)

Marx explicitly categorises three types of labour as being unproductive. First, the labour of (re)producing labour-power:

Hence the former class [productive labourers] will produce immediate, material wealth consisting of *commodities*, all commodities except those which consist of labour-power itself. (Marx 1969: 161)

Productive labour would therefore be such labour as produces commodities or directly produces, trains, develops, maintains or reproduces labour-power

itself. Adam Smith excludes the latter from his category of productive labour; arbitrarily, but with a certain correct instinct—that if he included it, this would open the flood-gates for false pretensions to the title of productive labour. *In so far therefore as we leave labour-power itself out of account*, productive labour is labour which produces commodities. (Marx 1969: 172; my emphasis)

Second, the labour of superintendence of others' labour, as distinct to the labour of organisation of others' labour, is also deemed unproductive:

[O]ne part of the labour of superintendence merely arises from the antagonistic contradiction between capital and labour, from the antagonistic character of capitalist production, and belongs to the incidental expenses of production in the same way as nine-tenths of the 'labour' occasioned by the circulation process. (Marx 1972: 505)

Thus the third category of unproductive labour is that involved in the circulation of commodities. Here the worker 'expends his labour-power and his labour time in the operations $C-M$ and $M-C$... but the content of his labour creates neither value nor products' (Marx 1978: 290).

However, Marx does suggest that 'the value of the services of these unproductive labourers [is] determined and determinable in the same (or an analogous) way as that of the productive labourers: that is, by the production costs involved in maintaining or producing them.' (Marx 1969: 159). Similarly, the value of the labour-power of unproductive workers is determined in the same way as for their productive fellows.

From one point of view, a commercial employee of this kind is a wage-labourer like any other. Firstly, in so far as his labour is bought with the merchants' variable capital, not with money that he spends with revenue; it is bought, in other words, not for a personal service but for the purpose of valorizing the capital advanced in it. Secondly, in so far as the value of his labour-power, and therefore his wage, is determined, like that of all other wage-labourers, by the production and reproduction costs of this particular labour-power and not by the product of his labour. (Marx 1981: 406)

Moreover, unproductive workers, such as those involved in circulation activities, although they produce neither value nor surplus value, still perform unpaid or surplus labour:

He expends his labour-power and his labour time in the operations $C-M$ and $M-C$. And hence he lives off this in the same way as someone else might live from spinning or making pills. ... Let us assume that he is simply a wage-

labourer, even if one of the better paid. Whatever his payment, as a wage-labourer he works part of the day for nothing. He may receive every day the value product of eight hours' labour, and function for ten. The two hours' surplus labour that he performs no more produce value than do his eight hours' of necessary labour, although it is by means of the latter that a part of the social product is transferred to him. (Marx 1978: 209–10).

The commercial worker does not produce surplus-value directly. But the price of his labour is determined by the value of his labour-power, i.e. its cost of production, although the exercise of this labour-power, the exertion, expenditure of energy and wear and tear it involves, is no more limited by the value of his labour-power than it is in the case of any other wage-labourer. His wage therefore does not stand in any necessary relationship to the amount of profit that he helps the capitalist to realize. What he costs the capitalist and what he brings in for him are different quantities. What he brings in is a function not of any direct creation of surplus-value but of his assistance in reducing the cost of realizing surplus-value, in so far as he performs labour (part of it unpaid). (Marx 1981: 414)

So, to summarise, productive labour is (i) labour which is *directly exchanged with capital*; (ii) labour which produces value, surplus value and hence capital; (iii) any labour which contributes to the production of the commodity (e.g., that of a manager or technician, but not that of a capitalist). Unproductive labour is labour which is exchanged directly with revenue (wages, profit, rent or interest) or labour which does not produce value. This category of unproductive labour includes the labour of (re)producing the proletariat, supervisory activities and circulation activities. Some sort of *law of value* is in operation with respect to unproductive labour, for the value of services produced by unproductive labourers is determined by the socially necessary labour time, whilst the value of unproductive labour-power is determined by the costs of its (re)production in the same way as productive labour-power. Finally, unproductive workers may perform surplus labour.

1.2 Marxist economists on productive and unproductive labour

It is possible to distinguish four main positions on PUPL within Marxist theory and Marxian economics (see, for example, Laibman 1992). Here I consider mainly the *analytic* definition, which appears to be closest to Marx's own and most 'orthodox'.

The analytic approach is most forcefully argued by Fred Moseley, Simon Mohun and Anwar Shaikh and co-workers. The position and its importance can be summarised:

It must be emphasized once again that the classical distinction between production and nonproduction labor is essentially analytical. It is founded on the insight that certain types of labor share a common property with the activity of consumption — namely, that in their performance they use up a portion of existing wealth without directly resulting in the creation of this wealth. To say that these labors indirectly result in the creation of this wealth is only another way of saying that they are necessary. Consumption also indirectly results in production, as production indirectly results in consumption. But this hardly obviates the need for distinguishing between the two. (Shaikh and Tonak 1994: 25)

For Savran and Tonak (1999) the PUGL distinction is important for three *general* reasons. *First*, only productive labour produces surplus value and is therefore a source of accumulation. Further, since ‘the wages of unproductive workers have to be paid out of the surplus-value created by productive workers[, ...] the mass of unproductive labour employed in a capitalist economy is in fact a positive restraint on capitalist accumulation. *Second*, it has implications for the determination of surplus value, variable capital, their ratio, the rate of surplus value, and the rate of profit (what Mandel calls ‘social bookkeeping’). Hence the distinction ‘is essential for an understanding of capitalist crises. *Third*, the distinction is necessary for the analysis of state intervention and, in particular, the ‘net impact of state intervention in the sphere of income distribution’ (116–7). The distinction is important for three further reasons peculiar to contemporary capitalism: in order to assess the impacts of, *first*, the ‘explosion of financial services’, *second*, the growth in consumer services, and *third*, the changes in social-service provision, on capital accumulation. (118–9)

Shaikh and Tonak begin by distinguishing four ‘basic activities of social reproduction’: (i) ‘production’; (ii) ‘distribution’; (iii) ‘social maintenance and reproduction’; and (iv) ‘personal consumption’. Activities (i), (ii) and (iii) qualify as labour (personal consumption is not labour); only (i) — ‘production, in which the various objects of social use (use values) are utilised in the process of the creation of new such objects’ — is production labour (1994: 21–2). *Productive* labour is then a subset of this category of production labour, and is that labour which is exchanged with capital and which produces surplus value.

The identification of that labor which produces surplus value — in other words, that labor which is productive of capital — immediately allows us to

specify its two salient properties: (a) it is wage labor which is first exchanged against capital (i.e., it is capitalistically employed); (b) it is labor which creates or transforms use values (i.e., it is production labor). (Shaikh and Tonak 1994: 30)

While Shaikh and Tonak use the category of *production labour*, Savran and Tonak (1999) adopt Marx's *productive labour in general*, a 'definition of productive labour applicable to all modes of production... [Then] productive labour for capital is a *subset* of productive labour in general' (Savran and Tonak 1999: 120).²

For these three authors, production activities are those which transform nature and hence 'mediate the *relationship of society to nature*'. By contrast, 'those... who carry out, within the context of a given social division of labour, the activities of circulation and the reproduction of the social order, simply execute tasks which flow from a historically determined set of socio-economic *relations among human beings* with a definite society.' (Savran and Tonak 1999: 122). The concept of productive labour in general is very important to their argument, as they re-emphasise towards the end of their paper:

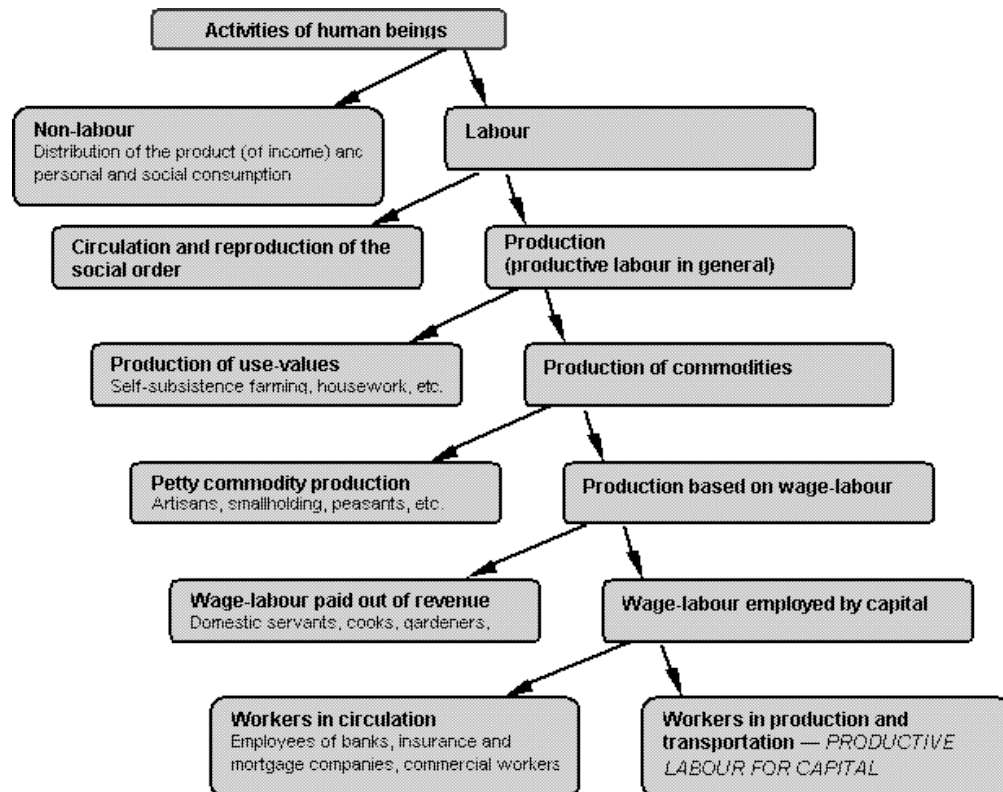
[T]he quality of being productive labour in general is a *necessary* (though not sufficient) condition for labour to be productive for capital. This means that any activity which is not directly necessary for humanity's intercourse with nature in order to transform aspects of it in accordance with human needs *cannot* be regarded as productive labour in general, nor, therefore, as productive labour under capitalism. In other words, this *double determination* of the concept productive labour implies that productive labour under capitalism is a subset of productive labour in general. (Savran and Tonak 1999: 144; emphasis in original)

Savran and Tonak then make the following points, many of which simply rehearse Marx's treatment of the distinction, which I summarised in section 1.1, above.

- 'Productive labour for capital is that labour which produces surplus-value' (124).
- '[T]labour of self-sufficient peasant households or housework under capitalism' is unproductive since it produces use-values, but not commodities (125).
- Similarly, the labour of petty commodity producers is not productive, since the direct producers own the means of production and hence exchange the products of their labour rather than their labour-power. Savran and Tonak include not only artisans and small-holding peasants in this category of unproductive labour, but also homeworkers, who are part of the modern 'putting-out' system, 'even in those

case where the instruments of labour and raw materials are provided by the capitalist' (125).

- '[O]nly labour-power exchanged against capital can serve as the source of productive labour under capitalism', which hence categorises the labour of 'domestic servants, cooks, drivers, gardeners, etc.' as unproductive (127)
- The productive-capital phase of the circuit $M-C...P...C-M$ is the basis of the valorization process and it is thus only during this phase that surplus value is produced. Tasks carried out in the other phases — i.e. circulation — are unproductive, even though these tasks are necessary for the overall process of reproduction and may 'produce' use-values of some nature. 'Workers employed by capital working in the sphere of circulation are unproductive as is their labour'. Savran and Tonak point out that 'circulation activities in the strict sense of the term are not an inseparable ingredient of production *in general* but are only necessary under the given conditions of *capitalism* and its indissociable companion, generalized commodity production'. They are '*by definition unproductive in all types of socio-economic organization*'. In other words, since circulation activities cannot be considered a part of productive labour in general they cannot be productive labour under capitalism. (128–30 & 144–45).
- Similarly, other necessary roles and activities, such as those of law enforcement, are unproductive. (130)
- Some transportation and storage activities are part of production and hence are productive, provided the labour in the sector is employed by capital. But other such activities, those 'due purely to motives peculiar to circulation (e.g. speculation or re-exportation due to differential government regulation) are immaterial to the production process and the labour employed therein counts as unproductive.' (131–32)
- Although circulation capital depends upon the workers it employs for its profits, both these profits and the wages it pays to its workers are a portion of the total surplus value produced by productive workers in the sphere of production. (132)

Figure 1. Savran and Tonak's (1999) productive-unproductive labour distinction

Savran and Tonak nicely sum up their discussion with two diagrams, which I have aggregated in figure 1. It's worth noting here that in their categorisation of housework as unproductive, since it involves 'labour expended with the sole purpose of producing use-values', i.e., not commodities (125; their second point, above), Savran and Tonak completely ignore the fact that housework produces the *commodity* labour-power (see, e.g., Dalla Costa and James 1972). More generally, such classifications are problematic, neglecting any consideration of the 'role of extra-market relations in the process of social reproduction, when market relations become the paradigm of social exchange' (Caffentzis 1999: 153).

Savran and Tonak go onto consider service-sector and state workers. They stress that those service workers who exchange their labour-power with capital and whose product (service) takes the form of a commodity are productive:

So long as the labour in question transforms a particular aspect of nature with the purpose of satisfying a need, so long, that is, this activity is an aspect of *production in general*, labour engaged in such a process can, if it is

employed by capital, serve as productive labour (Savran and Tonak 1999: 135)

Savran and Tonak group the activities of the state under three headings. First, activities which 'relate exclusively to the reproduction of the social order'. Workers who perform these activities 'are unproductive labourers *by definition* [since t]heir labour is not productive in the general sense... It does not act upon nature to transform certain aspects into use-values with a view to satisfying human needs, directly or indirectly' (138). The second type of state activity is the organization of production activities within state-owned corporations and companies. Such enterprises are capitalist and attempt to extract surplus-value from their workers, who are therefore productive. The third and final group of state activities comprises those directed towards the provision of social services (the welfare state). Some workers within this group, 'such as prison wardens or tax-collectors', really fall into the first group of state employees, since their 'exclusive task is the reproduction of the existing social order'; their labour is thus 'unproductive by definition'. Other welfare-state workers, such as health and education workers, produce use-values and their labour may be productive or unproductive depending upon the context in which this labour is organized and whether these use-values are sold as commodities. For example, 'the national education system or the national health service of a capitalist country cannot be regarded as capitalist enterprises. Consequently, the workers they employ cannot be classified as productive labourers.' (139)

2 The Decline of the Law of Value?

2.1 The increase in unproductive labour

Many of those Classical Marxists who have written on and defended the PURL distinction have also been concerned with the estimation and measurement of key Marxian variables, such as the rate of surplus value and the rate of profit.³ A principle finding of these authors has been the increase in unproductive labour over the post-war period and the corresponding decline in productive labour.

For example, Moseley (1983) estimates that the ratio of the number of unproductive to productive workers in the U.S. economy increased by 82% over the period 1947–1977. By 1977 'almost half the total wage bill of capitalist enterprises was paid to workers who performed unproductive labor ... [and] we have the striking result that over half of the surplus-value produced by productive labor was used to pay the

wages of unproductive labor within capitalist enterprises, or inversely, that less than half of the total surplus-value was available for capital accumulation and for other purposes' (Moseley 1983: 183). The ratio of unproductive to productive workers rose by a further 20% between 1977 and 1987; by 1987 'unproductive' workers comprised 44% of U.S. employees (Moseley 1991: Tables A7 and A8). Shaikh and Tonak (1994) broadly concur. They agree that the proportion of 'unproductive' labour in the U.S. economy is increasing, but suggest that it was already above 60% for the 1980s.

In the U.K., Cockshott et al.'s (1995) data suggests that the ratio of unproductive-worker wages to variable capital (i.e. productive-worker wages) rose from 22% in 1970 to 102% in 1989, a leap of more than 350% over just two decades. Gouverneur (1990) adopts a slightly broader definition of productive labour, which includes all wage-workers except those employed in 'non-market services' and those employed by 'private households'. Yet his findings for the rise in the ratio of unproductive to productive labour in the U.S., the U.K., France and Germany tell a similar story to these authors'.

The declining proportion of productive labour vis-à-vis the total mass of waged labour, or labour, or human activity, in general raises at least three points concerning the PUPL distinction, in particular, and the continued relevance of Marxism, in general.

First, capital is a social relation and the capitalist mode of production is a historically specific form of social relations. As others, including Elson (1979) and Bonefeld (2001a, 2001b), have emphasised, what distinguishes Marx's critique from the analyses of political economy is that Marx asks 'the question why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say, *why labour is expressed in value*, and why the measurement of labour by its duration is expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product' (*Capital I*: 1, 174; my emphasis). The first part of this question is sharp enough to go straight to the heart of the matter, to highlight the perverted nature of capital the social relation: why does our creative activity as human beings — work — take the social form of value, of abstract labour? But the whole thrust of the developing PUPL distinction is to blunt this question. For with the category unproductive labour, we have a whole and, what is more, expanding subset of human activities which, although they are both subjugated to and necessary for the capitalist mode of production, which do not create — are not expressed in — value.

The second point concerns the second part of Marx's question above: 'why [is] the measurement of labour by its duration ... expressed in the magnitude of the value of the product'? Again, the question is blunted when we admit the existence of

unproductive labour. How do we understand the fact, for example, that a pair of Nike trainers costs four or more times as much as a physically similar 'no logo' pair? If all the creative human activity involved in designing (beyond the physical design of the shoes) and marketing the Nike product is unproductive, adding nothing to the shoes' value, then the values of the Nike and 'no logo' trainers will be similar. A significant divergence of price from value is the only result. How is this to be explained?⁴

The third point is related to the second, but concerns capitalist strategies in the class struggle, more explicit than the pricing of final commodities. Marx's categories of the rate of surplus value and the rate of profit and his discussion of the capitalist strategies of absolute and absolute surplus value offer clear tools for understanding class struggle. These tools become clumsy and unwieldy when we attempt to apply them to unproductive labour.

Let us first disregard unproductive labour, or consider only class struggle involving productive workers. The strategy of absolute surplus value involves the extension of the working day. Necessary labour time and hence the value of variable capital V , remain constant, but surplus labour time and hence surplus value S both rise. The rate of surplus value and rate of profit both increase, since in both cases the numerator has risen whilst the denominator has remained constant (assuming no change in the value of constant capital C). With the strategy of relative surplus value, capital manages to increase productivity such that necessary labour time and hence V fall, allowing an increase in surplus labour time and S with the length of the working day constant. Again the rate of surplus value rises, because *not only* has the numerator risen but, *in addition*, the denominator has fallen. But the effect on the rate of profit is ambiguous. Whilst the numerator rises, the denominator will too since the strategy involves increasing the value of constant capital C . That is, the strategy of relative surplus value causes both the rate of surplus value and the organic composition of capital C/V to rise.

Now consider the existence of unproductive labour. According to Marx and most of those Marxists who accept the PUPL distinction, unproductive expenditures, including the wages of unproductive workers, are a deduction from surplus value. It is obviously in the interests of capital to minimise these unproductive expenditures since the lower they are the greater the magnitude of surplus value which remains to be accumulated. But, as in the 'productive' sphere, there are two main strategies which capital can adopt in order to do this. It can either (try and) force unproductive workers to work longer hours or more intensely, or it can introduce new technology which will allow fewer unproductive workers to perform the same volume of tasks. Of course, these two

strategies correspond to those of absolute and relative surplus value, respectively, but it is harder to distinguish them since their effects are hidden in the single term *unproductive expenses*, the deduction from *S*. To analyse work processes within the growing number of unproductive enterprises, we are required to graft whole new layers of theory onto Marx's own, in a way which to me seems unnecessarily complicated. This is certainly the implication of Shaikh and Tonak's theoretical approach, which posits two distinct rates of exploitation:

[A]ll capitalistically employed labor is exploited by capital, whether it is productive labor or unproductive labor. The rate of exploitation of each is their respective ratio of surplus labor time to necessary labor time. Necessary labor time is simply the value of the labor power involved, that is, the labor value of the average annual consumption per worker in the activities in question. Surplus labor time is [the] excess of working time over necessary labor time. In the case of productive workers, their rate of exploitation is also the rate of surplus value. (Shaikh and Tonak 1994: 31)

No doubt Shaikh and Tonak would argue the circumstances of unproductive labour are conditioned by those of productive labour and capital. However they do not suggest a process by which this determination takes place. Indeed they express 'surprise' at the 'close parallelism between wages of productive and unproductive workers' and later find that the rates of exploitation of these two types of workers 'move in remarkably similar ways' (ibid.: 150 & 224).

2.2 Making sense of capitalist crisis

Various authors' interpretations of the capitalist crisis of the 1970s and '80s also seem to highlight the limitations of the Classical-Marxist distinction between productive and unproductive labour. Moseley (1999) goes so far as to suggest that 'the conventional rate of profit [which does not take the PUPL distinction into account] is more important than the Marxian rate of profit in an analysis of the current crisis. ... [The] significant decline in the conventional rate of profit seems to be an important cause of the economic stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s' (103-4).

Given this, he seeks to 'formulate a Marxian theory of the conventional rate of profit', in which variable capital (the wages of productive workers) is distinguished from the 'flow of unproductive capital', and constant (productive) capital is distinguished from the stock of unproductive capital (108).⁵ Then, 'the proximate causes of the decline in the conventional rate of profit in the postwar US economy were the significant increases in the composition of capital and in the two ratios of

unproductive capital to variable capital ... [with] the proximate determinant which contributed the most to the decline in the rate of profit was the ratio UF' , i.e., that of the flow of unproductive capital, 95% of which is the wages of unproductive labour, to variable capital, i.e., the wages of productive labour' (111). Moseley further finds that the 72% rise over the period 1947–1977 in the ratio of wages of unproductive labour to variable capital can mostly be accounted for by an 83% increase in the ratio of the number of unproductive workers to productive — from 0.35 to 0.64 — whilst their relative wages remained 'more or less constant' (113).

Moseley's embarks upon a series of further decompositions, considering the relative contributions of the output and productivity growth of commercial and financial labour (circulation labour) and supervisory labour. His main conclusions are that (i) commercial labour accounted for almost two-thirds of the total increase of unproductive labour; financial and supervisory labour each accounted for roughly half of the remaining increase; (ii) the relative increase in commercial labour was mainly due to slower productivity growth of this type of labour vis-à-vis productive labour; (iii) the relative increase of financial labour was mainly due to the faster output growth of banks vis-à-vis productive-labour output, which Moseley ascribes to the wider use of personal checking to make payments; (iv) the relative increase in supervisory labour — which, relative to productive labour, increased by 86%, from 0.07 in 1950 to 0.13 in 1980 — was most likely due to increased firm size, increased union membership, lower rates of unemployment and managers' (150–51).

Two points about Moseley's analysis stand out. First, his suggestion that the 'conventional rate of profit' is actually more important in terms of explaining capitalist crisis than the Marxian rate, in which unproductive labour is disregarded. This remark both begs the question, *what use is the Marxian rate?* and forces him to construct the elaborate expressions outlined above. Second, while his decompositions and empirical evidence are extremely illuminating, they serve to focus attention on so-called 'unproductive' activities, activities which fall outside the scope of the labour theory of value.

Shaikh and Tonak (1994) adopt a startlingly different approach. The broad sweep of their empirical results is similar to that of Moseley's, but they instead focus on the Marxian rather than conventional variables. Emphasising the rising rates of surplus value and profit over nearly all of the postwar period, they appear to deny any period of real crisis in the US economy. For example, they write:

[T]he Marxian measure of productivity q^* is between three and four times as large as the conventional measure y . Moreover, q^* rises relative to y for significant periods. This is most notable during the post-1972 period, which is exactly when the pernicious and puzzling ‘productivity slowdown’ is supposed to have occurred. ... GNP/TP^* falls from 1972 to 1982, most probably because the oil-price shock in 1973 raises TP^* relative to GNP. At the same time, the ratio of total employment relative to productive employment rises more rapidly in this period (because of the relatively rapid growth of unproductive employment). ... *The so-called productivity slowdown* exhibited by the conventional measures ... in this critical period *is the result of these two disparate movements*. (Shaikh and Tonak 1994: 132; emphasis in original).

The effect of Shaikh and Tonak’s argument is not only to ignore class struggle and working-class power, but to deny it. The struggles which exploded in the US, and elsewhere, throughout the late 1960s and ‘70s are hidden behind the ‘objective’ increase in unproductive labour. But, adopting a different perspective, one can understand this rise in ‘unproductive’ labour as one part of capital’s *response* to these social struggles. After all, militant workers, blacks, housewives, students and others must be quietened by a combination of increased repression, on the one hand, and placation, on the other: more police, more social spending, both ‘unproductive’. For example, Federal social spending — on social security, income security, Medicare, health, education and veterans’ benefits — increased from 5% of GDP in 1950 to 11.6% in 1980, with almost two-thirds of this increase occurring in the single decades of the 1970 (United States Bureau of the Census 1995).

Another part of capital’s response to the crisis of the 1970s was the manipulation of prices, in particular oil prices, which in turn affect many other prices. By using inflation rising real incomes can be dampened and value transferred back to capital (Clever 1981; Midnight Notes Collective 1992; Oppenheim 1976–77, cited in Cleaver 2000). But for Shaikh and Tonak the oil-price shock was just that, a shock, and completely unrelated to class struggle in the United States.

1. ‘The question is not: is it true? But: does it work?’ (Massumi 1987: xv)

It is not my intention to attempt to formally refute the Classical Marxist theory of the PUPL distinction. Such a refutation may not possible and, *on their own terms*, the orthodox theorists of the distinction may well be consistent. But I do think that Marxist orthodoxy here fails to grasp what I consider fundamental, namely capital’s ceaseless imposition of work, which has spread into more and more spheres of human activity,

most 'unproductive', and the many struggles around this imposition. In this sense then, I am not claiming that the orthodox distinction is 'wrong' or 'false', but that it simply isn't very useful — it doesn't 'work' — in understanding class struggle. Our differences are not ones of formal logic, but of interpretation and of perspective. Whilst Classical Marxists perhaps understand the distinction as a logical category and a *basis* for analysis, I wish to reinterpret it as an *open* category, a distinction which *immediately* helps us understand struggle and which *emerges* from struggle.⁶ I attempt this task in the next two sections.

3 All Labour is Productive

3.1 Abstract labour, the substance of value

The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist. (Marx 1976a: 644)

Productive workers are workers who produce value and surplus-value. But what, in fact, is value? Here we can distinguish the 'Marxian theory of value', or the 'social paradigm', from the 'Ricardian theory of value', the so-called 'technological paradigm' (de Vroey 1982). In the Ricardian theory, value is simply embodied labour. By contrast, in the Marxian theory, value is embodied labour *which is also abstract labour*. That is, *the substance of value is abstract labour* (see, e.g., Cleaver 2000).

So let us now look more closely at abstract labour. For Marx, abstract labour is 'human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure'. Like labour, like result: 'All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished.' (Marx 1976a: 128). De Angelis (1995) suggests that 'without regard to the form of its expenditure' means 'without regard to the pain, suffering, human brutalisation, boredom, stupidity, etc, that work may imply' (110) and he goes on to show 'that abstract labour is *alienated, imposed, and boundless in character*'. Labour is alienated because the work activity appears to the worker as an *external power*, outside their direct control: it is not 'the satisfaction of a need but a mere means to satisfy needs outside itself' (Marx 1975: 226). Since alienated labour appears as an external power, such labour is 'not voluntary but forced, it is *forced labour*', i.e., it is imposed (Marx 1975: 326). And since abstract labour, by definition abstracts from concrete labour and from the useful character of concrete labour, it cannot be limited by a set of needs, neither those of the direct producer(s) nor of some other individual(s), such as the feudal lord, who

appropriates surplus labour. It is thus boundless, ‘production for production’s sake’. (De Angelis 1995: 111–13; including references to Marx).

But exactly these characteristics — alienated, imposed, boundless — are increasingly those of an apparently ever-expanding array of human activity under capitalism! At school and in universities, students face an immense battery of tests and examinations, with their associated pressures, from an ever-younger age. Schoolwork is alienated: its content is determined by external forces (teachers and, to an increasing extent, national syllabi) and it is directed towards passing exams, acquiring specific and ‘transferable’ skills and becoming ‘employable’. It is imposed: ‘you must do well at school, or else you’ll end up like...’; ‘if you don’t get a degree...’ It is boundless: ‘testing for testing’s sake’. Teachers and parents, particularly mothers, face associated and similar pressures. ‘Good’ and ‘responsible’ parenting is directed towards giving one’s child the ‘best start in life’ — finding the ‘best’ schools and doing whatever is necessary such that the child will be admitted, helping with homework, etc. — and seems to be driven by endless rounds of new research, government suggestions and scare-stories. One should always strive to be a ‘better parent’, to do ‘better’ for one’s child(ren). The labour of being a modern parent can thus be alienated, imposed and boundless. Other examples of alienated, imposed and boundless labour, both waged and unwaged, abound.

This perspective on abstract labour — and thus value — understands it as a tangible reality, the ‘sensuous-less’ of alienated, imposed and boundless activity. (See De Angelis 1996; 2004.) And this tangible reality is as applicable to the labour performed in capital’s reproductive circuit, $LP-M-C(MS)...P...LP^*$ (see Cleaver 2000: 123), as it is to that performed in its industrial circuit, $M-C\{LP, MP\}...P...C'-M'$. The two circuits are, of course, interlinked: when the industrial circuit of capital expands, the reproductive circuit will be affected. Clearly too, this perspective on abstract labour understands it as a category of struggle: how can it be otherwise when sensuous beings are forced to engage in sensuous-less work?

An important aspect of abstract labour, not discussed thus far, is the question of *commensuration*. For Classical Marxists, the process of ‘real abstraction’ which makes commensurate the various heterogeneous concrete labours is market exchange:

[H]eterogeneous concrete labors are rendered homogeneous and abstract *by the market*. The creation of value is not only a process of labor embodiment, or objectification of labor, in production; it is also, and *crucially*, a social process involving *exchange in the market*. (Mohun 1996: 33; my emphasis)

Labour which is 'unproductive' is then categorised as such because commensuration through market exchange does not take place. But I would argue that markets are only one social mechanism through which commensuration of heterogeneous concrete labours can take place. Markets are, in fact, a disciplinary device for capital: concrete labours become commensurate as individuals actors are forced to meet and beat benchmarks or social norms. (See De Angelis 2005 — this issue of *The Commoner*.) But markets are only one such device amongst many and capital habitually uses a combination of markets and planning. Moreover, commensuration is never 'perfect' or 'complete': it is a process (a verb not a noun!) and subject to struggle. So-called 'free markets' are never really free and unfettered. Private capitals from the largest global corporation right down to the smallest small business, have always attempted to gain political power in order to influence market structures and prices, both for labour-power and for other commodities. Labour, for its part, has always struggled in various ways to obtain the political power to influence markets and prices — particularly the price of labour-power — in *its* favour. Marx's simplifying assumption, throughout much of *Capital*, of no unequal exchange is just that, a simplifying assumption. And, of course, although Marx leaves this unspecified, the 'moral and historical element' in the determination of the value of labour-power clearly refers to struggle.

As production has become increasingly social and cooperative in nature, the private capitals that exploit cooperating labourers have used a variety of strategies to determine the remuneration of individual workers. These strategies are as much concerned with maintaining discipline and hierarchy as with 'efficiently' equating each worker's wage with the value of his or her labour-power, they involve administrative or 'political' decision-making or 'quasi-market' structures ('internal markets'). And similar strategies are increasingly being embraced by state organisations, which largely employ 'unproductive' labour.⁷ Private capitals' 'internal' decisions are ultimately vindicated or not by the market 'outside' and, frequently, this 'outside' market is the world market. But we can think of this world market as also judging nation states in terms of their 'competitiveness', and thus their 'political' decision making and 'quasi-markets'.⁸ If we think of individual nation states competing in order to attract and retain private capitals within their borders (see, e.g., the collections Bonefeld and Holloway 1991; 1995; Clarke 1991), then the organisation and 'efficiency' of state labour, along with the quantity and 'quality' of the unwaged reproductive labour of mothers and others, are as important parameters within this competition as are the tax regimes, juridical framework and level of infrastructure.⁹

In fact the question of measure or commensuration and the law of value is problematic, though we should also remember that linking labour and value is *capital's* problem, it is not ours. The task of 'trac[ing] the development of the expression of value' (Marx 1976a: 139) is increasingly challenging as production and reproduction become increasingly social and collective, both more reliant upon the 'general intellect', and with the product or 'commodity' more likely to be ephemeral in nature. It is these tendencies that have led to the rejection of the law of value by thinkers such as Toni Negri.¹⁰ Nevertheless, every day the personifications of capital — whether private capital or state — make judgements regarding value and its measure. Managers, technicians, human-resource experts, accountants and all manner of other specialists make decisions on prices and the allocation of labour-powers. These decisions span every aspect of production, reproduction and so-called 'circulation'. Some decisions will be vindicated somewhere between the local level and the final arbiter the world market, while some decisions will affect the very structure of the market(s).¹¹ 'Good' decision-makers will be rewarded, 'poor' decision-makers will be penalised. (At 'higher' levels within administrative structures, those who reward (penalise) 'good' decision-makers and penalise (reward) 'poor' decision-makers will themselves be rewarded (penalised), and so on). All such decisions within this framework ultimately relate to reinforcing the connection between value and work, to the reduction, in practice, of concrete labours to abstract. Isn't this is the law of value?

In more and more areas of life, economists, statisticians, bureaucrats, civil servants are struggling to devise and impose new metrics, frameworks by which performances can be judged and productivity measured. Examples are the 'proletarianisation' of many professions, the organisational changes in the public sector, driven by the rhetoric of 'quality', 'efficiency' and 'value for money' (Pollit 1993; Kirkpatrick and Martinez Lucio 1995; Clarke and Newman 1997). We can think of league tables for schools and hospitals; in universities we have the Quality Assurance Agency the Research Assessment Exercise and yet more league tables (see Harvie 2000). We have cultures of 'best practice', we have 'performance indicators', we have 'benchmarking'. On the one hand we have the case of Patricia Amos, the mother who in May 2002 was jailed for 60 days (reduced to 28 on appeal), under the 1996 Education Act, for allowing her two teenage daughters to play truant from school (Morris and Smithers 2002; Gillan 2002). On the other hand, the government is currently piloting plans to pay young people up to £40 a week to remain at school or college, with this payment linked to satisfactory attendance and performance (DfES 2003: chapter 6, box K). In fact, we can understand attempts of neoclassical economists to estimate 'returns to

schooling', to model labour-market participation (wage-labour versus household production), to develop concepts such as 'social capital', and so on, as both a recognition of the increasingly abstract nature of diverse types of labour, both waged and unwaged, and a part of capitalist strategy to make commensurable heterogeneous concrete labours. While some have lamented and criticised this 'colonisation' of the social sciences by 'fortress economics' (e.g., Fine 1997; 1999; 2001), in fact, in this respect, neoclassical economics is far in advance of Marxian orthodoxy.¹²

3.2 Production and the commodity

[T]he only productive labour is that which is directly consumed in the course of *production* for the valorization of capital. (Marx 1976b: 1038; emphasis altered)

Labour is productive ... if it is converted into *commodities*. (Marx 1976b: 1039; Marx's emphasis)

[P]roductive labour is labour which produces commodities. (Marx 1969: 172)

Productive labour is that labour which is involved in *production*, which is usually opposed to circulation, supervisory or other activities concerned with maintaining the social order. Moreover, the product of productive labour must take the form of a commodity. So let us examine the nature of production and the commodity.

Most Classical Marxists tend to understand the commodity as a *thing*, even if it is a service. Following capital's purchase of labour-power and means of production, a thing — commodity — is produced, and then it just *is*, until it is sold — its value realised — and hence 'falls out of circulation and into consumption' (*Capital* I: 250). To ease this moment of realisation *C-M*, the employer of the (productive) producer of the commodity also employs the services of marketers and advertisers, credit-providers and retailers. These (unproductive) services are located firmly *within* the moment *C-M*, i.e., within circulation.

My argument is that these 'circulation' and reproductive (of the social order) activities and outputs are not only 'socially necessary' (as I think all agree), but themselves take the form of commodities. That is, such activities and outputs have a dual existence, being both values and use-values. These activities are therefore really part of production. I have already considered, in section 3.1, how a wide variety of concrete labours can be and are reduced to abstract labour. It should therefore be clear that such 'circulation' and reproductive activities contain abstract labour and are

thus productive of value. I will examine the use-values produced. It is neither here nor there that so-called 'pure circulation' activities such as selling (as opposed to the 'productive' labour of transporting goods to convenient locations, etc.) is perhaps not 'socially useful' in any moral sense, i.e., does not produce new *wealth*. It is sufficient that this activity is the result of abstract human labour and produces a use-value for someone, where frequently that 'someone' is capital (either individual or in general).¹³

Retailers *sell* products, they do not give them away, and they use a range of techniques to prevent theft. As such they provide a use-value to both an individual capital, by ensuring that the values of *its* commodities are preserved and realised in money-form, and to capital-in-general, by safe-guarding property relations. (Consumer) credit-providers provide a use-value to workers and capital, who share the cost. For capital, credit, like retail services, provides the use-value of allowing it to realise the values of its commodities more easily. For workers, the use-value of credit is its ability to allow them to enjoy other use-values earlier. Some use-values many workers would never be able to enjoy without credit.

Advertising too provides an individual capital with the use-value of easing the realisation of its commodities' values as money and profit. As Hunt has already suggested, they 'lessen the work and worry of a capitalist facing the vagaries of the sphere of circulation' (1979: 322). But, advertising and, more generally, *branding*, play a far more important role and also provide workers (as consumers) with use-values. The purpose of branding (see, of course, Klein 2000) is to produce imagined, non-corporeal qualities of products and, as such, branding *does alter* the use-values of commodities.¹⁴ In fact, in terms of use-value, it is probably impossible to disentangle the product, in its tangible form, from the brand, i.e., to separate the corporeal and ethereal qualities of commodities. If we wear Nike, for example, we're not just wearing mere sports wear, we can (pretend to) be Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong or Ronaldo. We buy not only the tangible good, but the identity too. Thus, as Negri (1991: 142) has suggested 'productive capital extends into circulation'.^{15 16}

The category of *immaterial labour* is useful here. This is defined by Lazzarto (1996: 133) as 'the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity'. But immaterial labour not only advertises and brands individual commodities.

[A]s regards the activity that produces the 'cultural content' of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as 'work' — in other words, the kind of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions,

tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion. Once the privileged domain of the bourgeoisie and its children, these activities have since the end of the 1970s become the domain of what we have come to define as 'mass intellectuality' (Ibid.: 133–34)

The relations involved are far too complex to discuss in detail here. But we can mention two examples of this complexity. First, much immaterial labour is unwaged, or is performed in return for small 'perks', and may not be perceived as labour at all by those who perform it. For example, AOL chat-room hosts tend to provide their services in exchange for 'free' connection time and more privileged access (see Margonelli 1999; Terranova 2000). Klein (2000) recounts how the 'street styles' of black kids in the Bronx and even of anti-capitalist demonstrators are appropriated by 'cool hunters'. The 'cool hunters' are waged labourers. Those whose styles they appropriate are not. Second, the roles of 'advertiser' and 'advertised' are frequently confused due to so-called 'synergy'. For example, the Spice Girls advertised Coca-Cola, but this simultaneously involved Coke endorsing the Spice Girls. David Beckham advertises numerous products, but the constant reproduction of his image alongside 'cool' brands simultaneously promotes the David Beckham *brand*. It is the enormous complexity of these relationships that leads writers such as Hardt and Negri, as I noted above, in footnote 10, above, to suggest that the production of value now takes place 'outside measure' and the PUPL distinction's defenders to declare this labour *unproductive*. Both these approaches are problematic. On the one hand, Hardt and Negri ignore capital's attempts to devise and impose metrics adequate to its need to measure, which I discussed briefly in section 3.1, above. Hardt and Negri may believe in the 'impossibility of power's calculating and ordering production at a global level' (2000: 357), but 'power' certainly hasn't stopping trying and the 'impossibility' of its project derives directly from our own struggles against the reduction of life to measure.¹⁷ On the other hand, the Classical Marxists tend to neglect the myriad interconnections between waged work and unwaged, the 'economic' and the 'social', production and reproduction. (See, e.g., Caffentzis 1999 for a discussion of some of these connections.) And *both* approaches would seem to imply that the question of measure was (or is) straightforward in the nineteenth century (or the 'productive' sector).

3.3 Labour-power as a produced commodity

Accumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat. (Marx 1976a: 764)

Marx explicitly ruled out the labour of producing and reproducing labour-power as being productive, and most Classical Marxists have followed him on this point, categorising it as unproductive or non-productive. Today, such a position seems less and less tenable.

There are a number of aspects to consider and it is useful to distinguish reproductive labour on the basis of whether it is, first, concerned with (re)producing human beings as human beings or with (re)producing human beings as the commodity labour-power (its function), and second, whether this labour is waged or unwaged (its form). (See Table 1.)

On the reproduction of labour-power, Simon Mohun writes:

The value of any other commodity [apart from labour-power] is determined by the socially necessary labour-time required to produce it. But labour-power is not a produced commodity in the same sense. It is a capacity or potentiality of people, and people are not (re)produced under capitalist relations of production. No capitalist production process is involved, no process of adding value to the means of production by living labour; neither do there exist different technologies of production in competition with one another which must be averaged to find a market value. (Mohun 1994: 398)

Labour-power is not a produced commodity; it is a commodified aspect of human beings, and human beings are not produced in any valorisation process. It might be suggestive for some purposes to consider that labour process which (re)produces people, but the relations involved are not class ones, there is no private property in the means of (re)production from which non-possessors can be excluded, the labour involved is not wage labour, and (re)production is neither production for sale nor production for profit. (Ibid.: 401)

These activities [including 'daily and generational reproduction of labor-power'] do not produce value, because there is no social mechanism for commensurating different labor activities, and so there is no way in which the time taken in such activities can be regarded as 'socially necessary'. ... Such labor is non-productive; indeed, in value theory terms it does not count quantitatively at all. (Mohun 1996: 38)

Table 1. Examples of reproductive labour

		Function	
		(Re)production of humans <i>qua</i> humans	(Re)production of humans as labour-power
Form	Unwaged	[1.1] 'Natural' biological reproduction, aspects of obtaining and preparing food, within family and community healing	[1.2] Many aspects of parenting, e.g, basic rules of capitalist society: 'do not steal'.
	Waged	[2.1] 'Artificial' biological reproduction, aspects of state and private health services	[2.2] Education services, police, military, judicial system, etc., 'capitalist culture'

But consider education, for example. Privately-educated human beings tend, in nearly all countries, to be better-educated than those reliant solely on state-provision. These individuals are able to command higher wages, that is, the value of their labour-power is higher. In many countries, not least the UK, schools compete with each other, on the basis of various targets, which involve frequent testing of students. Relative success for schools equates to greater resources for the school, including higher remuneration for its head, who as *manager*, rewards her or his 'best' teachers. Educational goals tend to be determined by capital's needs: students need to be disciplined, to be able to turn up on time, to have 'transferable skills' and so on. Science subjects are deemed more important than humanities. The culture of adopting 'good practice' or, better, 'best practice' can be understood as part of a process by which schools are forced to adopt the most 'efficient' of alternative 'technologies'. In turn, education systems are compared across countries, with particular use made of key economic indicators, such as productivity and growth rates. As I suggested in section 3.1, above, this is the arbitration of the world market. Education is concerned with reproducing human beings as labour-power and is largely provided by waged teachers. As such it falls into cell [2.2] in Table 1, above.¹⁸

Similar inequalities exists with regard to the biological reproduction of new human beings and the biological reproduction of self, i.e., health, both as a result of diet and access to health-care resources. The reality is stark: *poor people are less healthy than rich* and, in turn, their future earnings potential, i.e., the value of their labour-power, is lower. With cosmetics, cosmetic surgery, expensive tailors, special diets, gym workouts and so on we can alter the way we look. In this way we exercise power over

the daily reproduction of ourselves as human beings, moreover as human beings of a particular type. In many ways, this control is empowering, yet it frequently takes the form of a commodity: gym-membership must be paid for, special-diet food, along with fresh fruit and vegetables, tends to cost more than crisps, chocolate bars and TV dinners. What is particularly interesting is the approach of an increasing number of people to their 'fitness' activities. For many, good health is not a benign by-product of participation in enjoyable physical recreational activities, coupled with a naturally balanced diet. Rather it is something to be attained and maintained through 'scientific' and 'efficient' exercise programmes, which becomes a chore: the time spent doing 'exercise' must be minimised and, if possible, it must be combined with some other activity.¹⁹ In this way attaining and maintaining a certain physical appearance has, for many, become a labour activity, even one with its own associated socially-necessary labour time. The pressures to attain and maintain such fitness regimes are varied, but it is certainly the case that increasing numbers of people are *obliged* to look a certain way as part of their job: *fat*, for example, is no longer just a *feminist* issue, it is also a *class* issue!

Other examples are the Human Genome Project, cloning and staggering medical developments in fertility treatments. All have the goal of taking control of the very building blocks of life, but are in fact only the latest development in a centuries-long struggle over fertility. (See, e.g., Federici 2004.) One interesting point about many of these issues concerning biological reproduction is that the boundaries between the cells in Table 1 become fuzzy. For example, a striking feature of many US citizens is their 'perfect' teeth. But to what extent does such a dental 'norm' — requiring expensive dentistry — reproduce the human being as human being and to what extent does it reproduce labour-power?

Of course, the feminists of 'wages for housework' and other theorists of the 'social factory' have long recognised the value-producing aspect of reproductive labour (e.g., Dalla Costa and James 1972; Tronti 1973; Modern Times Collective 1974; Federici 1975; James 1975; Fortunati 1995). What I have tried to do is extend some of their arguments to cover the ever-wider range of reproductive activities we engage in and, more importantly, to suggest that these activities are increasingly becoming subject to more pernicious 'benchmarks', 'social norms' and so on. Essentially, reproductive activity is increasingly becoming subject to *measure*, which threatens the establishment (followed by discipline and development) of *socially-necessary labour times*. It should certainly be clear, as the various examples above illustrate, that *first*, class relations are involved in the (re)production of human beings, and *second*, the capital relation is

the separation of humans from the conditions of production, i.e., creation of labour-power from human beings. I develop this argument in the next section.

3.4 What is capital?

Productive labour is only that which produces capital ... labour becomes productive only by producing its own opposite. (Marx 1975: 305 f/n; emphasis in original)

The commodity is the most elementary form of bourgeois wealth. The explanation of ‘productive labour’ as labour which produces ‘commodities’ also corresponds, therefore, to a much more elementary point of view than that which defines productive labour as labour which produces capital. (Marx 1969: 173)

Capitalist production therefore reproduces in the course of its own process the separation between labour-power and the conditions of labour. (Marx 1976a: 723)

Capital is a *social relation*. The social relation is characterised by the fact that one class of people controls the means or conditions of production, whilst another class of people owns nothing but its ability to work and is thus *separated* from the conditions of production. Capital is a social relation of struggle between these two classes, capitalist class and working class. This struggle is both over the way in which labour is combined with the conditions of production, i.e., over the imposition of work, *and* over the way in which the separation is maintained, i.e., over the way in which capitalist class and working class are reproduced. (See, example, De Angelis 2001.)

In *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx describes the ‘separation [of the conditions of production from the labourer] as the real generation process of capital ... New capital formation [is then] the fact that the *additional* conditions of production confront the worker as capital’ (Marx 1972: 422; my emphasis). This formulation can also be understood as the separation and struggle between living labour and dead labour or, as Holloway (2002) has suggested, as that between those that *do* and those that appropriate what has *been done*.

If we understand capital as the separation (or rather, the *separating*—again, see Holloway 2002) of worker and capital (or doing and done), and if productive labour is that which produces capital, then we can understand productive labour as those human activities which reproduce this separation and produce it on an expanded scale. This has *always* been the case. However when nearly all production involved the

production of *things*, corporeal commodities, it was easy to overlook the simultaneous (re)production of separation, of capital, on the one hand, and proletarians, on the other. Yet, as Marx wrote:

The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total, connected process, i.e. a process of reproduction, produces *not only* commodities, not only surplus-value, but *it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself; on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.* (Marx 1976a: 724; my emphasis)

With the growth of services and all manner of other ‘superstructural’ phenomena it is more important than ever to understand the category of *separation* as central to capital. All manner of activities, usually characterised as ‘unproductive’ (though ‘necessary’), in fact (re)produce the separation of labour from the conditions of production and should thus be understood as productive, even though they produce no *thing*. Spheres of such activities clearly include the legal and judicial system, which enforces laws protecting private property,²⁰ but also much ‘culture’, which encourages acceptance of capitalist social relations, i.e., encourages acceptance of this separation.²¹ So, as Negri suggests: ‘productive labour is no longer “that which directly produces capital [capital understood here in its narrow economic sense]”, but that which reproduces society’ (1996: 157).

4 Productive and Unproductive Labour and the Law of Value

In the previous section, I considered Marx’s category of productive labour from a number of standpoints, namely: *value*, whose substance is abstract labour; the *production of commodities*, the commodity having a two-fold existence as value and use-value; *labour-power*; and, *capital as social relation of separation*. We argued that there is a tendency for all labour in capitalist society to be reduced to abstract labour — alienated, imposed and boundless, and mutually commensurable through various mechanisms and metrics, perhaps with the world market as final arbiter — and thus to be productive of value. We showed that many activities, normally considered as ‘pure circulation’ or supervisory, are in fact a part of production, in that these activities produce both use-value and value, i.e., a commodity. We also showed that labour-power, rather than being merely a ‘commodified aspect of human beings’, can in fact be treated as a produced commodity. Finally, I suggested that if capital is understood as the social relation by which labour is separated from its conditions of production, then productive labour should be understood as any activity which maintains and

extends this separation. We can thus agree with Cyril Smith (1996: 87), who suggests that, '[i]n present-day society, productive labour can have no other meaning but production under the dominion of capital'.

So, all labour is productive. But...

... capital's dominion is not total; it never has been and it never can be. We are humans, not automatons, and, what is more, capital depends upon our existence as humans for its existence (see Caffentzis 1990). For all that we are forced to perform 'sensuous-less' labour, we remain sensuous beings. Just as there are many ways by which capital attempts to reduce all of life to value-producing abstract labour, there are many varied ways in which we resist and attempt to escape this reduction. Many of our activities reproduce our separation from the conditions of production, but there are also numerous ways in which we struggle to overcome this separation, to build relationships based on our common humanity rather than on commodity-ownership. These acts of resistance, of humanity, of going-beyond the commodity-form — of 'self-valorization' (Negri 1991) — do not produce value for capital. They do not produce and reproduce capital. They are, from capital's perspective, unproductive.²²

But productive and unproductive labours are commingled. Looking at society in its totality this commingling appears fractal-like. Whatever the scale of our perspective, productive and unproductive activities each contain the germ of their opposite. On a 'macro' scale, even the most revolutionary of movements contains elements that can be recuperated by capital. For instance, images from the Russian Revolution and 'anti-work' slogans from the 1980s make good advertising copy,²³ while this season's anti-capitalist street-cool may reappears on next season's cat-walk. Conversely, even the most disciplined, controlled and productive of factory workforces can suddenly down tools and walk off the job. At a more 'micro' level, many 'revolutionary' groups, with their emphasis on discipline, hierarchy, specialist roles and quantities (number of papers sold, number of members, number on a demonstration) and so on, simply reproduce capitalist structures and social relations, while the welcoming super-market 'greeter' and the obsequious waiter/waitress are becoming unproductive if they are surly.

Thus we should understand productive and unproductive labour as *open* categories, as categories of struggle. All labour can be *either* productive or unproductive, or rather, all labour tends to be *both*. Whether a particular concrete labour activity creates value or not is contingent on class struggle. While capital struggles to subsume all of life under it, reducing all labours to value-producing,

abstract (and hence productive) labour, the working class (or better, *humanity*) struggles to be *unproductive*, to free its activities from value, to go *beyond value*. In this understanding, we retain the relation between the productive-unproductive labour distinction and the labour theory of value, but instead of the distinction being a 'building block' of — i.e., prior to — the labour theory of value (Mohun: 1996: 31), the relation is *internal*. Labour's struggle against the law of value *is* its struggle against productive labour.²⁴

This understanding can therefore also be thought of as *strategic* from a working-class point of view, or *political* (cf. Cleaver 2000). That is, it allows us to assess various activities and strategies from the explicit perspective of wishing to transcend the capitalist mode of production. And, as such, the question, *is this activity productive or unproductive of value for capital?* is a reformulation of the Solidarity group's understanding of 'meaningful action for revolutionaries' vis-à-vis 'sterile and harmful action' (Solidarity 1967), but in a context which goes beyond the revolutionaries *versus* masses dichotomy.

Finally, this understanding allows us to interpret in a meaningful sense Marx's comment that '[t]o be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune' (Marx 1976a: 644). If some workers are productive and other workers are unproductive, but all are exploited or dominated by capital, then the unproductive worker is no more fortunate than the productive: Marx's statement is empty. Once we understand the productive worker to be anyone who is subjugated to capitalist social relations, anyone who performs alienated, imposed and boundless abstract labour, Marx's declaration acquires some force. Conversely, that worker who is able to reclaim from the boss minutes, hours, days of her life, that worker who is able, like Milton, to produce 'as the activation of *his own* nature' (Marx 1976b: 1044) is a fortunate worker indeed.²⁵

Notes

1. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri write: 'In the biopolitical context of Empire... the production of capital converges ever more with the production and reproduction of social life itself; it thus becomes ever more difficult to maintain distinctions among productive, reproductive, and unproductive labor. Labor — material or immaterial, intellectual or corporeal — produces and reproduces social life, and in the process is exploited by capital' (2000: 402).

2. 'Marx throws out as useless the question of what kind of labor is productive in general, in all historical epochs, independently of the given social relations.' (Rubin 1973: 260).
3. In some ways, the theoretical debate has been driven by these authors' empirical work. In the expression for the rate of surplus value, for example, the value productive labour-power forms the denominator, V , whilst unproductive labour is paid for out of surplus value, S , the numerator. Hence, clear definitions and distinctions between the two types of labour are necessary if the rate of surplus value is to be estimated correctly.
4. An unsympathetic (and anonymous) reviewer of this paper suggests that this 'is not difficult to explain at all! The divergence of the price from value ... is due to the fact that on the basis of copyright and patent laws, Nike has a monopoly on the production of Nike labelled trainers. The price of Nike trainers is a monopoly price. The work of marketing Nike trainers, as opposed to designing them, is unproductive since it simply persuades people to buy Nike trainers rather than other trainers or other commodities in general'. Of course, theories of monopoly *can* be invoked to explain the price differential for Nike trainers. But questions concerning branding and the creation and maintenance of monopolies, including the juridical framework (intellectual property rights) in which they are created and maintained, remain and, from the Classical Marxist perspective, this labour falls outside the ambit of the law of value. In fact 'unproductive labour' would surely sit quite nicely up in the superstructure, alongside 'politics', 'law', 'aesthetic effect' and so on, in E.P. Thompson's diagram of 'Althusser's Marxist Orrery' (Thompson 1978: 292).
5. $CRP = P/K = (S - U_f)/(C + U_s) = (S/V - U_f/V)/(C/V + U_s/V) = (RS - UF)/(CC + US)$, where CRP stands for conventional rate of profit, P is total profit, K is total capital, S is surplus value, V and C are variable and constant (productive) capital, respectively, and U_f and U_s are flow and stock of unproductive capital, respectively. Then RS is the rate of surplus value, CC is the composition of capital, while UF and US are the ratios of the flow and stock, respectively, of unproductive capital to variable capital.
6. My anonymous critic argues that 'in *Capital* class struggle is attenuated in order to bring to the fore the logic of capital. To my mind it is misconceived to attempt to read off class struggle *immediately* from *Capital*, particularly forms of class struggle which do not arise from the immediate process of production.' Harry Cleaver (2000) and John Holloway (2001) both explicitly argue against such an interpretation of *Capital*.

7. Mohun dismisses 'quasi-market criteria for "efficient" decision-making' as 'artificial competition', which cannot 'act as surrogate for the real coercive forces of competition on commodity producers to reduce socially necessary labor times' (1996: 47). But, first, this would seem to imply that 'normal' markets are *not* somehow artificial and, second, it neglects the fact that socially necessary labour times *are* in fact being driven down in the state sector.
8. The world market is no 'freer' than any other. TNCs and nation states will use all in their power to influence the structures of this market in their own favour.
9. The two 'sets' of parameters are not separate. A tax regime, juridical framework and level of infrastructure favourable to capital will generally require an 'efficient' and 'productive' state sector (if small) and a high level of unwaged reproductive work.
10. Hardt and Negri suggest that the production of value now takes place 'outside measure', where this 'refers to the impossibility of power's calculating and ordering production at a global level' (2000: 357). As an alternative theoretical framework for understanding the development of human activity outside the law of value they offer the rather ill-defined opposition *generation-corruption*, e.g.: '[W]hen capitalism loses its relationship to value (both as the measure of individual exploitation and as a norm of collective progress), it appears immediately as corruption.' (390)
11. Since the market is socially constituted, *all* decisions will affect its structure in possibly infinitesimal ways.
12. The problem with neoclassical economics is not that it is misguided or wrong, rather that it is the science of the enemy, capital.
13. This is one root of my argument with at least some of the defenders of the PURL distinction. For example, Shaikh and Tonak suggest that 'it is the production of new *wealth* which has been, at least so far, the real foundation of economic success' (1994: 210; my emphasis). I would argue that it is not *wealth* which is central to the capitalist mode of production (and 'economic success'), but *value* or command over labour.
14. 'The commodity is ... a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of *whatever* kind. The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach, or *the imagination*, makes no difference' (*Capital I*: 125; my emphasis). The quotation which Marx appends as a footnote here is also worth

repeating: 'Desire implies want; it is the appetite of the mind, and as natural as hunger to the body ... The greatest number (of things) have their value from supplying the wants of the mind.'

15. Marx writes: 'Circulation can *create value* only in so far as it requires fresh employment — of *alien labour* — in addition to that directly consumed in the production process. This is then the same as if more *necessary labour* were used in the direct production process. Only the actual *circulation costs* increase the *value* of the product, but decrease the surplus value.' (Marx 1973: 548; emphasis in original.) But the last sentence here is a little careless. Surely *all* costs, as *costs*, decrease surplus value. But expenses are nevertheless necessary for capital's valorisation. By laying out money (value) on labour-power, capital hopes this value will be both preserved and enhanced. If the labour is both value-creating and exploited, this will be the case.
16. Mohun would perhaps object here that 'one might question whether a category such as the rate of exploitation is well-defined under circumstances in which the production of value continues to the point of consumption' (1999: 5 f/n). This may be so. But, as we suggested in section 3.1, quantitatively defining the rate of exploitation is capital's problem; it should not be ours.
17. Hardt and Negri claim that the production of value takes place both 'outside measure' and 'beyond measure' (2000: 354–359), but they seem to treat these two characteristics of value production in *Empire* as though they were somehow separate. I would suggest there is an internal relationship: 'outside measure' flows from our struggles to go 'beyond measure.'
18. There is increasing pressure, however, on parents to involve themselves with their child(ren)'s education: attending parents' evenings, ensuring homework gets done and assisting with it if necessary, for example. Such parenting activity is unwaged and thus falls into cell[1.2].
19. Such as sitting at one's desk working or in one's armchair watching television!
20. '[T]he pickpocket becomes a productive worker too, since he indirectly produces books on criminal law (this reasoning at least as correct as calling a judge a productive worker because he protects *from* theft)' (Marx 1973: 273). Marx's sarcastic example is rather unfortunate: the pickpocket's actions challenge private property, thus undermining the separation of labour from its conditions, and hence are unproductive; the judge's, on the other hand, enforce this separation and thus

are productive of capital. But the example does contain a grain of truth: capital's development takes place through responding to challenges against it (cf. Tronti (e.g., 1979) and other 'workerists'; Wright 2002).

21. On the role of culture in reproducing capitalist social relations see, of course, Marcuse, Adorno and the other Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School.
22. This understanding of productive and unproductive labours is similar to O'Connor's (1975). He equates unproductive activity with 'the struggle against both the boss and the repressive mechanism of self-control class society develops with the aim of extracting obedience' (318).
23. Images from the Russian Revolution have been used to advertise a bank and vodka, for example, whilst Berghaus, the outdoor-clothing manufacturer has encouraged people to phone in sick to work (provided they wear its equipment out on the hills, of course, and presumably as long they don't work for Berghaus!)
24. Cf. the questions *does definition come prior to struggle, or is struggle partly over (against) definition?* (Holloway 1998; 2000; De Angelis 2001; Leeds May Day Group 2004) and *structure-vs.-struggle* debates of the 1970s and 1980s. My formulation corresponds to the latter position in both cases.
25. Many thanks to Massimo De Angelis, who has made many useful comments and suggestions. I'm also grateful to George Caffentzis and Simon Mohun who have both offered encouragement (although Simon disagrees with 'just about everything' I say).

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Mariarosa Dalla Costa

Development and Reproduction

I. Zapata and the workers

Zapata's determined gaze and slightly stooped shoulders in the well loved photograph paraded in the metropolitan workers' demonstrations was one of the striking journalistic images¹ of 1994, creating a bridge in real time between the Mexican revolt in January and the struggles of Europe's industrial workers and unemployed. A bridge was thrown through space and historical time to link struggles against continued 'primitive' expropriation of the land to those against the post-Fordist expropriation of labour that brings with it the progressive dismantlement of the public system of social rights and guarantees. The 'primitive' expropriation of the land that began five centuries ago with the enclosures in England and which has been continued, and is still continuing,² in the more recent forms of colonisation and exploitation in the Third World, is now linked even photographically to the contemporary forms of expropriation and poverty creation in the advanced capitalist countries.

How to build and impose on expropriated men and women the discipline of the wage labour system (with the unwaged labour it presupposes) was the problem posed five centuries ago in initiating the process of capitalist accumulation. It is still the problem today for the continuation of this mode of production and its combined strategies of development and underdevelopment. The creation of mass poverty and scarcity together with the imposition of terror and violence, as well as the large-scale relaunching of slavery, were the basic instruments used to resolve the problem in this system's first phase.

The expropriation of free producers of all the means of production as well as the individual and collective resources and rights that contributed to guaranteeing survival was subjected to a well-known analysis by Marx in his section on primitive accumulation (in *Capital*, Vol. I, Part 8, 1976) to which we refer you for the enclosures

and all the other measures that accompanied them, notably the bloody legislation against the expropriated, the forcing down of wages by act of parliament and the ban on workers' associations. Laws for the compulsory extension of the working day, another fundamental aspect of the period, from the middle of the Fourteenth to the end of the Seventeenth century are dealt with in *Capital*, Part Three, Chapter 10, where the subject is the working day.³

Concerning the expropriation of the land, Marx observed: "The advance made by the eighteenth century shows itself in this, that the *law itself* now becomes the *instrument by which the people's land is stolen*, although the big farmers made use of their little independent methods as well. The Parliamentary form of the robbery is that of 'Bills for Inclosure of the Commons', in other words decrees by which the landowners grant themselves "the people's land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the people" (Marx, 1976, p. 885). The "little independent methods" are explained in a footnote to the same passage, quoting from a report entitled *A Political Inquiry into the Consequences of Enclosing Waste Lands*: "The farmers forbid cottagers to keep any living creatures besides themselves and children, under the pretence that if they keep any beasts or poultry, they will steal from the farmers' barns for their support; they also say, keep the cottagers poor and you will keep them industrious, etc., but the real fact, I believe, is that the farmers may have the whole right of common to themselves" (Marx, 1976, p. 885, note 15).

This footnote gives a powerful picture of the step-by-step process of expropriation used to produce the misery and poverty essential in establishing the discipline of wage labour. But just as powerful an image is given to us by the isolation of people from all living beings that has characterised and still characterises the human condition in capitalist development. The human being, isolated not only with respect to his/her own species, but also with respect to nature—that 'other' treated increasingly as a commodified thing.

Deprivation and isolation: they are in fact the two great accusations, the two great terrains of rebellion symbolised by the poster of Zapata whose watchword was *Tierra y Libertad*. The reappropriation of land was seen by the Zapatistas in 1911 as a fundamental question because it opened up the possibility of reappropriating a collective life free of misery. For even then the reappropriation of the land was pregnant with a multitude of meanings: as the reappropriation of a territory where one could express a different sense of life, of action, of social relations and of work; as a place where one could imagine and build a different future. From this viewpoint,

Zapata's nine-year revolutionary epic is one of the great suppressed memories of official Mexican history.

Today's explosion of the *zapatista* rebellion shows how real the problem of the reappropriation of land remains, but also how much it has been magnified by the complex of issues raised by movements in the North and South over the question of land. 'Land', here, does not only refer to a means of subsistence - though this would already be an excellent reason for a movement of reappropriation, since many economies based on a non-capitalist relationship with the land have guaranteed the possibility of life for millennia to a large proportion of people for whom capitalist development has offered only hunger and extinction. It refers also to land as the earth, a public space to be enjoyed without frontier; the earth as an ecosystem to be preserved because it is the source of life and, hence, of beauty and continual discovery; the earth as a material reality of which we are part, to be reaffirmed in contrast to the exaltation (especially by male intellectuals) of virtual reality.

But, returning to Marx (*Capital*, Vol.I, 1976, Part 8), the creation of misery starts and proceeds from the *fixing of a price for the land* as well as the land's expropriation. Pricing the land is in fact the solution used for colonies where the aspirant capitalist is unable to find a sufficient number of waged workers. When the settlers arrive at their destination, they find a 'free' land where they can settle and work independently. "We have seen that the *expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil forms the basis of the capitalist mode of production*. The essence of a free colony, on the contrary, consists in this, that the bulk of the soil is still public property, every settler on it can therefore turn part of it into his private property and his individual means of production, without preventing later settlers from performing the same operation. This is the secret both of the prosperity of the colonies and of their cancerous affliction - their resistance to the *establishment of capital*" (1976, p. 934). In this context, we can leave to one side the obvious criticism that the 'public' land freely settled by the settlers belonged, in fact, to the natives. Marx continues: "There (in the colonies) the capitalist regime constantly comes up against the obstacle presented by the producer who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself instead of the capitalist. The *contradiction between these two diametrically opposed economic systems has its practical manifestation here in the struggle between them*. Where the capitalist has behind him the power of the mother country, he tries to use force to clear out of the way the *modes of production and appropriation which rest on the personal labour of the independent producer*" (1976, p. 931). Wakefield, the economist Marx quotes in this context, proclaims aloud the *antagonism between the*

two modes of production: “To this end he demonstrates that the development of the social productivity of labour, cooperation, division of labour, application of machinery on a large scale, and so on, are impossible without the expropriation of the workers and the corresponding *transformation of their means of production into capital*” (1976, p. 932).

Wakefield’s theory of colonisation tries to solve the problem of ensuring an adequate supply of labour for the capitalist’s needs by what he calls ‘systematic colonisation’, which as Marx notes England tried to enforce for a time by Act of Parliament. Of Wakefield’s theory, Marx adds (1976, p. 938): “If men were willing to turn the whole of the land from public into private property at one blow, this would certainly destroy the root of the evil, but it would also destroy - the *colony*. The trick is to kill two birds with one stone. Let the government set *an artificial price on the virgin soil, a price independent of the law of supply and demand*, a price that compels the immigrant to work for a long time for wages before he can earn enough money to buy land and turn himself into an independent farmer. The *fund* resulting from the sale of land at a price relatively *prohibitory* for the wage-labourers, this *fund of money* extorted from the *wages of labour* by a violation of the sacred law of supply and demand, is to be applied by the government in proportion to its growth, to the importation of paupers from Europe into the colonies, so as to keep the *wage-labour market* full for the capitalists.” Marx also pointed out that the *land price laid down by the state* must be ‘sufficient’, which quoting from Wakefield (1833, vol. II, p. 192) he explains means that “it must be high enough ‘to prevent the labourers from becoming independent landowners until others had followed to take their place’.”

The reference to the setting of a price on the virgin soil is more than just a reminder of a past problem and its analysis in Marx’s *Capital*. Today, putting a price to the land and expropriation by illegality, pseudo-legality and violence are issues on the agenda throughout those parts of the Third World where capitalist expansion is currently seeking to break economies and societies based on a different relationship with the land; types of economy which have guaranteed subsistence from time immemorial and which, by the same token, resist wage-labour’s discipline and the isolation, hunger and death that usually accompany its imposition. Silvia Federici (1993) and George Caffentzis (1993) underline the cruciality of fixing a price on the land in the policies directed to ‘develop’ the African continent. In their studies of Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular, they insist on the importance of this measure from the point of view of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other

investors, but they also stress how this procedure became a terrain of struggle and resistance for the population.

Obviously, today, there are many other policies and measures creating hunger and poverty, from the lowering of the export price of agricultural products, which ruins Third World farmers, to those policies that, internationally, have characterised the period of the so-called debt crisis. But this has been dealt with in a recent collection of papers (Dalla Costa M. and Dalla Costa G.F., eds., 1993) and is dealt with extensively by the Midnight Notes Collective (1992).

In this article, the focus is on the two *major operations* of expropriating the land and putting a price on it, since, even though they are usually ignored, they remain as fundamental today for making a profit out of the Third World as they were at the dawn of capitalism in Europe. In fact, the current development strategy of the capitalist mode of production based on the 'informatic revolution' continues to imply a strategy of underdevelopment that presupposes these operations which create hunger and poverty in order continually to refound and re-stratify the global working class.

Obviously, the continual imposition of wage-labour discipline at the world level does not imply that all those who are expropriated are destined to become wage-labourers. Today as five centuries ago, this will be the fate of only a small part of the population: those who can will find employment in the sweat shops of the Third World or the countries they emigrate to. The others will be faced solely by the prospect of death by hunger, which may explain the tenacity of resistance and the toughness of the struggles. And, returning to the poster in Milan, it explains the revolt in Chiapas. The *price* of capitalist development understood as a whole, in its facets as development and underdevelopment, is *unsustainable* because it consists of *death*. As I have argued elsewhere (Dalla Costa M., 1995), a central assumption must be that, *from the human viewpoint, capitalist development has always been unsustainable* since it has assumed from the start, and continues to assume, extermination and hunger for an increasingly large part of humanity. The fact that it is founded on a class relationship and must continually refound this relationship at a global level, in conflict with the power that the class of waged and non-waged men and women build through struggle and resistance, only makes its *original unsustainability* more ample and more lethal in time.

The operations that produce hunger, poverty and death, have accompanied the continuous and progressive expropriation of the land, and its rendering as commodity/capital have obviously been redefined in ideological and technological

terms over time. 'Food policies' brought into effect during the present century, officially in order to solve or mitigate the problem of insufficient nutrition have always been closely linked to 'reforms' of the relationship with the land. The outcome has been better nutrition for the few, insufficient nutrition or hunger for the many, and above all a powerful tool for social control by breaking up those organisations that parts of the world's population, in very many areas of the globe, had created in order to achieve better nutrition and a better level of life as a whole.

The 'social reforms' characteristic of these policies have always been linked to new divisions and a new hierarchy between the waged and the unwaged as well as within these two groups. Harry Cleaver's essay (1977) remains fundamental for its analysis and the globality of its information as well as for its reports on numerous struggles and the sort of policies adopted to fight them. We agree in full with the assumption that food crises are fundamentally produced by capitalism's political economy. As this author informs us, it is interesting to note how experiments carried out by the Rockefeller Foundation in China in the 1920s and 1930s provided clear evidence of the stabilising effect of better food supplies coupled with some land reform measures on peasant unrest. In the 1950s, politicians were still talking about an Asian rice policy as a tool for halting peasant revolt in many parts of that continent. Later, the issue officially became a humanitarian one.

The Green Revolution, on the other hand, was put into effect in the 1960s in both East and West on the basis of a technological leap in the mechanical, chemical and biological inputs in agricultural policy. The aim was to apply Keynesian principles to agriculture, in other words, achieving wage increases linked to an increase in productivity. But, as Cleaver argues, the whole history of this technological breakthrough in agriculture was linked to the de-composition of the class power of the waged and the unwaged, the continual creation of new divisions and hierarchies, and the progressive expulsion of workers having different forms of relationship with agriculture.

Agricultural technology became more and more subject to criticism and analysis by feminist scholars, being so closely linked to large land holdings, which meant the expropriation and the expulsion from that land of unwaged workers, who were managing to make a living from it, and of waged agricultural workers, displaced by the continual technological change. Important in this connection is the work of Vandana Shiva (1989), whose approach is not Marxist, and who uses the category of the female principle against male reductionist science. An outstanding physicist, Vandana Shiva abandoned India's nuclear programme because she felt that the 'reaction of nuclear

systems with living systems' was being kept secret from the people. In her well-known work, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1989), she illustrates the systematic and grave loss of resources for health and subsistence through the reduction in biodiversity imposed in India by the agricultural policies of recent decades; the dependence and poverty created by the imposition of new laboratory hybrids; the drought and human and environmental disasters created by dams and their irrationality by comparison with earlier forms of water management. The history of the enclosure, expropriation and commercialisation not only of the land, but also of its plants, animals, and waters is revived in Shiva's analysis, which is centred on the events of these last decades. There are other important works belonging to the ecofeminist current, first of all the work of Maria Mies (1986 and, with Shiva, 1993), to mention only the most famous ones. In contrast Mary Mellor's book (1992), while it has many points of contact with the above cited studies, is rather concerned to define a 'feminist green socialism'.

I share much of the critique advanced in this blossoming of feminist studies on the relationship between human beings and nature and on the North-South relationship. Here, there is not enough space to compare our positions more extensively. But one point I can make is that some ecofeminist scholars look primarily at the forms of struggle and resistance in the Third World, while seeing the First World primarily as an area of excessive consumption whence the assertion of the need for a reduction of production and consumption. For myself and the circuit of scholars I have worked with since the early 1970s, we affirm that besides looking at the Third World struggles, just as much importance should be given to advanced capitalist areas, not only as a source of consumption, but also as a place of labour, hence our stress on the importance of the struggles of waged and unwaged that occur there and their relationship with struggles in other areas. We also see a need to analyse consumption in a more articulated way. By definition, consumption by workers, obviously including housewives, has in fact never been high and, today, is falling dramatically. But these are simply a few hints in a debate that will develop further.

Let us now return to our discourse. Vandana Shiva (1989) says of water and drought: "The drying up of India, like that of Africa, is a man-made rather than a natural disaster. The issue of water, and water scarcity has been the most dominant one in the 1980s as far as struggles for survival in the subcontinent are concerned. The manufacture of drought and desertification is an outcome of reductionist knowledge and models of development which violate cycles of life in rivers, in the soil, in mountains. Rivers are drying up because their catchments have been mined, de-

forested or over-cultivated to generate revenue and profits. Groundwater is drying up because it has been over-exploited to feed cash crops. Village after village is being robbed of its lifeline, its sources of drinking water, and the number of villages facing water famine is in direct proportion to the number of 'schemes' implemented by government agencies to 'develop' water" (p. 179).

"Commercial exploitation of forests, over-exploitation of ground water for commercial agriculture and inappropriate afforestation are the major reasons identified for the water crisis" (p. 181).

Time and again, Vandana Shiva points out, famous British engineers who learned water management from indigenous techniques in India, commented on the "sophisticated engineering sense, built on an ecological sense, that provided the foundation for irrigation in India". Major Arthur Cotton, credited as the 'founder' of modern irrigation programmes, wrote in 1874:

"There are multitudes of old native works in various parts of India...These are noble works, and show both boldness and engineering talent. They have stood for hundreds of years...When I first arrived in India, the contempt with which the natives justifiably spoke of us on account of this neglect of material improvements was very striking; they used to say we were a kind of civilised savages, wonderfully expert about fighting, but so inferior to their great men that we would not even keep in repair the works they had constructed, much less even imitate them in extending the system" (p. 187).

The East India Company, as Vandana Shiva adds, took control of the Kaveri delta in 1799, but was unable to check the rising river bed. Company officials struggled for a quarter century; finally, using indigenous technology, Cotton was able to solve the problem by renovating the Grand Anicut. He wrote later: "It was from them (the native Indians) we learnt how to secure a foundation in loose sand of unmeasured depth...The Madras river irrigations executed by our engineers have been from the first the greatest financial success of any engineering works in the world, solely because we learnt from them...With this lesson about foundations, we built bridges, weirs, aqueducts and every kind of hydraulic work...We are thus deeply indebted to the native engineers."

But the lesson has obviously been overwhelmed by the full flood of the capitalist science of development/profit, what Vandana Shiva calls 'maldevelopment'.⁴ British engineers in the 1700s and 1800s recognised that indigenous technology and knowledge tended to preserve water resources and make them available for the local people. Today, capitalist water-management projects cause drought and deny survival

to entire populations. One woman from Maharashtra State in India sings against the dam she has to help build so that crops such as sugar cane can be irrigated while women and children die of thirst (Shiva, 1989):

As I build this dam
I bury my life.
The dawn breaks
There is no flour in the grinding stone.

I collect yesterday's husk for today's meal
The sun rises
And my spirit sinks.
Hiding my baby under a basket

And hiding my tears
I go to build the dam

The dam is ready
It feeds their sugar cane fields
Making the crop lush and juicy.
But I walk miles through forests
In search of a drop of drinking water
I water the vegetation with drops of my
As dry leaves fall and fill my parched yard.

A response to this mad 'enclosure' of water became more and more a problem on the agenda of political networks that monitor and struggle against projects of this kind. The immediate future will show the effects of this effort. An exemplary case is the Bangladesh flood control plan (Del Genio, 1994), presented by the World Bank in London in December 1989. Even though it was claimed to differ from previous projects because of its low environmental impact, other estimates of its effects were so dramatic that an international coalition of organisations, opposed to the World Bank's approach to the canalisation of rivers, was created in Strasbourg in May 1993.

Considering solely the immediate human impact, the building of the Narmada dam in India was expected to require the evacuation of 500,000 inhabitants and aroused strong opposition from the 'tribals' and the organisations supporting them. The Bangladesh Flood Action Plan (FAP), coordinated by the World Bank on behalf of the Group of Seven, would require the forced transfer of 5-8 million persons in a territory whose population density is 10 times that of India.

Del Genio's article illustrates the reasons cited to justify the plan—on the one hand, mystified assumptions and, on the other, the lethal techniques of the Green Revolution. This plan insists on the need to “propagate modern mechanised agriculture capable of coping with the food crisis” so as to increase the cultivation of modern high-yield varieties of rice which, in its turn, requires a large and regular quantity of water and a system of flood control and irrigation to make it available.

The drawbacks of the high-yield varieties include a dependence on the market and the laboratories, since they are unable to reproduce, and imply the reduction of the genetic diversity of local seeds. Awareness of the drawbacks is growing in the world, and rural workers' grass-roots organisations are putting up increasing resistance to these agricultural improvements that are supposed to be more appropriate for satisfying their nutritional needs. As regards flood control, some of the year's regular flooding bring nutrients which ensures the soil's fertility and top up the water-table as they expand across the plain. Other, purely destructive floods need to be controlled through works different from the planned ones if the aim is to be achieved without destroying the environment, including the humans in it. In this connection, it is worth remembering the level of sophistication achieved in biodiversity by long-term cooperation between humans and nature; among the hundreds of local rice varieties developed in response to the demands of territory and climate, a sub-variety called Aman is capable of growing over 15cm in only 24 hours if the level of the water rises.

As for transferring 5-8 million persons by coercion, this is in itself inconceivable from my point of view, since to uproot a population is like cutting a tree's roots, but in this case a forest's. The first and obvious question that comes to mind is: where and how does one suppose that the peasants are to find the money needed to pay the costs of agricultural modernisation (machinery, fertilisers, etc.)? The answer is identical and repeated thousands of times over in the history of the Green Revolution: only the big proprietors and the big enterprises can sustain the costs. And the others? Work has begun in the meantime...

The peasants and many working with them in international networks are organising resistance and opposition. The Asswan dam and what the consequent loss of the soil nutrients has meant for all the peasants who lived off the soil, plus all the other grave consequences it has precipitated, necessarily comes to mind. For example, the flooding of part of Nubia and, with it, the burial of major relics of that civilisation and the abandonment of the land by those who lived there. But this is only one case in the midst of the many one could cite. When I was in Egypt in 1989, there was talk of a project to turn the Red Sea into a lake. I hope that the growth of the ecological

movement, the movements of the native populations and others will have relegated this project to the nightmares of a past era.

Returning to Vandana Shiva, the same observations, made by her and many other scholars today about the dams and other Western water management projects in the Third World, can equally be applied to the technologies that are imposed on Third World agriculture, in livestock raising, and in the destruction of forests to cultivate export crops: the destruction of biodiversity, ecological equilibriums, and the life-cycles that guaranteed subsistence. In short the production of profit for the big companies, the denial of survival for the population.

Even though her cultural and theoretical approach is far from Marxian, when Vandana Shiva interprets the logic of the continual enclosure of segments of nature and the effects it has, she finds no difficulty in concluding that the foundations of capitalist accumulation are the science and practice of the culture of death. Her merit is also to have contributed to bringing to international attention struggles and movements otherwise ignored or neglected. Our argument here is that the Chipko movement in which women organise to stay in the forest even at night, embracing the trees to prevent the logging companies from cutting them down, should be placed on the same level as all the other struggles against various forms of expropriation and attack against individual and collective rights in different parts of the world - not only the right to survival, or better, to life, but the right to the self-determination of one's own future.

The economic and life system of the Indian 'tribals'⁵ who created the Chipko movement which forms the focus of Vandana Shiva's studies and practical activity, is based on a combination of agriculture, livestock raising and the use/conservation of the forest. The forest has a central and many-sided role in the whole system. The forests bear "soil, water and pure air", sing the Chipko women (Shiva, 1989, p. 77), and they play an important nutritional role. Whatever crisis may hit crops or livestock, say the Chipko women, the children will never suffer hunger if there is a forest near. Thus embracing the trees to stop them from being felled is like occupying the land to prevent it being expropriated, or struggling in defence of jobs or a wage or a guaranteed income when survival depends solely on money. This is what we see if we want to spotlight how the different parts of the working social body struggle contemporaneously and in different forms against the same system that exploits and besieges them in different ways.

This is important for getting a real idea of how an opposition to this form of development is growing increasingly at the world level and is refusing to pay its price while seeking other paths for a different future. But I think that the struggles of the Chipko women and all the other movements for the maintenance and defence of an age-old experience and knowledge in humankind's relationship with nature are all the more vital for us. In fact, *the political debate in the 'advanced' areas empowering the voice of those who refuse to pay the price of this development must necessarily be an ecological debate, too.*

The other great denunciations advanced by Vandana Shiva, whose work I have considered here, even if briefly, because it is representative of an entire school of feminist studies developed by women in the world's various Souths, concern the genetic manipulation of living species. To the tampering of the nutritional resources of entire communities is added the genetic manipulation of the species. This topic that has attracted extensive attention in recent years from the various circuits of women scholars and activists.

"With engineering entering the life sciences, the renewability of life as a self-reproducing system comes to an end. Life must be engineered now, not reproduced. A new commodity set is created as inputs, and a new commodity is created as output. Life itself is the new commodity..." (Shiva, 1989, p. 91).
"The market and the factory define the 'improvement' sought through the new bio-technologies... Nature's integrity and diversity and people's needs are thus simultaneously violated" (Shiva, 1989, p. 92).

This biotechnological trend is matched by the determination to patent and 'bank' the genetic heritage of the living species. This was denounced by women meeting in Miami in preparation for the Rio conference (*Women's Action Agenda 21*, 1991), but their opposition is widely shared. After patenting cotton, the agro-industrial corporations now want to do the same for rice and soy, two of the fundamental foodstuffs for many parts of the world's population. Increasingly food, already difficult to obtain because of the combination of expropriation of land, technological innovations in farming methods, and the ratio between prices and wages (when there are any), is manipulated, placed beyond access, privatised, monopolised, patented, 'banked'. A new enclosure. *No Entry: Food!*

In this parabola of technological conquest over nature, expropriation reaches its acme: human beings are expropriated, the living species are expropriated, the earth's own reproductive powers are expropriated to transform them into capital. This mode of production pretends to capitalise the generation and reproduction of life. What a long

road capitalism has made since, indifferent to life, was satisfied with nothing more than appropriating an excessive number of working hours⁶ or when it simply pretended to transform all life into work and, to that end, whilst ignoring the contradiction of exploiting free and slave labour at the same time, on the one hand, drained dry the life of the free workers, and on the other, enchained masses of slaves!

But, the amplitude of the various rebellions and struggles in the world in rejection of this type of development is matched by the increasingly massive, lethal and monstrous structures and forms of domination. Considering only the most recent past, from the Gulf War on, the increasingly warlike character of this development has undeniably produced an escalation of war that removes any residual doubts over whether or not it is founded on the science and practice of death. Referring to the wars in the Gulf, ex-Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda-Burundi finds its limit in the fact that these are simply the wars that have received the most coverage in the media in the last three or four years. We certainly have no intention of underestimating the number of wars that have been pursued in the world without them ever entering the limelight.

If anything, the escalation of war in recent years has confirmed the emptiness of what the major powers said on disarmament. *Rather, war has become increasingly the instrument par excellence for disciplining the working social body at the global level, through annihilation, terror, division, deportation, and the lowering of living conditions and life expectations. In the end, humans, when they are not massacred directly, are increasingly 'enclosed' in refugee camps and the more or less concealed concentration camps of war situations.*

But, at the same time, the *other face of war as a form of development* has been revealed ever more clearly, through the growing monstrosity of the enterprises its macabre laboratory generates. War is recognised as having always been a great laboratory, but since the voracity of capitalist technology has begun to pursue life in the attempt to steal and capitalise its secrets, death has been discovered increasingly as a terrain for profit. In this case, too, the shift is from the 'primitive' indifference to the death of masses of individuals expropriated of their means of production and sustenance, to the identification of death, dead bodies or bodies destined in a nonchalant way to die in order to experiment with new technologies or commercialise body parts in trafficking in organs. Besides the traditional markets of arms, post-war reconstructions and techno-industrial experimentation on which our 'peace economy' rests, war today offers above all the biggest mass of living/dying guinea-pigs on whom to test, on a mass scale, the new technologies applied to acquire more knowledge of the body and how to operate on it. Here too, it is clear how the part of guinea-pigs has

been played above all by the people of the 'non-advanced' nations, even if a similar role has recently been emerging for citizens for the most part from the weaker social sectors of the great powers, dispatched to war or used without knowing it in 'peacetime'.

But war continues to offer new and horrifying terrains on which to reap profits. Trafficking in children,⁷ for example. How many for pornography?⁸ How many for trafficking in organs?⁹ How many for slavery¹⁰ and the traffic in war cripples?¹¹ How many for prostitution? How many to be sold for adoption by childless couples? Trafficking in adult males and females also goes on, for all the reasons mentioned above, apart from the last.

It is rather strange that, in discussing sustainable development, there is usually no mention of the *unsustainability* for humankind and the environment of the *form* that development has increasingly taken, namely *war*.

The poster with the image of Zapata from which we set out was sent to us from the Chiapas revolt and the war and truce that resulted from it. Carried as a banner by the workers in Milan, it gave voice to the two great expropriations, from the land and from work. At the same time, it poses with all the force expressed in the struggles throughout the world carried on by those who have been expropriated, the question of what is the contemporary relationship between waged and unwaged labour in this development? In the Third World as in the First, what future is there for unwaged labour?

II. Zapata and the women

It may be a provocation, then, but not excessive to think that, in relaunching the increasingly dramatic question of the relationship between these two great sectors of labour, the poster of Zapata also relaunches the feminist question that emerged and stimulated the women's movement in the early 1970s, i.e., the problem of the unwaged labour of reproducing labour-power. The woman is in fact the unwaged labourer par excellence and experiences in this development a *doubly unsustainable contradiction* (Dalla Costa, M., 1995; Dalla Costa, G.F., 1989). On the one hand, her condition, which has been created by capitalist development, is unsustainable in its typical form in the 'advanced areas' as an *unwaged worker*, in that she is responsible for reproducing the labour-power in a *wage economy* (Dalla Costa, M., James S. 1972). On the other, her situation has become increasingly unsustainable as an unwaged worker in an unwaged *subsistence economy* where the expansion of capitalist relations

progressively deprives her of the means to fulfil her tasks of reproduction for herself and the community. The contradiction and, with it, the unsustainability of the woman's condition, cannot be solved within capitalism, which forms its basis. To be solved, it requires a totally different conception and organisation of development, but by the same token, women's struggles around their condition amplify the demands of other unwaged social subjects from whose labour this capitalist development continually accumulates value.

Numerous studies of which I mention only some (Michel, Agbessi Dos Santos, Fatoumata Diarra, 1981, Michel 1988; Boserup, 1982; Shiva, 1989) have illustrated how the continual realisation of capitalist projects in the Third World's rural areas, apart from expropriating the land, makes it increasingly difficult for women to gain access to the fundamental means for the production of subsistence: from wood for fuel to water for the home and forage for the animals. Now, hours or days have to be spent in fetching things that were previously fairly close. These resources too have been swallowed up by enclosure/appropriation/ commoditisation/capitalisation.

Feminist authors (Mies, 1992) have noted the paradox that precisely for their activities related to acquiring these resources, as well as for having too many children, rural women are blamed for doing harm to the environment. Supposedly, they destroy the forests if they go there in search of wood; they pollute and use up the water sources if they go to fetch water; they use up the earth's resources if they have too many children. It is a typical case of blaming the victims. At the same time, their working and living conditions and, with them, the entire community's life are continually undermined by the debt policies imposed on the Third World countries by the major financial agencies, policies of which the expropriation/ privatisation of the land is only one, but fundamental aspect (Dalla Costa M. and Dalla Costa G.F., eds., 1993).

When it is not directly the expropriation and expulsion of the rural communities without anything in exchange, the capitalist proposal which presents itself as an 'alternative in the direction of development', not only removes an assured subsistence and replaces it with an uncertain wage, but deepens the gap between the male and the female conditions. Significant once more in this respect is the example (Shiva, 1989) also quoted by Mies (1992) of the Chipko women, who oppose the felling of trees in the Himalayan forests for commercial purposes. As in many cases, the men were less determined in their opposition because they were tempted by the prospect of the jobs they would be given in the saw-mills.

But one of the women's biggest doubts was of how much of that money/wage they would have received - and therefore they opposed the creation of a hierarchy based on having or not having a wage. Above all, they posed the problem of what would happen to all of them when the forest, the basis of their subsistence, had been swallowed up by the saw-mills which, since there would be no more wood to cut, would be closed. The women said clearly that they needed no jobs from the government or private businessmen as long as they kept their land and their forests.

In Shiva (1989), there are many other episodes of this kind. After five centuries in which the scene has been repeated, the lesson has been learned in the most remote corners of the earth. There is a great determination not to put one's life in the hands of the planners of development and under-development,¹² to stop others from plunging whole populations into total uncertainty, which if it does not lead to hunger today will do so tomorrow; a determination to avoid being turned into beggars or refugee camp inmates.

Ecofeminist practices and positions linking nature, women, production and consumption in a single approach are often criticised for 'romanticism' by male scholars. One might wonder, if only to raise the most simple question, what value do these scholars attribute to the right to survival of those communities - and there are many of them - whose subsistence and life system are guaranteed precisely by these practices with nature, while the 'development proposal' almost always presupposes the sacrifice of the vast majority of the individuals that constitute these communities. Significantly, Mary Mellor (1993) observes in this connection: "I see all this as something that men should prove to be unfounded, rather than as something that the feminists must justify."

As emerges with increasing clarity from the 'charters' that the various native peoples have elaborated with the growth in their movement in the last two decades, together with the right to land, i.e., the right to survival/life, there is an increasingly strong demand for the right to identity, dignity, one's own history, the maintenance of the complex of collective and individual rights belonging to one's own culture, and the right to work out one's own future starting from one's own premises. Obviously, there is no intention here of skating over the contradictions within the existing customs and systems of rules, above all those between men and women. If anything, what needs immediate clarification is that capitalist development, far from offering solutions to these problems, most often aggravates them. Politicians promoting development often try suppress the women's movements which deal with these questions. Nevertheless these movements have grown and are creating an increasing number of new

networks, that struggle, denounce and demonstrate great determination in changing a state of affairs clearly causing women harm.

In this connection, the Chiapas revolt is exemplary since it brought to international attention how the Maya women defined their rights with respect to men and society at large. Work and grass-roots debate in the communities produced a code of rights.¹³ Some rights concern the economic/social/civil plane such as the right to work, a fair wage, education, basic health care, the necessary food for oneself and one's children, the right to decide autonomously the number of children one wants to have and to rear, to choose one's companion without being required to marry him, to suffer no violence inside or outside the family. Others rights concern the political plane, such as the right to take part in managing the community, to hold office if democratically elected, to hold positions of responsibility in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (ZNLA). The code repeats that women must have all the rights and obligations deriving from revolutionary laws and regulations. As far as one knows, women participate fully in the highest offices in the ZNLA.

I was in Chiapas in the winter of 1992-93, and in San Cristobal I was struck by the numerous posters put up by women's right activists alongside the posters in praise of the guerrilla heroes. A year later, the great work achieved by these women took on new substance and became known throughout the world, disclosing how much progress had also been made within the community as regards the relationship between the sexes. It is significant that an important point in the code of women's rights, corresponding to the centrality this issue has won in the Western world, concerns violence. I would only like to add that, during my visit the year before the revolt, I was told in San Cristobal that the Maya women were no longer willing to go to the hospital to have their children for fear of being raped - evidently not by the natives.

It seems clear that these women's elaboration of their rights was not in a mythical and improbable phase, 'after' the movement that was tending towards a radical change in the state of things, but formed an integral part of it. The same thing happened in the elaboration of their rights by the Eritrean women during the Eritrean liberation war, and it is repeated in an increasing number of situations. These facts show how it is invalid to presume a lack of movement in 'non-advanced' societies because of a supposed observance of tradition.

I would also like to underscore that the relationship with nature¹⁴ is for all of us a fundamental contribution made by the movements of the native women, yet there is

great resistance to it being recognised as such by the more or less historical elaborations of urban male intellectuals that try to find a way to change the world.

As the Chipko movement shows - and numerous other examples are available from various parts of the planet - the leaders are increasingly *women in movements that link* the maintenance, recovery and reinterpretation of a relationship with nature with a defence of economic subsistence and the conservation of the identity and historical-cultural dignity of the communities/civilisations to which they belong.

In that their primary task is the reproduction of individuals in wage and non-wage economies, that they are *unwaged subjects par excellence* in both types of economy, and that their possibilities of autonomous subsistence are progressively undermined in the proceeding of capitalist development, women emerge as the *privileged interpreters* for the unwaged of the earth's future. Today, their critique and their theoretical contribution form a necessary moment in the formulation of a different development, or in any case in reasserting the right not to be developed against one's own will and interest.

On the other hand, international networking between women scholars and feminists and women active in various ways and various organisations concerned with the women's condition, development and the native peoples have brought an awareness of these experiences of resistance and struggle, stimulating a closer attention from Italian women researchers as well. Several of them, internationally well known, are cited by Cicoella (1993). One is the *Green Belt Movement* founded in 1977 by the Kenyan woman, Wangari Maathai, who starting from the idea of 'afforestation for life', has created green belts around cities in 12 African countries where forests had been replaced by open spaces. Then, the *Gabriela* group in the Philippines began its activities by safeguarding a mountain precious for its natural equilibrium and fragile ecosystem. The *Third World Network* founded by a Chinese jurist Yoke Ling Chee aims at forms of development that truly respond to people's real needs and, above all, are independent of aid from the industrial nations. The *Mapuche movement* in Chile led by Alicia Nahelcheo, who was already active against the Pinochet dictatorship, is today struggling against development projects, the expropriation of land to build power stations, and the cropping for commercial purposes of the *araucaria* tree whose fruit is a basic foodstuff.

But these are only some examples. The forms in which many men and women increasingly try to guarantee their survival and at the same time fight against this type of development can be expected to multiply and emerge further. At the same time,

there is a growth of increasingly ample initiatives at the international level¹⁵ designed to contest the legitimacy of, and to halt the directives handed down by, the World Bank and the IMF. At the economic and social level, these are the key points in the management of contemporary development, as well as being the major factors in the poverty and degradation of the 'developing' countries.

At the same time, the strong critique and forms of struggle and resistance against this form of development have produced an increasingly vast and articulated debate in which various interpretations of what a different development should be have emerged. Recent summaries (Gisfredi, 1993) of the major positions stress that the centre of it all is the importance of the environment and the cultural context for elaborating an autochthonous project.¹⁶ They also stress the significance of typologies which, in order to identify the fundamental goals of development, list as categories of basic needs, rather than those concerning pure physical survival, those concerning security, welfare, identity and liberty as against violence, material poverty, alienation and repression which typify the way in which governments rule 'developing' countries.

Central to approaches such as these remains self-reliance, by mobilising all the human and material resources available locally and by using technologies compatible with the cultural and natural environment. But many other positions could be listed. To the range of approaches of basic needs, self-reliance, and eco-development summarised by the Dag Hammerskjold Foundation (1975), others have been added because, since then, the debate has developed significantly. The most questioned idea is 'sustainable development' as it emerged from the famous world commission for the environment and development chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland. The main criticism is that it confuses development with economic growth and confuses 'everyone's future' with the future of the First World.

In any case, it is clear that any definition of a new approach concerning development makes sense only in so far as it grasps the demands of those men and women who have so far paid the heavier price for development while gaining the least from it. And in so far as it recognises the *right to reject development* in all situations where people refuse it, as it often happens in many different parts of the world. In this sense, Gustavo Esteva said as long as ago as 1985, in his comments on a conference of the Society for International Development: "My people are tired of development, they just want to live." (quoted in Shiva, 1989, p. 13)

Granted the perspective described above, a look at the contribution made by movements wanting to approach the question of development from a feminist

viewpoint shows, in my view, that the most interesting approaches include eco-feminism, because its starting-point is respect for human life and the life of living beings in general. Since it appreciates rather than devalues the knowledge and experience of the women in the native communities, eco-feminism also relaunches an approach including the relationship with nature as the source of life and subsistence, the right to self-determination, and the rejection of the capitalist model of development.

I think that a cross between this feminism with the more radically anti-capitalist feminism which has analysed the condition and struggles of women and the unwaged in this model of development, posing the question of what perspectives, may make a very interesting contribution. In this context, I would like to recall, if only briefly, Vandana Shiva's conception of nature which forms the foundation of her discourse.

She uses a reading of Indian cosmology in which Nature (Prakrti) is an expression of Sakti, the female principle, dynamic primordial energy, the source of abundance. Joining up with the male principle (Purusa), Prakrti creates the world. Women, like any other natural being, have in themselves the female principle and, therefore, this capacity for creation and the maintenance of life. According to Vandana Shiva, the reductionist vision typical of Western science continually expels the female principle from the management of life, by the same token interrupting the life cycles and therefore the regeneration of life itself, creating destruction in its place. The reductionist vision with respect to nature and women ensures that they are reduced to means for the production of commodities and labour-power.

"Patriarchal categories which understand destruction as 'production' and regeneration of life as 'passivity' have generated a crisis for survival. Passivity, an assumed category of the 'nature' of nature and women, denies the activity of nature and life. Fragmentation and uniformity as assumed categories of progress and development destroy the living forces which arise from relationships within the 'web of life' and the diversity in the elements and patterns of these relationships" (Shiva, 1989, p. 3).

"Feminism as ecology, and ecology as the revival of Prakrti, the source of all life, become the decentred powers of political and economic transformation and restructuring" (Shiva, 1989, p. 7).

"Contemporary women's ecological struggles are new attempts to establish that steadiness and stability are not stagnation, and balance with nature's essential ecological processes is not technological backwardness but technological sophistication" (Shiva, 1989, p. 36).

Discourse on land, on water, on nature return to us, brought by the native movements and the knowledge of the native women, almost the most precious of the riches that ancient civilisations hid and the secrets that they never revealed.

But with the land, there also returns to us the immense potential of a human diversity that has been able to resist and preserve its heritage of civilisation. And now it gives forceful expression to the will to work its own future autonomously. The need for a relationship with the earth, for liberty, time, and an escape from the modalities of labour and the relations that the capitalist model of development wants to continue imposing also represents a long thirst for expropriated Western humanity. Perhaps, precisely the fact of having being heard so widely in the world, as happened with the Chiapas revolt, gave many their first perception of the real feasibility of a different life project which they had resignedly relegated to a dream of impossible flight - a world in which life would not be all work, nor nature an enclosed park in which relationships are prepackaged, pre-codified and fragmented into atoms. It is evidently because these deep and dolorous chords in expropriated Western humanity were touched that the whole body of working society vibrated together with the Chiapas rebels, beating a thousand keys, transmitting, declaring, sustaining. A thousand arms and a thousand legs were moved, and a thousand voices heard.

A hinterland of communication and liaison has been constructed with the growth of the native movements across the Americas and in the world in the last twenty years. Relations, analyses and information have been more closely and more strongly interwoven, especially recently in opposition to the North America Free Trade Agreement. And all this has become the primary tissue for communication between and action by different sectors in the working social body. Workers and non-natives, ecological movement militants, women's groups, and human rights activists have been attracted into a complex support action, helping and monitoring from various parts of the world. But it is clear that, in the last analysis, what has moved all these individuals, groups and associations is the fact of having recognised their own demands in the demands of the native movement; of having seen their own liberation in the native movement's chances of liberation.

The natives have brought the keys, and they are on the table. They can open other doors to enter the Third Millennium. Outside, the full flood has arrived, breaking the concrete banks and drowning the latest high-yield variety of rice...The peasants take

out their hundreds of seed varieties, while Aman pushes its stems out above the water.¹⁷

Notes

- See *Il Manifesto*, February 8 1994, but many other newspapers have used the same image.
- This is the subject of the third part of *Midnight Notes Collective* (1992).
- In lectures on *Capital* that I used to give each year, I devoted some comments in 1970 to the fundamental question of the two opposite tendencies characterising the history of the working day. They were published later (Dalla Costa M., 1978). In my university courses, I continue illustrating fundamental parts of *Capital*, especially those concerning primitive accumulation. Social processes in this period which were neglected by Marx in *Capital*, e.g., the great witch-hunt, have been analysed by the feminist scholars I worked with (Fortunati, 1981; Federici and Fortunati, 1984), with the aim of clarifying the capitalist sexual division of labour and the construction of proletarian women's individuality in capitalism. It is no coincidence that this period is considered as crucial by various currents of feminist thought.
- The term *maldevelopment* and its French equivalent *maldéveloppement* were originally coined with a biological meaning in mind, rather than a political one. The reference to the idea that the wrong type of development is male-related is clear.
- India has about 50 million members of scheduled tribes, recognised as such by the Indian constitution because of their particularly disadvantaged situation. They are found most extensively in the states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maryana and are at most marginally integrated into the market economy. Their specific social organisation tends to be non-masculinist and generally speaking egalitarian, with a particularly 'sustainable' approach to natural resources. But they are considered as without caste, being despised and exploited as cheap or unpaid labour when they are forced to join agricultural or industrial units. Consequently, 'tribals' referring to India, has not only a social-anthropological meaning but a juridical one as well.
- "Capital asks no questions about the length of life of labour-power"... "What experience generally shows to the capitalist is a constant excess of population"... "*Après moi le déluge!* is the watchword of every capitalist and every capitalist nation" (Marx, 1976, Vol. 1, p. 376, 380, 381).

- In *La Repubblica*, May 17 1994, an article entitled, "Where have the Sarajevo children disappeared to?" Wondering where the children evacuated from the Bosnian war have finished up, the article quoted spine-chilling figures from the humanitarian organisations on trafficking in children and reported the case of one 14-year-old girl who finished with Italian go-betweens and managed to escape. Also mentioned is an article in the weekly, *Focus*.
- The number of children used in the pornography market was referred to with increasing frequency in the media in 1993-94.
- International criminal networks and international crime organisations with legal terminals are growing around the clandestine traffic in organs. In this connection, Italian public television has broadcast a series of programs on this issue. One of the most interesting, on March 5 1994 on the second state channel, provided evidence of a relationship between these organisations and legal terminals in France.
- It seems worthwhile putting this question given the incredible figures on slavery published recently: 200 million in the world, according to *Economist* of January 6 1990. 100 million are reportedly children, according to *Il Manifesto*, 8.06.1994, which quotes a Unicef report published on the previous day.
- *Il Mattino di Padova*, 4.06.1994, publishes an article on the discovery and denunciation of an organisation that was exploiting women and war cripples from ex-Yugoslavia. In Mestre, Venice, the former were sent to work as prostitutes, the latter as beggars.
- An effective description of the creation of under-development through development is provided for the Port Harcourt area in Nigeria by Silvia Federici (1992).
- Since January 1 1994, the day on which the revolt broke out, there has been a continual flow of information in the press. In Italy, *Il Manifesto* and other newspapers have reported the major demands of the rebels and with them the women of Chiapas as they were advanced. Two articles with very precise information on the demands as a whole and the details of the mobilisation are Gomez (1994) and Cleaver (1994). A brief synthesis of the women's rights in the Women's Revolutionary Law is to be found in Coppo and Pisani (eds. 1994). I must add that a book not to be missed for knowing the condition of the Maya women, this time in Guatemala, is Burgos (1991), *My name is Rigoberta Menchù*.
- In any case, it needs recognising that, in recent years, even if with different approaches, there has been a growth – internationally – in attempts to link different

theoretical elaborations with approaches whose focus is the relationship with nature, particularly Marxism and ecology. The magazine best-known for publishing this type of debate is *Capitalismo. Natura. Socialismo*, which is explicitly located in an eco-Marxist perspective. In this same magazine, a particularly ample discussion has developed around the O'Connor (1992) theses on the "second contradiction of capitalism". On the relationship between the left and ecological issues, see, among others, Ricoveri (1994).

- Just to mention two initiatives: the Circle of the Peoples coordinated a wide range of associations in a counter-summit against the Naples summit of the Group of Seven on July 8-10, 1994, and, in the first ten days of October of the same year, a large number of associations is taking part in a counter-summit in Madrid for the annual assemblies of the World Bank and the IMF, this year marking the fiftieth anniversary of Bretton Woods and the international financial organisations created there. For the same event, the League for the Rights of the Peoples is working at the Lelio Basso Foundation in Rome to produce a statement on the Bretton Woods institutions to be published when the summit is on in Madrid, just as was done for the IMF general assembly in Berlin in 1988.
- Autochthon, from the Greek [ott pl.] are of the earliest known inhabitants of any country and/or an animal or plant that is native to a region, Greek meaning "from the earth itself" [Editor].
- This article has been published originally in Italian in the Review *Vis-à-Vis* n.4, 1996, then in the book edited by Mariarosa Dalla Costa e Giovanna Franca Dalla Costa (1996) *Donne sviluppo e lavoro di riproduzione. Questioni delle lotte e dei movimenti*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

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Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Dario De Bortoli

For Another Agriculture and Another Food Policy in Italy

Italian agriculture has recently witnessed a transition from classical unionism, which fixed working conditions but remained indifferent to what was produced and how, to the movement for another agriculture, centred on the question of the ends and the sense of peasant labour, a fundamental rethinking of the farmer's activity. This development may seem belated compared to other experiences in advanced capitalist countries. In France in particular, as early as the 1980s, Paysans Travailleurs then Confédération Paysanne, with J. Bové and F. Dufour (2001), opened questions which in most advanced capitalist countries have only assumed importance in recent years, with the debate on agriculture developing within discussion of neoliberal globalization.

For the moment the Italian transition has nothing to do with agricultural unions, Coldiretti, CIA [translator's note: Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori, not Central Intelligence Agency] and Confagricoltura (of which Coldiretti, traditionally linked to the Christian Democrats, is dominant among peasants farming on a small and medium scale). Historically these organizations have not adopted strategies involving their members in discussion of agricultural policy. Rather, the change reflects the collective will of farmers, stockbreeders and citizens (not only as consumers), who have organized to refuse an agriculture and a stockbreeding system that increasingly spreads illness and danger of death. They have set up new groupings (including unions), new movements of denunciation, struggle, construction of alternatives and indication of other possibilities. Some were formed very recently, within the movement of movements, taking shape during the 2001 Genoa demonstrations against neoliberal globalization. These include Foro Contadino – Altagricoltura and AltrAgricoltura NordEst, while Co.Sp.A (Comitato Spontaneo Produttori Agricoli), made up of dairy farmers, was formed in 1996 around the question of milk quotas and surcharges (commonly known as fines). Others, oriented less towards a new unionism than towards spreading another culture of agriculture, building and promoting alternative

practices and criteria, have existed for longer. However they remained somewhat separate, deaf to a debate in the Italian movement, polarized by other questions. Of these, we mention here Centro Internazionale Crocevia, Associazione Rurale Italiana (ARI), Civiltà Contadina (which includes Seed Savers) Associazione Italiana Agricoltura Biologica (AIAB), Associazione Italiana Agricoltura Integrata and Mondo Biologico Italiano, Associazione Agricoltura Biodinamica, plus of course the galaxy of groups specifically dedicated to the defence of plant and animal biodiversity and therefore of the raw material of a diversified agriculture, who often set up islands of cultivation and breeding of rare species.

Over the last 35 years political movements in Italy have paid little attention to experiments in alternative agriculture, seeing them as escapist, (especially in the case of the agricultural communes of the 1970s). Consequently there has been a lack of effort to address the issues raised by these experiments. French agriculture, once again in contrast with Italy's, has been characterized by the predominance of medium-sized farms (10 to 20 hectares), with everything that implies in quantitative and qualitative terms: a more consolidated productive structure, with farmers heavily involved in their associations in a country that generally holds them in high regard, supporting their demands economically and socially. In Italy the situation has been noticeably different, with scant attention paid to farmers, little interest in their demands for a dignified life, serious impoverishment of the countryside and a strong tendency to use agricultural areas as a source of an emigrant labour force, [directed] first towards other countries and then for the large industrial poles in the North of the nation.

Among the groups cited above, the stockbreeders of Cospa (or Co.Sp.A) have been the largest and most combative outside the unions. Between 1996 and 2002 they blocked motorways, occupied Milan's Malpensa airport and demonstrated outside big TV stations, always with tractors and Ercolina the cow. They have won some 6,000 court rulings in their favour against surcharges. Since 2002 Cospa has been subdivided into three parts: Cospa Cobas, LIAG (established as a union) and Cospa Nazionale. Italian law 119 of 2003, requiring payment of surcharges (drafted by agriculture minister Gianni Alemanno) and the due date for payment of March 31 2004 opened a particularly dramatic moment.

Leaving this significant battle, which remains open after years of struggle, let us turn again to the emergence in Italy of a movement for another agriculture. Despite various experiments in alternative agriculture in the country over decades, only in the last few years, starting from the Genoa demonstrations and therefore from the

encounter with agricultural movements from other countries, has the Italian movement acquired [strength] and visibility, becoming part of the international Via Campesina peasant movement and joining in its call for food sovereignty with all that implies, starting with different relations between agricultural producers and between agricultural producers and citizens. Looking in particular to the neighbouring experience of Confédération Paysanne in France, a model of local, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable peasant agriculture is counterposed to that of industrial production.

However Italy is a country in which the *price of land* is exceptionally high, compared to other European countries. The first obstacle, therefore, is this price, which in more and more parts of the country cannot be absorbed within the agricultural process. Moreover, due to neoliberal policies favouring production by big corporations, some 50 small and medium sized agricultural companies close each day,¹ one every half an hour or so. Consequently much land remains uncultivated, while financial speculation and privatization deny the right to work the land to those who wish to do so. Not surprisingly, therefore, one of the first forms of struggle that must be mentioned is the *occupation of land* in order to work it and the *defence* of these occupations in various ways when, after peasants have worked the land for some time, others seek to take it back from them. This was the experience of the Eughenia co-operative in the province of Grosseto, who for five years have been working on the improvement of a farm and of the nearby village, which at the time was on the brink of depopulation. They managed to revitalize both through a local agriculture project based on a short, diversified cycle, sustainable in every respect, which even found sources of financing. This thousand hectare project could have represented the possibility of employment and adequate income for many people, and therefore of the village's revitalization. The co-operative wanted to buy the land, but the owners raised the price, and in the resulting dispute won the right to evict the occupiers, although this has not been exercised. The situation remains open, and the peasants have put a herd of sheep at the gate of the land, to guard it.²

In a very similar position is the co-operative Le Terre della Grola – Ottomarzo of San Ambrogio, Valpolicella,³ in the hills near Verona, which for more than 20 years has cultivated 13 hectares of vineyards using organic methods, returning to traditional techniques for the cultivation of marginal land and at the same time operating the farm as a teaching project, running an agritourism service and a small cheese factory, making the outdoor space and the land available to the public for recreation and cultural and charitable initiatives, and providing work for people in difficulty. The

provincial government, which owns the land, now wants to sell it to generate cash, but the co-operative wants to buy it and has promoted a collection of funds. The positive response to the collection shows that the public is very well aware of how much value is added by an alternative way of managing the land, value held in common, which the city can draw on in its new relationship with the countryside. Certainly the money collected could not compete with other offers if the province puts the land up for auction. Here again, the situation is open.

These are only two examples, but many others in the same direction could be given. In order to support experiences like these, and, more broadly, to generalize the demand for the right of access to land to improve it through agriculture, as a fundamental right of peasants, the Foro Contadino – Altragricoltura association has promoted across Italy the ‘Campaign for the right to land’. Notwithstanding the difference of context from those countries where Via Campesina has a longer history, this campaign intends to claim the right to access to land – the fundamental demand of the Via Campesina network – in Italy. The association also calls for a locally diversified model of peasant agriculture, capable of spreading across the country and creating widespread employment, cultivating the species typical of the various areas and thereby protecting the biodiversity that characterizes the various contexts. These associations also demand a reformulation of credit and tax policy in order to allow this kind of agriculture to become established in an ongoing way, so as to guarantee a durable revitalization of the land. The existing forms of economic support fail to take account of the price of land in areas where there is pressure from industry and the hotel business, as Guglielmo Donadello of AltrAgricoltura points out. This combination of factors leads to a problem of management as well as one of access to land.

In the document *Il cibo non è una merce* (‘Food is not a commodity’), Foro Contadino – AltrAgricoltura states: ‘In the interest of all citizens, of their health, of their territories, of social justice ... we want a peasant agriculture with a social dimension based on labour, on solidarity between producers and consumers, but also between regions and peasants worldwide. Otherwise the richest regions and the strongest farmers would encroach on others’ right to life, and this logic has no future ... everyday in Europe 600 farms close; by the end of this year 750,000 agricultural jobs in Italy could be lost.’ Regarding this increasingly serious problem of land, the association has issued ‘The call for the right to land’ (L’appello per il diritto alla terra), in which it states: ‘One problem once again stands out among all others, a problem that Italy seemed to have put behind it with the victory of the last century’s peasant struggles, but which is ever more dramatically urgent: access to land for those who

wish to work it, denied by the extremely high cost of productive land, tied more and more to financial speculation and less and less to real agricultural value...Thus, ever more often, peasant tenant farms are evicted because the owners prefer to speculate financially rather than guaranteeing the agricultural use of the land; companies managing public property privatize the property at prices peasant operations cannot afford; young people who want to work the land asked unaffordable prices per hectare; old people abandoning farming without their land being put to social use ... The death of peasant farms through the abandoning of the land can and must be resisted.'

To this end, the association established *Soccorso contadino* ('Peasant aid') and *Coordinamento nazionale contadino per il diritto alla terra* ('National peasant coordination for the right to land'), aiming to 'bring single struggles out of isolation and indifference, coordinating initiatives of legal and technical defence, building mobilization, opening negotiating tables for the right to land and demanding that institutions respond in the interests of the citizens they are supposed to represent.' In very concrete terms, the association proposes launching a national struggle for the right to land, articulated in four demands: for an urgent halt to evictions and other action leading to expulsion from land; for the use of public land to ensure the priority of peasant production; for a plan to restructure land ownership that guarantees access to land; for the establishment of a land bank that guarantees the use of abandoned land.⁴

Another set of problems, over which groups and networks have mobilized, has to do with the *offshoring* of production by big food companies and the related *increasing unsafety of food* and *declining employment*. *Milk production* is a particularly problematic area: today, after the Parmalat crash, it faces a range of very different solutions. [translator's note: Parmalat, Italy's largest food and agriculture group, collapsed financially at the end of 2003, amid evidence of fraud on a massive scale.] As AltrAgricoltura NordEst – Co.Sp.A. Nazionale points out in its document *Oggi di cibo si può morire* (Because of Food 'We could die today') of February 2003, the first absurdity relating to the question of milk was the forced slaughter of many animals in the name of milk quotas, after which it was found that 46 per cent of our fresh milk is imported. On the basis of milk industry association Assolatte's figures,⁵ the picture is even worse. The document cited shows that the consumer is unaware of the source of imported milk, which sometimes comes from areas with lower sanitary standards in Eastern Europe. For citizens this means the erosion of the right to know the origin and the type of milk they are consuming, the right to choose, and, moreover, contrary to the promises of neoliberalism, an economic disadvantage. Four years ago, as Luciano

Mioni of AltraAgricoltura Nord-Est shows, a litre of milk cost L980 from the farm and L1,600 to the consumer: approximately 50 per cent to the producer and the rest to the marketer. Today a litre of fresh milk costs the equivalent of 2,200 or 2,300 old lire in Italy, the highest price in Europe, while the farm price is L620. Thus milk costs the consumer an average of L400 more today than four years ago, while the price paid at the farm has fallen by 30 per cent. Within this very negative scenario there is also the particular case of Fresco Blù microfiltered milk, produced and distributed by Parmalat, which despite its name is not fresh, inasmuch as it is treated in order to expire in ten days rather than four (now raised to six) for fresh milk. Stangely this milk is often sold in supermarkets as fresh milk. Consequently there have been frequent protests at supermarket chains for a correct classification of this milk on the shelves.

As the stockbreeders of Cospa emphasise, however, the Parmalat affair could be the occasion for a major turning point. Instead of corporate earnings based on financial mechanisms, earnings based on a return to a model of food production that recognizes that food is not a commodity like any other, and in particular acknowledges milk as a basic food for everyone and especially for vulnerable people, assuring its genuineness and real freshness, and consequently privileging the short cycle. In their statement 'Open a new phase in Italian zootechnics after the culpable disasters of parliament and the Alemanno law', the stockbreeders write that the collapse of this company has 'buried for ever in our country the episode of milk quotas, and has put an end to the chimera of instalments so dear to European Union policy'. After 25 years of failed milk and cheese policy, the document continues, the state and political forces should accept the policy of food sovereignty, the short cycle and production aimed at valorizing Italian DOP products worldwide: therefore they must change the agricultural model. This, the text continues, means a return to a real economy rather than a fictitious one; protecting of a zootechnics whose methods respect animals and the environment; confirming the importance of the multifunctional role in the is sector, above all in hill and mountain areas that are particularly severely damaged by neoliberal policies; adopting the short cycle and consequently the link between production and territory; the traceability of the entire chain to offer guarantees to the consuming citizen, who is increasingly alarmed by food scandals, and oriented, when possible, towards more local, transparent and guaranteed production. It also means, we add here, restoring pride to a producer who wishes to be proud of his or her work, and opening new relations between producers and consumers. The document reiterates citizens' right to healthy milk, resulting from a short production chain, free from GMOs, and coming from animals not fed on industrial by-products. It concludes

by calling for the rescinding of the Alemanno law, for real correspondence between the assigned quotas and the number of dairy cows actually possessed and their productive capacity, for the strengthening of the short cycle, and for a radical change in milk and cheese policy in Italy and in Europe. In another press statement,⁶ the same organization claims 'the right to exist as farms, to be certain of being able to continue working and keeping the farms open even after the application of the Alemanno law, to be assigned production on the basis of production,⁷ to a real national and regional agriculture policy giving precise indications on traceability of the product from the beginning to the end of the production chain'. It is evident that a new vision of food and labour comes from this complex of requests, a different conception of agriculture, the will to build a responsible peasant class and the demand that politicians assume their responsibilities in order that peasants and stockbreeders can assume theirs. As Bové writes (Bové and Dufour 2001, pag.179), 'To go in this direction action is needed on two levels ... by the state ... and by the peasant'. Perhaps precisely because they are bearers of a different agricultural project, these union organizations were not invited to Rome on the 6th of February for the discussions of the Parmalat case to which the agriculture minister had summoned organizations historically involved in the sector and regional government members responsible for agriculture. This happened despite the fact that the same minister had recognized these groups as interlocutors for the question of aviculture. Yet the Parmalat case undoubtedly represents the greatest opportunity to pose the fundamental question of a turning point in what is produced and how, questions that take priority over those of investment and employment. Whether this opportunity is taken or evaded opens or closes the way to the future of food, development and a different life in Italy and Europe.

Similar problems arise with the offshoring and importing of meat production. Once again, the document *Because of food we could die today*, which calls on citizens to oppose these policies, making contact with organized groups and protest movements, informs us, a great deal of the meat consumed in Italy comes from Brazil, Thailand, China and Argentina, in particular chicken treated with cloramphenical and nitrofurazone, substances banned in Europe since 1966. Moreover bacitracin, spiramycin, virginiamycin and tilosin, dangerous substances, recognized as potentially carcinogenic and strictly forbidden in Europe, are commonly used in these countries not only in poultry farming, but also in the raising of pigs and cattle that end up in the Italian diet. According to the document, multinational meat-producing companies take advantage of the loose international regulation imposed by the WTO to avoid controls and import duties, ensuring an enormous low-priced supply of unsafe

meat, of very low quality, in the purchasing centres of national retail chains, generating significant earnings given that the price for the consumer remains high. This allows these companies almost monopoly control of the European market. Moreover, although in September 2002 all consignments of bird meat and derivatives sent from Brazil to the European Union were checked for residual presence of nitrofurazone, because the substance was found in products imported from that country, the permanent Committee on the food chain and health agreed to a European Commission proposal to reduce the frequency of checks to 20 per cent of consignments. The proposal will now be adopted by the Commission and will come into force in the coming weeks. The places where the various kinds of unsafe meat we import are produced are marked by savage exploitation of workers, impoverishment of land, environmental pollution resulting from intensive stock farming with heavy use of pharmaceuticals and chemicals, and similarly widespread monocultures using chemical fertilizer and pesticides on a massive scale. As we said before, sanitary regulations are either absent, or weak, or not observed. The primary destination of this meat (cutlets, hamburgers, cordon-bleu, chicken breasts and thighs) is catering, institutional meals and food services for the elderly, hospital, school and corporate meals, workers' clubs, bars, motorway services and so on: in general those eating in such places are vulnerable or at least are short of time. For consumers, an extremely high health risk. Many cases of telarchia or premature puberty have been reported: Turin magistrates are investigating 80 in that city and another 60 in Milan. Aside from hormonal disorders, which already appear in children in the form of premature puberty, and in adults in that of excess of oestrogens, recognized as a cause of male infertility, an increase in the human resistance to antibiotics, due to the excess of these products that we ingest through the food has been noted, as has an increase in the incidence of allergies, especially among children, as well as continuing alarm over the danger that epidemics breaking out in intensive stock farms – especially those with little or no regulation – could spread and cause human deaths. Farms in Italy and elsewhere in Europe observing quality control and consumer health regulations face unfair competition, increasingly often forcing them to close. Despite the fact that the European Community banned the use of hormones in stock breeding in 1988, these are used in Italy and in the rest of Europe, as are massive dosages of antibiotics, in order both to prevent disease and to stimulate growth. Consequently many animals found on our farms are [fattened] with banned drugs and are highly dangerous to human health.⁸ In particular, boldenone is a growth hormone of the anabolic steroid group, whose traces disappear in 24 hours: this substance, dangerous to humans, is used illegally in the raising of calves. In 2000 Italian health minister Girolamo Sirchia

ordered the seizure of a consignment of calves from the Netherlands, in which traces of the anabolic substance were found. However it has also been found on Italian farms, particularly in Lombardia, the Veneto and Piemonte. Pressure from pharmaceuticals companies for the use of large numbers of drugs probably had a role in the use of the vaccine against blue tongue in cows, which led to numerous abortions and many other problems, driving the stockbreeders to fight this absurd requirement.⁹ In Italy there was no real cause for alarm as this disease, which affects sheep, struck only a very small number of cattle. Despite alarmist media coverage, not even bird flu, which in recent years has been particularly common in the Veneto region, was so highly pathogenic as to call for the slaughter of animals. Here, however, the substantial compensation available for this kind of epidemic could have been a reason for declaring them “highly pathogenic” even if they were not.

A third order of problems, which the Italian movement for another agriculture has confronted and which is now well known worldwide, is that of GMOs, which unfortunately are extremely common both in food for humans and that for animals, often without the knowledge of producers, who are unaware of having bought genetically modified seeds or other substances. Even here in the Veneto, farmers have been interviewed on television who say they have been ruined by companies that sold them GM seeds without their knowledge, in order to make them cultivate GMOs against their will. On the basis of the examination of samples by AltrAgricoltura Nord-Est, this association revealed that the DNA of plants analysed in the Veneto showed that two samples in three were genetically modified. The association complained formally to the regional government, with no result. On the contrary, this summer a ‘Piemonte case’ broke out because, following the discovery of 381 hectares of genetically modified corn, and the consequent order from the regional authorities that the farmers destroy the crops, the dispute over who should pay for the damages reached the Regional Administrative Court. The farmers accused Pioneer Italia and Monsanto of selling them the seeds in bad faith, and consequently claimed the cost of the losses from the company. From this it can be deduced that this kind of cultivation is already widespread in Italy, and many fear that the European parliament’s decision on summer 2003¹⁰ to require that packaging be labelled only when 0.9 per cent or more of its contents is genetically modified could constitute a threshold that is easy to raise in the future, and which immediately violates citizens’ rights to distinguish and choose between genetically modified and other food. On this matter popular opposition is widespread, and there is no lack of initiatives for verification from various groups, but the usual response from the relevant political institutions, with a few

exceptions, has been inertia. The presence of GMOs in many Italian companies' products especially Discount stores, has also been noted by Greenpeace Italia, which in 1993 published a 'red list' of 35 companies and foods chains, with a total of 250 products presumed to contain GMOs.¹¹

Another disturbing point, of which citizens are not sufficiently aware and, consequently, regarding which the necessary initiatives have not begun, is Italy's *heavy dependence on foreign countries* in the food sector. 45 per cent of our milk comes from France and Germany, as does 50 per cent of beef, while 40 per cent of pork comes from Bavaria and the Netherlands, while Germany and the USA monopolize the grain market, supplying 60 per cent of the raw material used for bread and biscuits. This situation has been denounced by Coldiretti. The trojan horse for the invasion seems to have been foreign supermarket chains, which silently and stealthily colonized the territory, turning Italy into a country that depends on big foreign chains for 65 per cent of its food. For Italian producers this represents a serious risk of closure, and for their workers the risk of unemployment. It is significant that, faced with this collapse of defences, which is in danger of worsening following the Parmalat crash, the president of Coldiretti declared the only possible defence to be support for the 'made in Italy' brand, adding that 'the chain of agricultural production must be attached to that of distribution, and the obligation to show the source of all goods should be extended beyond DOC and DOP products'.¹² A welcome comment! As we shall see shortly, the question of complete traceability of all stages in the food chain and of the transparency of the production process is more urgent than ever for those seeking another agriculture.

Another front for mobilization that has witnessed important events in the last year is that of *quality of products without excessive price*. The *wine production* sector, represented by circles of good and insufficiently known viticulturalists, has led the way with new initiatives in this area. The co-ordinates for the emergence of the right to quality and accessibility of a product so important for the pleasure of the table and in other respects were clearly defined in the documents illustrating the two 'Land and Freedom/Critical Wine' conferences. These were simultaneously meeting points for agricultural producers, citizens, not only as consumers, poets, administrators and scholars: 'organize the refusal of the neoliberal development model, which wants an industrial, monocultural agriculture of the multinationals and the European Union, and at the same time the refusal of an elitist production of so-called 'typical' products: these are two sides of the same coin. Conceive a new model of engagement with the land/Earth, which leaves space for simpler, happier production, consumption and

pleasures. Draw the virtuous circle between quality of production, quality of the product and quality of social relations.’ The two conferences and demonstrations took place at the La Chimica social centre in Verona from April 11 to 13 2003, and at the Leoncavallo social centre in Milan from December 5 to 6 of the same year. The most important innovation of these initiatives was their capacity to attempt a new moment of community, uniting an in-depth analysis of politics, the role of multinationals, the strategic nature of their control of agriculture and the production and sale of food for ends of global domination, with the problems of those who produce and have to earn, those who consume and have to match their spending capacity to a good glass of wine, those who came to meet others, to learn, to read a poem.¹³

In the same territory of recognition and appropriate monitoring of quality production is this year’s mobilization for *olive oil*, a fundamental product for Italian and Mediterranean food and the object of many frauds.¹⁴ *Report*, a well-known television programme, dedicated an important show to this question on March 10, 2002. A major demonstration against these systematic frauds was held in the large square in front of the port at Monopoli on February 2 2004. Along with Luigi Veronelli, anarchaenologist and theorist of responsible peasant agriculture and the organizer and promoter of the initiative, the Assud association and Project Land and Freedom/Critical Wine, plus another 40 organizations, took part in the sit-in and disobedient protest action against the traffic in olive oil, which exemplifies the malign power of multinationals. The participants created an action and a debate with a strong media impact in a space where nothing had happened for decades. Olive oil was discussed as an emblematic instance of the multinationals’ planetary domination through control of food production, and of their dubious production in contrast to the healthy production of a responsible agriculture. The reasons for the demonstration were set out in the statements calling it, which we summarize here.¹⁵ 80 per cent of the Italian olive oil market is in the hands of multinationals. In a legalized fraud, allowed to proceed in tranquillity, the tanker ships transporting the oil ‘transform’ their cargo from seed oil to extra virgin olive oil. This is no miracle. It is enough to falsify the documents, protected by international rogatory laws that hide crimes committed outside the country. Thus consumers are defrauded and olive growers forced to suffer unfair competition and consequently to lower the cost of their labour, or even to abandon the harvesting of olives. Well known Italian companies sell extra virgin olive oil in supermarkets at around 3 euro a litre. Considering that the European Union subsidy for producers is around 1.25 euro a litre and that harvesting the olives costs producers 5 euro a litre in an area such as Salento where costs are low, while on the terracing of

Liguria or Lake Garda it costs twice as much, it is clear that the oil sold for 3 euro a litre either is not olive oil, or it comes from countries where the cost of labour is much lower. In fact Bertolli is part of Unilever and buys only 20 to 30 per cent of its oil in Italy, while Sasso, owned by Nestlé, buys 40 per cent of its oil from Italy but none from Liguria. The remaining larger percentage of olive oil comes from Tunisia, Turkey, Israel and Spain, but – and this is a great problem – the consumer is unaware of this because the place of origin is not stated on the label, as the producer is not required to do so. Another aspect is the great extent to which this oil is exposed to adulteration, through increasingly sophisticated techniques that escape even the checks of the anti-adulteration unit of the Carabinieri. The port of Monopoli was chosen for the demonstration in order to denounce the case of a ship, since disappeared, that used to leave Turkey or Israel with a cargo of hazelnut oil and, after stopping off at a few ports, unloaded olive oil at Monopoli or Barletta. On other occasions oils are even mixed with inedible oils or with heavily coloured seed oils or even with GMO seeds. The demonstration at Monopoli aimed to spread awareness of what goes on around olive oil, to open new opportunities for contact between producers of real olive oil and consumers interested in buying it, and to call for political change to restore space and economic recognition to high quality production of something so fundamental to our diet and our culture.

The proposals raised in the debate accompanying the demonstration, and also already discussed at other meetings, such as those on wine production mentioned above, point to another order of problems around which activism and inventiveness are increasing. These regard the need for *new procedures, more agile, local, and differently identified*, to certify agricultural processes that aim to assure certainty of the product's origin, and offer transparency, traceability and quality, privileging locality. The most innovative proposal is certainly that of the *Denominazioni Comunali (De.co.)* devised by Veronelli,¹⁶ which is already widely applied. This very simple procedure, which certifies directly a product's origin in a particular area, is administered by local authorities, based on the new powers they acquired through constitutional law 3 of October 18, 2001. Under this law the power is open to any local government, and it is well worth the trouble of requesting it. This is so despite the position of agriculture minister Alemanno, who, before this certification was inaugurated with the adoption of the first De co. by the municipal council of Lecce on February 3, 2003, sent all concerned an intimidatory circular on December 19 of the previous year. This document stated that '...by definition, any discrimination between local and imported products, based on the products' origin creates an unjustified

obstacle to the free circulation of goods'. Nonetheless, the municipality of Lecce approved 'regulation for the protection and promotion of local products and the introduction of the De.co. certificate for the defence and promotion of the area's cultivation and culture.' Other municipalities followed Lecce's example, including that of Cartoceto, which introduced the De.co. certificate for its extra virgin olive oil, providing financial help to companies choosing to produce De.co. products. The introduction of the De.co. register is hoped for by many. It would immediately make peasants better off, with the reopening of many farms previously reduced to closure and misery, requiring better paid workers and substantial advantage on every level for citizens as consumers. Equally innovative is the proposal for a *completely voluntary and self-managed and self-certified catalogue of producers*, through which producers themselves certify the production process, giving information on various aspects of their work, including the culture it is based on. This communication between producer and consumer would be direct and voluntary rather than imposed, and would increase the producer's self-responsibility, which would be repaid by the opportunity to make better known the complexity of his or her engagement. There is also the proposal of a farm-gate price to give transparency to the process constituting the final price. The farm-gate price would indicate the price at which the producer sold his or her product, and, if included in the label, would allow to be recognized the unjustifiable increases attached to the product in the course of the distribution process, which is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few powerful established interests. This proposal initially came from wine producers, but could be applied to any product, its spirit is to provide an instrument that allows the first steps to be taken towards establishing traceability of prices. It represents the emergence among producers of a will to stop accepting the law by which the price rockets after the product has left their hands, and, among consumers, to refuse the impenetrable pretexts by which the price mysteriously multiplies.

The requirement that production identified and certified this way find adequate outlets on the market, above all locally, meets the demand of citizens who, increasingly, are organized in purchasing networks based on new rules allied to those of another agriculture. Among these networks there are *GAS (Gruppi di Acquisto Solidale)*, which involve around two million citizens and act on the basis of ethical criteria in every context: in relations with the other human beings, with nature and with the economy. They plan a major convention next April in Florence.

To speak more completely of the present movement for another agriculture would require covering the work of organic and biodynamic agriculture groups and others,

active since longer ago. But we assume this work to be better known and documented among those concerned with agricultural problems, and we will address it in subsequent works. A complete account of the present movement would also require illustration of the many projects specifically dedicated to the protection of animal and vegetable biodiversity, which, as we said at the beginning are involved in preserving the raw material of another agriculture. However it is not possible to address this aspect in this text, which is intended to focus more on other aspects of the question. As for the experiences described here, I can conclude that, on one hand, they reflect the ongoing difficulty of finding forms capable of having an impact on the most serious problems of the dominant organization of agriculture, characterized by the industrial productivist approach, which is currently burdened by further negative factors in the Italian context. In fact there is a risk of a further concentration of capital in favour of foreign groups in food production, while in food retailing foreign groups are already present on a large scale and are suspected of having favoured products from their countries of origin, primarily France and Germany, in supermarkets. These companies could consolidate their position in Italy following the collapse of Italian companies. If Italian companies close, unemployment is likely to worsen. On the other hand, producers and consumers are demonstrating a will to establish in various ways another agricultural and dietary model. Around this demand and this new culture, struggles are generated and new networks of production, information, struggle and exchange flourish. This already appears as what it is: a very unequal confrontation. But David defeated the giant Goliath. Could this happen again? Among the reasons supporting an optimistic outlook is the new composition and determination of this agricultural movement, made up of rural and urban citizens who discuss, plan and construct, refusing the modes of production and consumption imposed by the neoliberal model, which lowers the quality of life not only in the precarisation of work and the curtailment of services, but first of all in its attack on the land/Earth. This attack includes the adulteration and pollution of food, the destruction of the environment and the landscape, and the privation of relations and sensations, beginning with the tastes of the products of the earth and the perfumes of the wind. It is not only producers and consumers as such, but citizens, human beings, who, in search above all of life, are surrounding Goliath.

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Notes

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- Based on these statistics Italy's produced more than 105 million square litres of cows' milk in 2003, while 31.1 million square litres was imported from other countries. Domestic transformation and consumption of cows' milk was 131.7 million square litres. Of this total, 100.7 million square litres (76.2 per cent) was destined for industrial production (DOP and other cheese, UHT milk), while 31.1 million (23,8%) square litres was consumed directly as fresh milk.
- Both statements cited have been circulated without date by Cospa Nazionale.

- For 'the right to be assigned production on the basis of production' see above regarding the correspondence between quota and real production capacity.
- Guglielmo Donadello and Luciano Mioini addressed this question at a conference at the Political Sciences Faculty at the University of Padua on December 16, 2003. Among the most recent an alarming items of related news is the report in the *Mattino del Padova* of February 17, 2004 that an operation of the anti-adulteration unit of the Carabinieri in the provinces of Venice, Padua, Treviso, Verona and Vicenza in which large quantities of irregular pharmaceuticals were seized on animal farms. This operation led to the arrest of veterinarians, breeders, agricultural businesspeople, traders and heads of animal feed and pharmaceuticals companies.
- 'Lingua blu, allevatori in rivolta' (Blue tongue: stockbreeders in revolt) in *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, July 10, 2003.
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Silvia Federici

Women, Land-Struggles and The Valorization of Labor

How can we ever get out of poverty if we can't get a piece of land to work? If we had land to plant, we wouldn't need to get food sent to us all the way from the United States. No. We'd have our own. But as long as the government refuses to give us the land and other resources we need, we'll continue to have foreigners running our country.

—Elvia Alvarado (Benjamin 1987:104)

Introduction: Women Keep the World Alive

Until not long ago, issues relating to land and land struggles would have failed to generate much interest among North Americans, unless they were farmers or descendants of the American Indians for whom the importance of land as the foundation of life is still paramount, culturally at least. For the rest of the population, the land question seemed to have receded into a distant past, as in the aftermath of a prolonged urbanization and industrialization process, land no longer appeared as the fundamental means of reproduction, and new technologies claimed to provide the power, self-reliance, and creativity that people once associated with agriculture.

This has been a great loss because this amnesia has led to a world where the basic questions concerning our existence—where our food comes from, whether it nourishes or poisons our bodies—remain unanswered and are often unasked. This indifference to land among urban dwellers is coming to an end, however. Concern for the genetic engineering of agricultural crops and the ecological impact of the destruction of the tropical forests, together with the struggles of indigenous people, like the Zapatistas who have risen up in arms to oppose land privatization, have created a new awareness about the importance of the “land question,” not long ago still identified as a “Third World” issue.

There has also been a conceptual shift, in the last twenty years, concerning our understanding of the relation between land and capitalism. This shift has been promoted by the work of activist-scholars like Maria Mies (1986, 1999), Vandana Shiva (1989,1993); Bennholdt-Thomsen (1999, 2001); Claudia von Werlhof (2001), who have shown that land is the material basis for women's subsistence work, and the main source of "food security" for millions of people across the planet. Maria Mies also views this subsistence work as the paradigm of a new social perspective, providing a realistic alternative to capitalist globalization.

It is against this political and conceptual background that I examine the struggles that women are making worldwide to gain access to land, boost subsistence farming, and counter the expanding commercialization of natural resources. I argue that these efforts are extremely important. Thanks to them, billions of people are able to survive, and they point in the direction of the changes we have to make if we are to regain control over the means of *production*, and construct a society where our reproduction does not threaten the survival of other people, nor threatens the continuation of life on the planet.

Women and Land: A Historical Perspective

It is an indisputable fact, though one difficult to measure, that women are the subsistence farmers of the planet. That is, women are responsible for and produce the bulk of the food that is consumed by their families (immediate or extended) or that is sold at the local markets for consumption. This is especially true in Africa, even though across the continent women's right to own land is often denied, and women's access to land, in some countries, is possible only through the intervention and mediation of male kins (Wanyeki 2003).¹

Subsistence farming is difficult to measure because it is unwaged work; thus its status is similar to that of housework. Even the women who are subsistence farmers often do not consider it as work and, despite attempts to measure its significance in quantitative terms, we do not have reliable estimates concerning the number of hours or number of workers involved, and the value of their work.

International agencies like FAO (Food and Agriculture Association), the ILO (International Labor Organization), and the United Nations have generally overlooked the difficulties posed by the measurement of subsistence work. But they have recognized that much depends on the definition we use. Thus they have noted that:

In Bangladesh, [the] labour force participation of women was 10 percent according to the Labour Force Survey of 1985/86. But when, in 1989, the Labour Force Survey included in the questionnaire specific activities such as threshing, food-processing and poultry-rearing the economic activity rate went up to 63 percent (UN 1995:114).²

It is not easy, then, on the basis of the few statistics available, to assess how many people, and in particular how many women are involved in subsistence farming; but clearly it is a substantial number. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, according to FAO (2002), “women produce up to 80 percent of all the basic foodstuffs for household consumption and for sale.” Given that the population of sub-Saharan Africa is about three-quarters of a billion people, with a large percentage of children, this means that more than a hundred million African women must be subsistence farmers.³ Indeed, women hold up *more* than half the sky!

We should also recognize that the persistence of subsistence farming is an astounding phenomenon considering that capitalist development has been premised on the separation of agricultural producers, women above all, from the land. This reality can only be explained on the basis of a tremendous struggle women have made to resist the commercialization of agriculture.

Evidence for this struggle is found throughout the history of colonization, from the Andes to Africa. In response to land expropriation by the Spaniards (assisted by local chiefs), women in Mexico and Peru, in the 16th and 17th centuries, ran to the mountains, rallied the population to resist the foreign invaders, and became the staunchest defenders of the old cultures and religions, which were centered on the worship of nature-gods (Silverblatt 1987; Federici 2004) Later, in the nineteenth century, in Africa and Asia, women defended the traditional female farming systems against the systematic attempts made by the European colonialists to dismantle them and redefine agricultural work as a male job.

As Ester Boserup (among others) has shown, with reference to West Africa, not only did colonial officers, missionaries and, later, agricultural developers impose commercial crops at the expense of food production; though African women did most of the farming; they excluded women from the study of modern farming systems and denied them technical assistance. They also privileged men with regard to land assignment, even when the men were absent from their homes (Boserup 1970:53-55, 59-60). Thus, in addition to eroding women’s “traditional” rights, as participants in communal land-systems and independent cultivators, the colonialists and developers alike introduced new divisions between women and men. They imposed a new sexual

division of labor, based upon women's subordination to men and their confinement to unpaid household labor, which, in the colonialists' schemes, included unpaid cooperation with their husbands in the cultivation of cash-crops.

Women, however, did not accept this deterioration in their social position without protest. In colonial Africa, whenever they feared that the government might sell their land or might appropriate their crops, they revolted. Exemplary is the protest that women mounted against the colonial authorities in Kedjom Keku and Kedjom Ketinguh, in Northwestern (then British) Cameroon, in 1958. Angered by rumors claiming that the government was going to put their land up for sale, 7,000 women repeatedly marched to Bamenda, the provincial capital at the time, and, in their longest stay, camped for two weeks outside the British colonial administrative buildings, "singing loudly and making their rumbustious presence felt" (Diduk 1989:339-340).

In the same region, women fought against the destruction of their subsistence farms by foraging cattle owned by either members of the local male elite or the nomadic Fulani to whom the colonial authorities had granted seasonal pasturage rights expecting to collect a herd tax. In this case too, the women's boisterous protest defeated the plan, forcing the authorities to sanction the offending pastoralists. As Susan Diduk writes,

In the protests women perceived themselves as fighting for the survival and subsistence needs of family and kin. Their agricultural labour was and continues to be indispensable to daily food production. Kedjom men also emphasise the importance of these roles in the past and present. Today they are frequently heard to say, "Don't women suffer for farming and for carrying children for nine months? Yes, they do good for the country." (Diduk 1989:343)⁴

There were many similar struggles, in the 1940s and 1950s, throughout Africa, by women resisting the introduction of cash crops, to which the most fertile lands were being allocated, and the extra work it imposed on them, which took them away from their subsistence farming.

How productive women's subsistence farming continued to be, from the viewpoint of the survival of the colonized communities, can be seen from the contribution it made to the anti-colonial struggle and specifically to the maintenance of liberation fighters in the bush (e.g., in Algeria, Kenya, and Mozambique) (Davidson 1981:76-78, 96-8, 170). Similarly, in the post-independence period, women fought against being recruited in agricultural development projects as unpaid "helpers" of their husbands.

The best example of this resistance is the intense struggle women made in the Senegambia to refuse to cooperate in the commercial cultivation of rice crops, which came at the expense of their subsistence food production (Carney and Watts 1991).

It is because of these struggles—which are now recognized as the main reason for the failure of agricultural development projects through the 1960s and 1970s (Moser 1993)—that women continue to be the world’s main subsistence farmers; and a sizable subsistence sector has survived in many regions of the world, despite the commitment of pre- and post-independence governments to promote “economic development” along capitalist lines. The determination of millions of women in Africa, Asia, and the Americas to not abandon subsistence farming must be emphasized to counter the tendency, present even among radical social scientists, to interpret the survival of subsistence work only as a consequence of international capital’s need to cheapen the cost of the reproduction of labor and “liberate” male workers for the cultivation of cash crops and other form of waged labor.

Claude Meillassoux (1981), the main Marxist proponent of this theory, has argued that female subsistence-oriented production, or the “domestic economy,” as he calls it, has ensured a supply of cheap workers for the capitalist sector at home and abroad and, as such, it has subsidized capitalist accumulation. As his argument goes, thanks to the work of the “village,” the laborers who migrated to Paris or Johannesburg have provided a “free” commodity to the capitalist who hired them; since the employers did not have to pay for their upbringing nor had to continue to support them with unemployment benefits when their work was no longer needed.

From this perspective, women’s labor in subsistence farming would be a bonus for governments, companies, and development agencies, enabling them to more effectively exploit waged workers and transfer wealth from the rural to the urban areas, in effect degrading the quality of the lives of female farmers and their communities (Meillassoux 1981:110-111). To his credit, Meillassoux acknowledges the efforts made by international agencies and governments to “underdevelop” the subsistence sector. He sees the constant draining of its resources, and recognizes the precarious nature of this system of labor-reproduction, anticipating that it may soon undergo a decisive crisis.⁵ But overall, he too has failed to recognize the struggle underpinning the survival of subsistence work and its continuing importance—despite the attacks waged upon it—from the viewpoint of the community’s capacity to resist the encroachment of capitalist relations.

As for liberal economists—their view of “subsistence work” degrades it to the level of an “uneconomic,” “unproductive” activity (in the same way as liberal economics refuses to see women’s unpaid domestic labor in the home as work). As an alternative, liberal economists propose “income generating projects,” the universal remedy to poverty in the neo-liberal agenda,⁶ and presumably the key to women’s emancipation.

What these different perspectives ignore is the strategic importance that access to land and food production has had for women and their communities, despite the ability of companies and governments to use it at times for their own ends. An analogy can be made with the situation that developed during slavery in Jamaica, where the plantation owners gave the slaves small plots of land (“provision grounds”) to cultivate for their own support. The owners took this measure to save on food imports and reduce the cost of reproducing their workers. But the slaves were able to take advantage of it, as it gave them more mobility and independence such that—according to some historians—even before emancipation, a proto-peasantry had formed in the island, possessing a remarkable freedom of movement, and already deriving some income from the sale of its own products (Bush 1990; Morrissey 1989).⁷

Extending this analogy to illustrate the post-colonial capitalist use of subsistence labor we can say that subsistence agriculture has been an important means of support for billions of workers, giving wage laborers the possibility to contract better conditions of work and survive labor strikes and political protests, so that in several countries the wage sector has acquired an importance disproportionate to its small numerical size (Federici 1992).⁸

The “village”—a metaphor for subsistence farming in a communal setting—has been a crucial site also for women’s struggle, providing a base from which to reclaim the wealth the state and capital were removing from it. It is a struggle that has taken many forms, often being directed as much against men as against government, but always strengthened by the fact that women had access to land and could also support themselves and their children directly through the production of food and through the sale of their surplus product. Even after becoming urbanized, women have continued to cultivate any patch of land they could gain access to in order to feed their families and maintain a certain degree of autonomy from the market (Bryceson 1993:105-117).

To what extent the village has been a source of power for female and male workers across the former colonial world can be measured by the attack that from the early 1980s through the 1990s the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and

the World Trade Organization (WTO) have waged against it under the guise of Structural Adjustment and “globalization.”⁹

The World Bank has made the destruction of subsistence agriculture and the commercialization of land the centerpiece of its ubiquitous structural adjustment programs (Federici 1992; Caffentzis 1995; Faraclas 2001; Turner and Brownhill 2001). As a consequence, large tracts of communal land have been taken over by agribusiness and devoted to export crops, while “cheap” (i.e. subsidized) imported foods, from Europe and North America, have flooded the liberalized economies of Africa and Asia (which are forbidden to subsidize their farmers), further displacing women farmers from the local markets. War has completed the task, terrorizing millions into flight from their homelands (Federici 2000).

What has followed has been a *reproduction crisis* of proportions not seen even in the colonial period. Even in regions famous for their agricultural productivity, like southern Nigeria, food is now scarce or too expensive to be within reach of the average person who, after the implementation of structural adjustment programs, has to contend simultaneously with price hikes, frozen wages, devalued currency, widespread unemployment, and cuts in social services.¹⁰

This is where the importance of women’s struggles for land stands out. Women have been the main buffer for the world proletariat against starvation imposed by the World Bank’s neo-liberal regime. They have been the main opponents of the neo-liberal demand that “market prices” determine who should live and who should die, and they are the ones who have provided a practical model for the reproduction of life in a non-capitalist way.

Struggles for Subsistence and Against “Globalization” in Africa, Asia and the Americas

Faced with a renewed drive toward land privatization, the extension of cash crops, and the rise in food prices due to economic adjustment and globalization, women have resorted to many strategies to continue to support their families, pitting them against the most powerful institutions on the planet.

One of the primary strategies women have adopted to defend their communities from the impact of economic adjustment and dependence on the global market has been the expansion of subsistence farming also in the urban centers.

Exemplary is the case of Guinea Bissau studied by Galli and Funk (1995) which shows that, since the early 1980s, women have planted small gardens with vegetables, cassava, and fruit trees around most houses in the capital city of Bissau and other towns; and in time of scarcity they have preferred to forfeit the earnings they might have made selling their produce to ensure their families would not go without food.¹¹ Still with reference to Africa, this picture is confirmed by Christa Wichterich who describes women subsistence farming and urban gardening as “cooking pot economics.” She too notes that in the 1990s, it was revived in many Africa’s cities; the urban farmers being mostly women from the lower class:

There were onions and papaya trees, instead of flower-borders, in front of the housing estates of underpaid civil servants in Dar-es-Salaam; chickens and banana plants in the backyards of Lusaka; vegetables on the wide central reservations of the arterial roads of Kampala, and especially of Kinshasa, where the food supply system had largely collapsed... In [Kenyan] towns [too]...green roadside strips, front gardens and wasteland sites were immediately occupied with maize, plants, *sukum wiki*, the most popular type of cabbage. (Wichterich 2000:73)

However, in order to expand food production women have had to battle to expand their access to land, which the international agencies’ drives to privatize land and commercialize agriculture have further jeopardized.

This may be the reason why, in the case of Guinea Bissau, many women have chosen to remain in the rural area, while most of the men have migrated, with the result that there has been a “feminization of the rural areas, many villages now consisting of women farming alone or in women’s coops” (Galli and Funk 1995:23).

Regaining or expanding land for subsistence farming has been one of the main battles also for rural women in Bangladesh, leading to the formation of the Landless Women Association that has been carrying on land occupations since 1992. During this period, the Association has managed to settle 50,000 families, often confronting landowners in pitched confrontations. According to Shamsun Nahar Khan Doli, a leader of the Association to whom I owe this report, many occupations are on “chars,” low-lying islands formed by soil deposits in the middle of a river.¹² Such new lands should be allocated to landless farmers, according to Bangladeshi law, but because of the growing commercial value of land, big landowners have increasingly seized them. Women are now organizing to stop them, defending themselves with brooms, spears of bamboo, and even knives. Women have also set up alarm systems, to gather other

women when boats with the landowners or their goons approach, and push the attackers off or stop them from landing.

Similar land struggles are being fought in South America. In Paraguay, for example, the Peasant Women's Commission (CMC) was formed in 1985 in alliance with the Paraguayan Peasant's Movement (MCP) to demand land distribution (Fisher 1993:86). As Jo Fischer points out, the CMC was the first peasant women's movement that went into the streets in support of its demands, and incorporated in its program women's concerns, also condemning "their double oppression, both as peasants and as women" (Fisher 1993:87).

The turning point for the CMC came when the government granted large tracts of land to the peasant movement in the forests close to the Brazilian border. The women took these grants as an opportunity to organize a model community joining together to collectively farm their strips of land. As Geraldina, an early founder of CMC pointed out,

We work all the time, more now than ever before, but we've also changed the way we work. We're experimenting with communal work to see if it gives us more time for other things. It also gives us a chance to share our experiences and worries. This is a very different way of living for us. Before, we didn't even know our neighbors. (Fisher 1993:98).

Women's land struggles have included the defense of communities threatened by commercial housing projects constructed in the name of "urban development." "Housing" has often involved the loss of "land" for food production historically. An example is the struggle of women in the Kawaala neighborhood of Kampala (Uganda) where the World Bank, in conjunction with the Kampala City Council (KCC), in 1992-1993, sponsored a large housing project that would destroy much subsistence farm land around or near people's homes. Not surprisingly, it was women who most strenuously organized against it, through the formation of an Abataka (Residents) Committee, eventually forcing the Bank to withdraw from the project. According to one of the women leaders:

While men were shying away, women were able to say anything in public meetings in front of government officials. Women were more vocal because they were directly affected. It is very hard for women to stand without any means of income....most of these women are people who basically support their children and without any income and food they cannot do it...You come and take their peace and income and they are going to fight, not because

they want to, but because they have been oppressed and suppressed. (Tripp 2000:183)

Aili Mari Tripp points out that the situation in the Kawaala neighborhood is far from unique.¹³ Similar struggles have been reported from different parts of Africa and Asia, where peasant women's organizations have opposed the development of industrial zones threatening to displace them and their families and contaminate the environment.

Industrial or commercial housing development often clashes, today, with women's subsistence farming, in a context in which more and more women even in urban centers are gardening (in Kampala women grow 45 percent of the food for their families). It is important to add that in defending land from assault by commercial interests and affirming the principle that "land and life are not for sale," women again, as in the past against colonial invasion, are defending their peoples' history and their culture. In the case of Kawaala, the majority of residents on the disputed land had been living there for generations and had buried their kin there—for many in Uganda the ultimate evidence of land ownership. Tripp's reflections on this land struggle are pertinent to my thesis:

Stepping back from the events of the conflict, it becomes evident that the residents, especially the women involved, were trying to institutionalize some new norms for community mobilization, not just in Kawaala but more widely in providing a model for other community projects. They had a vision of a more collaborative effort that took the needs of women, widows, children, and the elderly as a starting point and recognized their dependence on the land for survival. (Tripp 2000:194)

Two more developments need to be mentioned in conjunction with women's defense of subsistence production. First, there has been the formation of regional systems of self-sufficiency aiming to guarantee "food security" and maintain an economy based on solidarity and the refusal of competition. The most impressive example in this respect comes from India where women formed the National Alliance for Women's Food Rights, a national movement made of thirty-five women's groups. One of the main efforts of the Alliance has been the campaign in defense of the mustard seed economy that is crucial for many rural and urban women in India. A subsistence crop, the seed has been threatened by the attempts of multinational corporations based in the United States to impose genetically-engineered soybeans as a source of cooking oil.¹⁴ In response, the Alliance has built "direct producer-consumer alliances" to "defend the livelihood of farmers and the diverse cultural choices of

consumers,” as stated by Vandana Shiva (2000), one of the leaders of the movement. In her words: “We protest soybean imports and call for a ban on the import of genetically-engineered soybean products. As the women from the slums of Delhi sing, ‘Sarson Bachao, Soya Bhagaa,’ or, ‘Save the Mustard, Dump the Soya’” (Shiva 2000).

Second, across the world, women have been leading the struggle to prevent commercial logging and save or rebuild forests, which are the foundation of people’s subsistence economies, providing nourishment as well as fuel, medicine, and communal relations. Forests, Shiva writes, echoing testimonies coming from every part of the planet, are “the highest expression of earth’s fertility and productivity” (Shiva 1989:56). Thus, when forests come under assault it is a death sentence for the tribal people who live in them, especially the woman. Therefore, women do everything to stop the loggers. Shiva often cites, in this context, the Chikpo movement—a movement of women, in Garhwal, in the foothills of the Himalaya who, beginning in the early 1970s, embrace the trees destined to fall and put their bodies between them and the saws when the loggers come (Shiva 1989).

While women in Garhwal have mobilized to prevent forests from being cut down, in villages of Northern Thailand they have protested the Eucalyptus plantations forcibly planted on their expropriated farms by a Japanese paper-making company with the support of the Thai military government (Matsui 1996:88-90). In Africa, an important initiative has been the “Green Belt Movement,” which under the leadership of Wangari Maathai is committed to planting a green belt around the major cities and, since 1977, has planted tens of millions of trees to prevent deforestation, soil loss, desertification, and fuel-wood scarcity (Maathai 1993).

But the most striking struggle for the survival of the forests is taking place in the Niger Delta, where the mangrove tree swamps are being threatened by oil production. Opposition to it has mounted for twenty years, beginning in Ogharefe, in 1984, when several thousand women from the area laid siege to Pan Ocean’s Production Station demanding compensation for the destruction of the water, trees, and land. To show their determination, the women also threatened to disrobe should their demands be frustrated—a threat they put in action when the company’s director arrived, so that he found himself surrounded by thousands of women naked, a serious curse in the eyes of the Niger Delta communities, which convinced him at the time to accept the reparation claims (Turner and Oshare 1994:140-141).

The struggle over land has also grown since the 1970s in the most unlikely place—New York City—in the form of an urban gardening movement. It began with the

initiative of a women-led group called the “Green Guerrillas,” who began cleaning up vacant lots in the Lower East Side. By the 1990s, eight hundred and fifty urban gardens had developed in the city and dozens of community coalitions had formed, such as the Greening of Harlem Coalition that was begun by a group of women who wanted “to reconnect with the earth and give children an alternative to the streets.” Now it counts more than twenty-one organizations and thirty garden projects (Wilson and Weinberg 1999:36).

It is important to note here that the gardens have been not only a source of vegetables and flowers, but have served community-building and have been a stepping stone for other community struggles (like squatting and homesteading). Because of this work, the women came under attack during Mayor Giuliani’s regime, and for some years now one of the main challenges this movement has faced has been stopping the bulldozers. Over last decade, a hundred gardens have been lost to “development,” more than forty have been slated for bulldozing, and the prospects for the future seem gloomy (Wilson and Weinberg 1999:61). Since his appointment, in fact, the mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg, like his predecessor, has declared war on these gardens.

The Importance of the Struggle

As we have seen, in cities across the world at least a quarter of the people depend on food produced by women’s subsistence labor. In Africa, for example, a quarter of the people living in towns say they could not survive without subsistence food production. This is confirmed by the UN Population Fund which claims that “some two hundred million city dwellers are growing food, providing about one billion people with at least part of their food supply” (UN 2001). When we consider that the bulk of the food subsistence producers are women we can see why the men of Kedjom, Cameroon would say, “Yes, women subsistence farmers do good for humanity.” Thanks to them, the billions of people, rural and urban, who earn one or two dollars a day do not go under, even in time of economic crisis.

Equally important, women’s subsistence production counters the trend by agribusiness to reduce cropland—one of the causes of high food prices and starvation—while ensuring control over the quality of food and protecting consumers against manipulation of crops and poisoning by pesticides. Further, women subsistence production represents a safe way of farming, a crucial consideration at a time when the effects of pesticides on agricultural crops is causing high rates of mortality and

disease among peasants across the world, starting with women (see, for example, Settini et al 1999). Thus, subsistence farming gives women an essential means of control over their health and the health and lives of their families (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999).

Most important, we can also see that subsistence production is contributing to a non-competitive, solidarity-centered mode of life that is crucial for the building of a new society. It is the seed of what Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and Maria Mies call the “other” economy which “puts life and everything necessary to produce and maintain life on this planet at the center of economic and social activity and not the never-ending accumulation of dead money” (Bennholdt-Thomsen and Mies 1999:5).

Notes

1. A detailed description of the land tenure system and women’s property rights in seven African countries—Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda is found in *Women and Land in Africa* (2003) by Muthoni L. Wanyeki. The author found that in general women control food crop production (in some countries like Uganda up to 90%) and control the benefits resulting from the sale of surplus crops. However, their right to own and inherit land is generally limited or denied especially in patrilineal cultures. African women have access to land according to customary laws, but they have users’ rights through their relations with men, through marriage or inheritance. In Latin America as well women’s land ownership rights have been extremely restricted, by means of “legal, cultural, and institutional” mechanisms rooted in a patriarchal ideology and patriarchal division of labor.. On this subject see Deere and León (2001) pp. 2-3.
2. In 1988, the ILO defined subsistence workers in agriculture and fishing as those who “provide food, shelter and a minimum of cash income for themselves and their households” (UN 1995:114)—a fuzzy definition depending on which notion of “minimum cash income” and “provision” one uses. Moreover, its operative meaning is derived from intentions, e.g., the subsistence workers’ lack of “market orientation,” and deficiencies they experience, such as having no access to formal credit and advanced technology.
3. The social and economic impact of colonialism varied greatly, depending (in part) on the duration of direct colonial control. We may even interpret the present differences in women’s participation in subsistence and cash-crop agriculture as a measure of the extent of colonial appropriation of land. Using the UN-ILO labor

force participation statistics, and remembering the measurement problem concerning subsistence farming, we see that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of the female labor force in agriculture (75 percent); while in Southern Asia it is 55 percent; South-East Asia, 42 percent; and East Asia, 35 percent. By contrast, South and Central America have low women's participation rates in agriculture similar to those found in "developed" regions like Europe between 7 and 10 percent. That is, the participation rates roughly correlate with the duration of formal colonialism in the regions.

4. On the struggles of women farmers in western Cameroon in the 1950s, see also As Margaret Snyder and Mary Tadesse who write: "Women continued to persist in their economic activities during colonial times, despite the formidable odds they faced. One example is the way they mobilized to form corn mill societies in western Cameroun in the 1950s. Over time 200 such societies were formed with a total membership of 18,000. They used grinding mills that were owned in common, fenced their fields, and constructed water storage units and co-operative stores... In other words, 'for generations women established some form of collective actions to increase group productivity, to fill-in socio-economic gaps wherever the colonial administration failed, or to protest policies that deprived them of the resources to provide for their families.' " (Snyder and Tadesse 1995:23).
5. The crisis consists in the fact that if the domestic economy becomes too unproductive, it then fails to reproduce the immigrant worker, but if it becomes too productive, it drives up the costs of labor, as the worker in this case can avoid wage labor.
6. Exemplary here is Caroline Moser, a "World Bank feminist" who executes a very sophisticated analysis of the work of women and whose approach to women is, in her terms, "emancipatory." After presenting a careful analysis of the many theoretical approaches to women's labor (Marxist included), the case studies she examines are two "income generating" projects and a "food for work" scheme (Moser 1993:235-238).
7. However, as soon as the price of sugar on the world market went up, the plantation owner cut the time allotted to the slave for cultivation of their provision grounds.
8. See, e.g., what Michael Chege (1987:250) writes of African wage workers and the land: "...most African laborers maintain a foothold in the country side; the

existence of labor totally alienated from land ownership is yet to happen.” One of the consequences of this “lack of alienation” is that the African worker can rely on a material basis of solidarity (especially the provision of food) from the village whenever s/he decides to strike.

9. The attack waged by the World Bank through Structural Adjustment *falsifies* Meillassoux’s claim that the domestic economy is functional to capitalism, but *verifies* his prediction that a “final” crisis of capitalism looms because of its inability to preserve and control the domestic economy (Meillassoux 1981:141).
10. Witness the dramatic decline in the “real wage” and the increase in the rate of poverty in Nigeria. Once considered a “middle income” country, Nigeria now has 70 percent of its population living on less than one U.S. dollar a day, and 90 percent on less than two U.S. dollars a day (cf., UN Development Program statistics from its website).
11. In Bissau, women planted rice during the rainy season in plots on the peripheries of town. During the dry season more enterprising women try to get access to nearby plots in order to plant irrigated vegetables not only for domestic consumption but for sale (Galli and Funk 1995:20).
12. This report is based on an oral testimony at the Prague “Countersummit” of 2000.
13. Tripp concludes that “...the Kawaala struggle is in many ways a microcosm of some of the changes that are occurring in Uganda” (Tripp 2000:194). Similar struggles have been waged throughout the Third World, where peasant women’s organizations have opposed the development of industrial zones threatening to displace them and their families and contaminate the environment.
14. This attempt was given a boost in 1998 when the mustard seed cooking oil locally produced and distributed was mysteriously found to be adulterated to such a point that forty-one people died after consuming it. The government then banned its production and sale. The National Alliance responded by taking the case to court and calling on producers and consumers not to cooperate with the government’s ban (Shiva 2000:54).

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