THE LABOUR DEBATE

The Labour Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work

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Ana C. Dinerstein
Michael Neary

From Here to Utopia: Finding Inspiration for the Labour Debate

ANA C. DINERSTEIN and MICHAEL NEARY

The Problem of Capitalist Work

The dependence of global society on capitalist work is the unavoidable reality of the modern world. By capitalist work we mean a particular form of labour that is given social and institutional recognition by the reward of the money-wage. This form of labour is based on a peculiar social interdependence in which workers do not consume what they produce, but work to consume what is produced by others in a process enforced and facilitated by the abstract and generalised power of world money (Bonefeld and Holloway, 1996; Clarke, 1988; Marazzi, 1996). It is this basic arrangement that makes the modern world 'modern' or constitutes what is social about modern social relations. In the modern world, capitalist work is not sanctioned by society, but society is sanctioned by capitalist work (Postone, 1993). In other words, capitalist work is the organising principle of all aspects of social life. What we 'do for a living' defines and gives meaning, purpose and direction to individual everyday life and the institutions where people spend their lives, forming the bases for social and cultural integration and interdependence. Questions of identity, consumption, and political affiliation, although important, are secondary issues compared to the importance of capitalist work.

For writers working in the post-modern and post-structuralist intellectual tradition, capitalist work appears to have become less central to human existence. However, the plain and incontrovertible fact is that without capitalist work not only would human life in its current form be unsustainable, but what we refer to as society would not exist in a form that we recognise as being social. And yet, in a world in which human life is defined by capitalist work and in which this peculiar form of human sociability has brought unbounded progress, it also brings social disaster beyond the human imagination. At the collective level this deeply contra-

dictory social environment takes the form of economic and political upheaval; and at the individual level, as various forms of human misery that include the lack of a job (unemployment), the lack of a place to live (homelessness) and a lack of human integration (loneliness).

What all of this generates is a very real sense in which the organising principle of human activity: capitalist work, is beyond collective human control in a situation within which human life must be subordinated to inhuman capitalist logic. As the British Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont, expressed in a famous remark to the House of Commons in 1991, made all the more chilling because of the way in which it connects to the logic of social reality: 'unemployment is a price worth paying' for economic and political stability (*The Observer*, 19.5.91).

Living Death

To be without a job in the contemporary world is a kind of living death, and yet the argument of this book is not that the problem of capitalist work can be alleviated by making more jobs or defending workers' rights to employment. Indeed, to be in work is itself a form of living death. Work is acknowledged as the major cause of stress, boredom, injury, detrimental effects on social and sex-life and in some cases premature death. The real issue is more fundamental: the problem of capitalist work is not the lack of work but the nature or character of capitalist work and the type of society that it produces. The bizarre feature of capitalist work is that human activity is recognised or given real status only in so far as it attracts a wage: money. Money is attributed to social activity not because of any intrinsic aspect of that activity, but only in so far as it contributes to the expansion of value that is represented by quantities of money. Money itself has no intrinsic value, but exists as the representation of a real process of social validation (Neary and Taylor, 1998). As a result there are many important types of work based on real need and of obvious social benefit that do not get done, but also the kind of work that is recognised as work always and everywhere destroys the sociality and environment that attracted it in the first place. In this book, rather than simply accept this situation as 'a price worth paying' for economic and political stability, we want to challenge the politics and economics on which that notion of stability is based. Our point is that the kind of stability generated by capitalist work is, in fact, the

reason for the intensification of a more destructive instability (Dinerstein, 1999).

Where Do We Start?

The overwhelming and unavoidable nature of capitalist work means that there is no Archemedian point or detached perspective from which to generate a sustained critique. There is no outside to the world of capitalist work. Capitalist work has become so generalised – indeed capitalist work – is defined precisely by the fact that it is general, i.e. that what is, in fact, a social and formal convention, appears as if it the basis of the natural world (Marx, *Grundrisse*). And yet what appears to be a problem for critical reflection has not prevented the articulation of antagonism and struggle against capitalist work. The history of the modern world is that critique has been generated internally from within the logic of capitalist work itself. These critiques have sought to either alleviate its brutal logic (reformism) or transform the impossibility of its arrangement (revolution). However, despite the power of this critique to generate progressive social transformation, we appear to have reached a moment when the possibility of critique has itself been overwhelmed.

The most populist among these uncritical interventions include, for example, the concept of the 'Third Way' (Giddens, 1998), the notion of 'the end of history' (Fukayama, 1993) and the 'end of the society of work' (Gorz, 1982, 1999; Offe, 1985; Rifkin, 1995). These examples of anti-critiques have not emerged in a political and economic vacuum, but are part of a process of restructuring that emerged in the most recent world capitalist crisis beginning in the 1970s. This restructuring has involved not only the deregulation or restructuring of the juridic and economic framework that supports capitalist work: money, labour and the state, but also the deconstruction of the intellectual setting in which we used to think about these matters. The results have been further capitalist expansion leading to increasing instability and an intellectual crisis. Indeed, the more capitalist work expands, the more uncritical languages of sociological or economic enquiry become incapable of grasping the nature of such transformations. There seems to be a link between the way in which capital expands at this time and the crisis of social theory, i.e. there is a 'relationship between the politics of contemporary global change and the theoretical uncertainty concerning the meaning and significance of this change' (Bonefeld and Psychopedis, 2000: 1).

Bill Clinton and the Razor's Edge

The nature and extent of this crisis is unavoidable even for those who seek to defend it. Some of the problems generated by the boundless expansion of capitalist work (De Angelis, 1995) are now recognised not only by the critics of capitalist work but by the institutional representatives of capitalism. In the last days of his Presidency, Bill Clinton made his final public speech at Warwick University. Bill said:

> And we begin the new century and a new millennium with half the world's people struggling to survive on less than $2 a day, nearly 1 billion living in chronic hunger. Almost a billion of the world's adults cannot read. Half the children in the poorest countries still are not in school. So, while some of us walk on the cutting edge of the new global economy, still, amazing numbers of people live on the bare razor's edge of survival. And these trends and other troubling ones are likely to be exacerbated by a rapidly-growing population, expected to increase by 50 percent by the middle of this century, with the increase concentrated almost entirely in nations that today, at least, are the least capable of coping with it. So the great question before us is not whether globalization will proceed, but how (Clinton, 14.12.00).

Bill recognises the problem but attributes it to factors beyond human control. For him, this paradoxical global situation, i.e. the triumphs of the new information era and the simultaneous disaster for global society, is a suprasocial process explained by reference to the new grand-narrative of globalisation. It is a very curious intellectual phenomenon that in a deregulated and deconstructed world, in which deterministic meta-narratives have been declared anachronistic, such a meta-discourse, i.e. 'globalisation', has emerged as an inevitable fact of life. In this account 'globalisation' is seen as being as natural as we used to think the climate was, before the climate was shown to be susceptible to human interference. 'Globalisation' is presented as the new omnipotent force of nature. The problem is then how to contain this powerful force and make it work. For Bill, political indifference is no longer an option:

> In a global information age we can no longer have the excuse of ignorance. We can choose not to act, of course, but we can no longer choose not to know…We have seen how abject poverty accelerates turmoil and conflict; how it creates recruits for terrorists and those who incite ethnic and religious hatred; how it fuels a violent rejection of the open economic and social order upon which our future depends. Global poverty is a powder keg, ignitable by our indifference (Clinton, 14.12.00).

Disutopia

In his speech Bill also referred to new forms of politics that have emerged in response to indifference: the 'anti-globalisation protestors' in Seattle, without granting them real significance. However, the struggles that have emerged as new form of political action, exemplified all over the world by the *Zapatistas* (Mexico), Roadblocks (Argentina), anti-capitalist struggles (Seattle, Prague, London, Quebec, Gothenburg), and against the European Monetary Union (Euromarch) are not just a reaction to the limits of globalisation but they are significant in that they call into question the basis of indifference itself (Cleaver, in this book; De Angelis, 1998; Dinerstein, 2001, 1999, in this book; Holloway, 1996; Holloway and Peláez, 1998; Mathers 1999; Mathers and Taylor, 1999; Rikowski 2001).

These struggles call into question the foundations of what we want to call *Disutopia*. *Disutopia* is the most significant project of our time. It is not the temporary absence of Utopia but the celebration of the end of social dreams. Social dreams have become a nightmare in which it is impossible to materialise our desires into a collective thought. *Disutopia* should not be confused with the form in which it appears: indifference. *Disutopia* entails an active process involving simultaneously the struggle to control diversity *and* the acclamation of diversity; the repression of the struggles against *Disutopia* and the celebration of individual self-determination. The result of this is social schizophrenia. In so far as diversity, struggle and contradiction cannot be eliminated by political or philosophical voluntarism, *Disutopia* has to be imposed. The advocates of *Disutopia* spend a huge amount of time in de-construction, repentance, denial, forgetfulness, anti-critique, coupled with academic justifications and the scientific classification of the horrors of our time. Whilst the reality of capitalism is destroying planet earth, *Disutopia* pictures Utopia as a romantic, naïve and old-fashioned imaginary that is accused of not dealing with the real world. However, our point is that *Disutopia* can only be sustained by denying the real content of life, i.e. the foundations of the real world. The result of all this together is mediocrity.

The historical difficulty for these struggles then is how to construct an articulate critique against the post-modern form of capitalist work, when capitalist work is still the defining principle of the organisation of social life. This question has extended outside the factory to include other aspects of human sociability that are expressed as new social movements, social movement unionism and has now taken the new form of anti-globalisation

struggles (Neary, in this book). In order to support the new intensified and coherent form of resistance it is necessary to understand the dynamic behind these processes of struggle. Our starting point will be that while all of the struggles have their own specificities what they all have in common, in different degrees, is the questions they pose about the problem of the increasing centrality of capitalist work in the globalised world.

The recovering of the essential content by means of a critique is an intrinsic aspect of the struggle itself. In order to recover a critique, the purpose of this chapter is to engage in a theoretical and historical analysis of the genesis and development of capitalist work. In this analysis we will enhance, draw out and underline the significance of labour through a reading of some of the most important accounts of contemporary critical political economy (Clarke, Kay and Mott, Meek, Rubin, Wood and Wood). We begin with Thomas More's *Utopia* as this is where the critique of capitalist work begins.

Labour: the Most Important Theoretical and Practical Discovery

Utopia

The Utopian project, which forms the motivation for *The Labour Debate*, is inspired by Thomas More's anti-absolutist dialogue (More, 1965). Our reading of *Utopia* is not as a territorial concept, the word itself means *no place*; but, rather, as a principle of negation or critique. For that reason we have chosen to concentrate on the first section of the book, part one, in which More is engaged in a critique of Tudor society. More's work is in response to a period that is marked by poverty and exploitation leading to generalised social disorder: rent strikes, anti-enclosure riots and industrial disturbances in 'a series of revolts that looked something like class warfare' (Wood and Wood, 1997: 27).

More's work gives expression to the structural transformations of this period, exemplified by the enclosure movement, engrossment, and how the problems associated with these might be resolved. Thomas More is, in fact, writing at the very beginning of the development of capitalist work during the construction of an agrarian capitalist society. But, if the world was new, so too was the way in which he was examining it. In More's writings we find the first attempt to provide an analytical and systematic analysis of the processes of social change in what amounts to the beginning of modern

political theory and political economy (Wood and Wood, 1997: 30). The basis of this systematic account was fundamental changes in the social relations of production (Wood and Wood, 1997: 35). The starting point for More's critique was then a society in the process of radical change as a result of major transformations that were occurring in the nature of productive human activity. The point and purpose for More, as exemplified by his island-society, is the possibility of constructing an alternative future.

The debate as to whether More's *Utopia* is a revolutionary manifesto, a meaningless fiction, or a conservative attempt to maintain the authoritarian and undemocratic Tudor *status quo*, is not of concern to us here. What is important is that, for the first time, labour and labour productivity has become the object of critical enquiry, and that, through this understanding, Thomas More anticipated the debates that were to become central within political economy. Firstly, he acknowledged the significance of labour as the producer of value and as part of a triangular relationship between worker, landlord and tenant:

> …there are a lots of noblemen who live like drones on the labour of other people, in other words, of their tenants, and keep bleeding white by constantly raising their rents (More, 1965: 44).

Secondly, he provided a materialist account for the problems within Tudor society, as well as a range of social policy options. For More, social disruption was a result of unregulated wool production: 'sheep devour men' (idem, ant.: 47) which can only be alleviated by the regulation of agriculture and a restraint on engrossment. Thirdly, he set out the terms of what was to become the most significant debate about the basis of property rights that led, not only to the development of political economy, but was also a central contentious issue in the English Civil War. On the one hand,

> it was evidently quite obvious to a powerful intellect…that the one essential condition for a healthy society was equal distribution of goods – which…is impossible under capitalism. In other words you'll never get a fair distribution of goods, or satisfactory organisation of human life, until you abolish private property altogether (idem, ant.: 66).

On the other hand,

> I don't believe you'd ever have a reasonable standard of living under a communist system. There always tend to be shortages, because nobody will work hard enough. In the absence of a proper motive, everyone would become lazy and rely on everyone else to do the work for him. Then, when things really

> got short, the inevitable result would be a series of murders and riots since nobody would have any legal method of protecting the product of his own labour – especially as there wouldn't be any respect for authority, or I don't see there could be, in a classless society (idem, ant.: 67).

Property was now the battle-ground. Thomas More opened up, but did not develop, the problem of property to a materialist critique of society. In what follows we examine the way in which the problem of labour developed during and after the English Civil War and the process through which the concept of labour became the most important theoretical and practical innovation of the modern, post-feudal world.

Absolute and Relative

The advances made in political economy (…Petty, Smith, Ricardo…) over political philosophy (…Hobbes, Hegel…) were derived out of the realisation that labour was now the basis not only of social order and social regulation, but also, and at the same time, was the justification on which claims for democracy, equality and freedom were made. In the battles over the new society, culminating in England with the Revolutionary War 1642–1647, political theory had sought to take refuge from sedition in the sovereignty of the absolute. This is exemplified in Hobbes' *Leviathan* where the absolute state is legitimised by the need of security; and, in Continental Europe, following the French Revolution (1789), through Hegel's discovery of the *Absolute Idea* materialised as the state and its separation from civil society. However, political economy was driven by real struggles to reconstruct and resist a world in which the absolute was being relativised through the preponderance of generalised commodity exchange. In 'the world turned upside down' (Hill, 1991) property was now king: the absolute was disembodied and dehumanised, transferred from personal authority and its institutions to reside in property itself, i.e. the commodity.

The two most important questions of the time became, firstly, what is the measure of assessment (value) in a non-absolute world, where the medieval concept of 'just price' had been replaced by the impersonal role of the market (Meek, 1979: 14; Rubin 1989: 65); and, secondly, what is the basis on which the rightful ownership and control of property (the commodity), now the substance of political power, is derived. This debate on the relationship between property and labour, progressed through the continuing social upheavals of the period that led eventually into social revolution and the English Civil War.

Critical Political Economy and the Labour Debate

During the English Revolutionary War, it is widely acknowledged that the Levellers, so-called because of their opposition to enclosure and their ambition to level or democratise rather than abolish private property, were among the most radical groups of the period. The Levellers argued that property rights were based on the concept of *self-propriety*: property rights inhere in man by virtue of his 'living and breathing'. This notion was supported by their own self-interested belief that artisans and craftsmen were entitled to the fruits of their own labour (Wood and Wood, 1997: 82). The logical problem implicit in this position was outlined by less radical voices who demanded a more limited form of parliamentary government. This less radical position argued that property was based on constitutional and civil rights developed through historical precedent rather than natural law. In a standpoint that echoed Thomas More in *Utopia*, the less radical critique argued that the Levellers' view provided no logical limit to what one man could claim off another and, therefore, would lead to a situation that could threaten the very basis of the people's democracy that the Levellers claimed to be constructing (Wood and Wood, 1997: 85–87).

This revolutionary Leveller logic was taken on by the Diggers, so called because of their ambitions to dig up the legal and physical restrictions imposed by the new enclosures. The Diggers' radicality was driven by its different constituency: not small artisans but the working people. The Digger position was that there could be no liberty without the destruction of property: liberty and property were incompatible as labour was based on exploitation and domination of one man by another. Labour and its oppositions were, therefore, the basis of conflict, crime and even sin itself. The Diggers argued that as it was the labour of the working people that constituted property, it should be the working people who would abolish it (Wood and Wood, 1997: 87–90). The Diggers' proposal was undermined by the collapse of the revolution into Cromwell's *Commonwealth* and the reactionary Restoration project.

The first systematic account of the significance of labour was presented by John Locke at the end of the seventeenth century. Locke's work was an attempt to justify a political system beyond absolute authority that was based on the nascent social relations of productive improvement and profitability. Locke's system was grounded in the radical formulations of the Levellers and Diggers, but he put them to very different uses. For Locke and the developing new science of political economy, the purpose was not

to overthrow the new society – based on the rule of parliament rather than the king – but to legitimise it, regularise it and to make it work (Wood and Wood, 1997: 115–119). For Locke the rights of labour were not based on common ownership by virtue of *self-propriety*, i.e. 'living and breathing'; but, rather, that labour had an inalienable right to the objects that it produced:

> Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men yet every man has property in his own person. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The Labour of his Body and the Work of his Hands, we may say are properly his (Locke II.27, quoted by Wood and Wood 1997: 124).

The importance of this formulation is that labour now becomes the basis of private property, however, this did not resolve the obvious inequalities and social distress caused by this justification. While Locke argued that property must be put to productive use in such a way that no man must accumulate more than he consumes, nor must he consume so much that he damages the interests of others, he managed to provide a justification for growing social inequality through the way in which he formulated his theory of money and value (Wood and Wood, 1997: 124).

Money, he argued, allowed for vast accumulation without spoilage or wastage as gold money keeps indefinitely. Money provides a motivation for productive improvement which also means that less land can support more people. As a result of the existence of money, people can live without any property at all because they exchange their labour for a wage. Money, in the form of the wage, also gives man the right to property which may be produced by the labour of others (Wood and Wood, 1997: 125). And, what is more, by taking part in this process, men agree to the social consequences which this arrangement of work generated: 'the disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth' (Locke II.50, quoted by Wood and Wood, 1997: 125).

If money provided the rationalisation for the existence of private property, value provided its justification. For Locke labour was not only the source of property, it was also the basis of value: ''tis labour indeed that puts the difference of value on everything' (II.40 idem, ant.: 131). His theory of value is no side issue, indeed, his previous argument depends on it. The main reason to justify private possession over common ownership is that private ownership leads to the rapid improvement of land through the productive employment of labour. The way in which Locke connected labour with improvement and productivity made him the first thinker to

construct a methodical analysis of the basis of emergent capitalist social relations. And, what is more, that value is a product not simply of market exchange relations but a measure created in the process of production (Wood and Wood, 1997: 132).

Although Locke's position was well suited to the developing conditions of agrarian capitalism, his theory of value remained undeveloped. Part of this undevelopment is that, while Locke recognised the significance of the production process in establishing value, he still wanted to maintain the importance of exchange relations in the production of value. However, the importance of exchange in producing value diminished for political economy as the real material conditions deepened. This became recognised in the work of William Petty's (1623–1687) who is widely recognised as 'the father of the labour theory of value' (Kay and Mott, 1982: 87).

For Petty, 'natural price' or value was not the result of the process of circulation, but the result of intrinsic factors within the process of production itself. Petty argued that the magnitude of a products' value depends on the quantity of labour expended in this process (Rubin, 1989: 70). He found the source of value, including the value of money, in the quantity of labour expended on its production. And what is more, value was not the result of individual labour, but labour in general: as a relatively homogenous and undifferentiated commodity. This was not just a technical exposition, but according to Petty, a society effect based on the social division of labour (Meek, 1979: 39).

The point and purpose of political economy at this time was not simply to formulate an economic theory of value, but also, in order to ensure a ready supply of cheap labour, a political justification to maintain a population in poverty and the socio-political institutions to discipline it. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that labouring society, i.e. population, was itself a form of wealth: 'People are…the chiefest, most fundamental and precious commodity' (Petty, quoted by Kay and Mott, 1982: 87). This formulation was epitomised in the work of Bernard Mandeville, who provided the first systematic account of this idea:

> In a Free Nation where slaves are not allow'd of…the surest wealth consists in a multitude of Laborious Poor…without them there could be no enjoyment, and no Product of any Country could be valuable (Mandeville, quoted in Kay and Mott, 1982: 87).

The way to maintain that wealth was to keep the population in a condition of poverty:

> By Society I understand a Body Politic, in which Man is become a Disciplined Creature, that can find his own Ends in Labouring for others, and where under one Head or other Form of Government each Member is rendered Subservient to the Whole (Mandeville, quoted in Meek, 1979: 39–40).

What is important about the above is that, for the first time, value is presented as a mass of congealed or crystallised social effort (Meek, 1979: 41). The significance of this is the link that is being made between the production of commodities and the particular form of interdependence that this is based on, and the social relations which are derived out of it (Meek, 1979: 42). Value is contributed through the medium of the expenditure of labour itself and the organisation of society in that direction; or, value becomes that which is recognised from the point of view of society as a whole. Value is indeed the construction of society in its totality or a particular form of society. But to give an account of the source of value is not to explain how to determine its quantity or measure (Meek, 1979: 44).

The problem of how to measure value-forms the central problematic for Adam Smith's materialist theory of society, which was based on an analysis of labouring activity or 'modes of subsistence': 'the understandings of the greater part of men are formed by their ordinary employment' (Smith, quoted by Clarke, 1991a: 22). For Smith each mode corresponded to a particular division of labour that determined a particular type of society: hunting, pasturage, agricultural and commercial. Each mode represented a progressive process of social differentiation facilitated through the free exchange of the market by which self-interest flourished in an increasingly expansive division of labour (Clarke, 1991a: 25). This virtuous circle was made possible by the proper organisation of that division which not only made for a process of political, intellectual, and moral social progress, but also for increasing prosperity by distributing the revenues among the social classes (Clarke, 1991a: 24).

Smith's great intellectual achievement was the way in which his analysis of distribution allowed him to differentiate between the various interests of society. He did this, not by reference to any natural law or personal status, but in terms of the contribution made by the various interests to the effective operation of the new commercial society (Clarke, 1991a: 31). For Smith there were three classes: Landowners, Wage-Labourers and Capitalists, each of which was defined by a particular factor of production corresponding to particular revenues: rent, wage and profit. The important point for Smith was that it was the sum of these revenues that made up the value of a commodity.

Smith argued that in early forms of society value was the amount of labour embodied in a commodity; but in capitalist society this was no longer the case as the full share of the value did not go to the direct producer. For Smith, in the new society, new rules applied: the value of a commodity was a function of production costs. Each interest contributed to the production of value and was entitled to its share in a collaborative, collective and mutually enforcing process within which the value of labour was not embodied value, but the amount of labour that the price of a commodity could command. The general consensus among critical commentators is that Smith's labour theory of value was confused (Clarke, 1991a: 31; Kay and Mott, 1982: 47; Meek, 1979: 78; Rubin, 1989: 208–216) and that his attempt to measure value ended in failure. For example, his production cost theory is tautological because the relative nature of his equation is not grounded in any determining social matrix. And thus Smith does not overcome the problematic: the basis of just price in a non-absolute world, identified at the beginning of this section .

And yet Smith's work is still of very significant importance. Although his conceptualisation of labour and its relationship to value is confused, his work provides the first basis for a materialist political sociology. The importance of Smith's work is that it concentrates on the social relations of man as part of a society of mankind and not merely as an individual: in the nature of the development of civil society (Meek, 1979: 43): 'It is through his theory of class that Smith opened up the possibility of a systematic social science' (Clarke, 1991a: 33). However, Smith's system ran into problems when his 'classes' began to engage in political activity that could not be resolved by reference to the kind of society (ideal) to which his model alluded (Clarke, 1991a: 39).

Smith's work pointed to a mutually beneficial social system, however, it was undermined by the development of social conflict, which revealed its theoretical weaknesses. The significance of labour, although recognised and then denied through his theory of production costs, was undermined when the power of labour began to reassert itself in struggles for democratic reform and against the Corn Laws, during a period of recession following the end of the French wars and the fear of revolution. What was needed by capitalist self-interest was a theory to ensure continuing accumulation and an equitable and justifiable system of distribution in a process of expanding capitalist production (Clarke, 1991a: 31). Thus the question becomes what was 'the proper organisation of society, the relationship

between classes and its constitutional, political and economic consequences' (Clarke, 1991a: 40; Meek ,1979: 84–85).

A Theory of Social Form

An attempt to provide a more grounded theory of value is found in the work of David Ricardo. Where Ricardo differed from Smith was that the former argued that value was the result of the amount of labour embodied in a commodity, thus rejecting Smith's theory of production costs. Ricardo argued that, rather than value being the accumulation of the costs of the various factors of production, the situation was reversed, i.e. costs, wages and profit (rent was an independent factor based on differential fertility rates of land) were aspects of value itself (Clarke, 1991a: 41–44; Meek, 1979: 97–105; Rubin, 1989: 249–266). Whilst Smith argued against an embodied labour theory of value in favour of a theory of production costs, Ricardo then provides a different solution. For him revenues were not the source of value as they were for Smith, but were component parts of the totality of value that was produced by accumulated labour (machines), and embodied labour. Profit was what was left after the deduction of rent and wages, whereby wages were determined by the amount of value needed to maintain subsistence of the workers (Clarke, 1991a:42). Value was, therefore, both absolute and relative at the same time (Meek, 1979: 110–120).

This formulation began to get to the problem of the relationship between the absolute and the relative measure of value. This connection between the relative and the absolute introduced a very different methodological way of thinking about the social world. Whereas Smith works from observable empirical phenomena, Ricardo was looking behind the obvious processes of social reality to what lay underneath. In this way, Ricardo was concerned with the social content out of which revenues were accrued as apparently independent phenomena. Or in other words, Ricardo was inventing a theory of social form. As we shall see, this caused him some serious problems later on when observable empirical phenomena did not completely match with his theoretical formulations (Meek, 1979: 118; Rubin, 1989: 244). For Ricardo, the fact that there was a discrepancy between the amount paid to labour and the embodied theory of value did not mean that there was a conflict of interest. As a land-owning bourgeois, it was the natural condition of the working class to be subordinated to the capitalist whose profit is reward for the risks they take (Clarke, 1991a: 44–45; Rubin, 1989: 244).

The critique of capitalism based on the moral entitlement of labour had yet to be written. What is obvious. of course, about Ricardo's theory is that it can be used as a basis to show that labour did not get its full entitlement. In a period in which labour was developing a particular movement to claim its just reward, Ricardo's labour theory of value was abandoned by those who aimed to deny labour the fruit of its effort (Clarke 1991a: 48). This retreat from the labour theory of value was enabled by other weaknesses within the work. While Ricardo pointed to the underlying reality of capitalist society, it did not completely accord with empirical reality. For example, it was obvious that value was not produced simply by embodied labour. If this was the situation then the capitalist who employed the most workers and the least machinery would make the most profit (Clarke, 1991a: 47; Rubin, 1989: 255–266). However, this was not the case as profit was based on the amount of capital employed. This forced Ricardo to introduce a number of exceptions to his rule based on amounts of fixed capital used and turnover times (Clarke 1991a: 47–8). While Ricardo did not think these exceptions modified his rule in any significant way, in fact, they created the space for political economy to focus once again on the contribution made to the production of value by fixed capital and other subjective aspects. Thus once again political economy moved back in the relativist direction of a production theory of costs to overcome the contradictions in Ricardo's theory (Clarke, 1991a: 48; Meek, 1979: 121–129; Rubin, 1989: 266).

The Great Evasion

And thus began the great retreat from labour and the advance of bourgeois economics in which the power of labour was denied by an attempt to petrify it into economic categories. This intellectual retreat was a result of the political and economic threat of labour implied by Ricardo's formulations, and not any inherent strength in the new economistic theory:

> If economics is indeed merely a new name for political economy, and if the subject matter which was once covered under the heading of political economy is now covered by economics then economics has replaced political economy. However, if the subject matter of political economy is not the same as that of economics, then the 'replacement' of political economy is actually an omission of a field of knowledge. If economics answers different questions from those raised by political economy, and if the omitted questions refer to the form and the quality of human life within the dominant socio-economic system, then this omission can be called a 'great evasion' (F. Perlman's Introduction 1968 in Rubin, 1990: ix).

But the problem of labour would not go away.

The Avoidance of Labour

The intellectual history of the 20th century is the history of avoidance of labour as a political category and its recreation as a sociological device which denies its critical capacity. As a sociological category, labour has been overwhelmed by the complexities of diverse social movements (Moody, 1997; Touraine, 1974) and sophisticated systems of class stratification (Wright, 1994), shamed by the disgraceful avoidance of gender and disadvantaged minorities (Miles and Phizacklea, 1984); subsumed by the multiple subjectivity and identities of post-modernism and post-structuralism (Bauman 2000; Deleuze and Guattari, 1984; Gorz, 1982, 1999; Laclau and Moffe, 1984; Touraine, 1998); denied its global pretensions by the success of globalisation (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000); recomposed through new forms of state regulation (Jessop, 1990) and abandoned in the search for accountability through the extension of democratic conventions in more civil societies (Held, 1998; Walzer, 1995). Even in the discipline for which labour is the main object of enquiry, i.e. labour studies, labour has 'become nothing other than an intellectually pretentious way of saying work' (Nichols, 1992: 10).

The subject of labour is also problematic within Marxism. While labour is supposed to be the central issue, the problem of what constitutes labour and what labour constitutes is far from being resolved. For the purpose of this exposition we want to argue that contemporary Marxist analyses of labour can be characterised in two particular ways. On the one hand, traditional Marxism regards labour as the unmediated victim of exploitation and, as such, the unproblematic concrete subject of revolution, rhetorically defined as 'Workers of the world unite!' On the other hand, post-modernist Marxism discards the concrete quality of labour in favour of its more abstract potentialities, rhetorically defined as 'labour as desire…the form giving fire' (*Grundrisse*), with neither position giving any ground to the other. For post-modernist Marxism, traditional Marxism is productivist and labourist, and with its narrow focus on workplace relations is unable to comprehend dramatic new forms of social antagonism that occur outside the workplace. The problem with this approach is that it takes Marx too literally, it is too empirical, too real. For traditional Marxism, post-modernist Marxism is more science fiction than social science. The

notion of human emancipation avoids the significance of the concrete forms of exploitation as the central site of class struggle. The problem for the traditionalists is that post-modernist Marxism is too abstract, it is not empirical enough, it is an avoidance of reality (Neary, 1999).

The Labour Debate

The purpose of this book is not to deny either the concrete or abstract quality of labour that characterises the Marxist debate, nor is it an attempt to resolve this dispute. Instead, we want to contravene the concrete–abstract dichotomy by focusing on labour as the expansive relation between its concrete and abstract nature. In other words, to examine labour as a *real abstraction*.

The inspiration for the Labour Debate is derived from four main sources. Firstly, the historical attempt by the working class to gain recognition in and against and beyond its capitalist form of existence. Secondly, the intellectual effort, since Thomas More's *Utopia*, to understand labour as a significant process that produces individuals and society. Thirdly, the attempt by contemporary critical political economy to provide a Marxist critique of political economy. Finally, the debate about labour that emerged since the 1970s out of a materialist critique of capitalist categories (labour, value, money, capital and the state). This debate was encapsulated within the Conference of the Socialist Economists (CSE), the journal *Capital and Class* in England, the journal *Common Sense* in Scotland, and exemplified in the publication of *The State Debate* (Clarke, 1991b), and reflected through the work of, among others, Tronti, Negri and the Autonomist movement in Italy. These inspirations provide the real bases on which to formulate our critical recovery of the Utopian project.

More particularly, our Labour Debate began in 1996 as a series of informal discussions and seminars with colleagues and students within the *Centre for Comparative Labour Studies* (CCLS) and the *Centre for Social Theory*, at Warwick University. These informal discussions culminated in the Conference 'The Labour Debate: the Theory and Reality of Labour in a World of Increasing Unemployment and Poverty', which took place at Warwick in February 1999. The purpose of the conference was to open our debates to a deeper and wider participation. The CCLS embraced the conference as being part of its historical interest in broadening 'the agenda of debate beyond narrow institutionalist understandings of "industrial rela-

tions" and "labour movements" whether they be represented by the dilemmas and challenges facing workers and their organisations beyond the workplace' (Elger, 24.2.99, welcoming remarks to the conference). What follows in this book are chapters which were either given as papers to this conference or have formed part of the ongoing discussions ever since.

In the opening chapter John Holloway and Simon Clarke set the parameters of the debate. Holloway asks the profound question that is central to the labour debate: Who are we? In asking this question he denies the possibility that human sociability is an established fact. The struggle over who and what we are forms the basis for his theory of revolution. Surprisingly, and against all the tenets of orthodox Marxism, he approaches the problem not by affirming the subject of the debate, i.e. the working class, but rather by arguing for its abolition. And, what is more, he claims justification for this apparent heresy in the work of Marx himself. By utilising Marx's theory of commodity fetishism Holloway argues that through *fetishisation*, the process by which the subject is separated from the object of its productive capacity, humanity is transformed from the condition of *creativity* into the *classification* of labour as the working class. This process produces a violent and unresolved tension through which humanity is constituted into competing classes, i.e. labour and capital, who participate in the separation of subject and object and struggle against this imposition. Holloway argues that it is through the struggle against what capital makes us (classification) that a new form of identity, or non-identity against the process of fetishisation, is possible. By identifying the link between the constitution of humanity and the specific form of its existence, Holloway claims to provide both the material basis out of which all forms of social antagonism are derived, and the logic for capitalism's continuing instability. By deconstructing the category of labour to reveal 'doing' as the source of human inspiration, Holloway attempts to reveal the motive power which lies behind all progressive social movements.

Clarke agrees with Holloway that labour is an active subject of the reproduction of capitalist social relations and the actual or potential agent of the transformation of those social relations and even of the transformation of society itself. Clarke also agrees that any democratic socialist politics that does not take the actually existing subjectivity of the working class as its starting point is bound to be self-defeating. Therefore, for Clarke as for Holloway, the working class is not simply a passive object of capitalist exploitation. However, unlike Holloway, for Clarke, the starting point of Marx's work on labour is not creativity but social labour, that is the produc-

tive activity through which society is reproduced. Class conflict emerges from the separation of the labourer from the means of production and her subsistence. This is the presupposition and a constantly repeated result of the reproduction of generalised commodity capitalist production. Class conflict takes on concrete forms depending on the specific nature of the capital labour relation. Clarke argues for a concrete account of labour developed out of a close textual reading of Marx's theories of a specific and more general commodity fetishism. Through the theory of commodity fetishism labour is reduced to the state of an object and forced to exist through a world of things. From this interpretation, the only real movement that can progressively transform society is the self-organisation of the direct producers based on the concrete experience of the working class. At that point for Clarke, the most secure form of conflict is based on trade union organisation around the struggles over the terms and conditions of wage-labour. The role of intellectuals in this process is to supplement the resources of labour through developing a critique of political economy.

In chapter 2, Werner Bonefeld argues that the concept of class is the most important and contested idea in the Marxist tradition. Bonefeld first assesses and then draws out the political implications of existing Marxist approaches to class through the lenses of the Frankfurt School, and, in particular, through the analytical perspective of Adorno's and Horkheimer's work. This assessment shows that orthodox conceptions of class fail theoretically and that their political implications are flawed. The second part of the chapter focuses on the original texts of Marx and shows that Marx's concept of class was a critical and not, as orthodox accounts claim, an affirmative concept. The chapter thus provides a critique of the category 'working class' as a fetishism. This critique is developed through a close reading of Marx's concept of primitive accumulation, which for Bonefeld is permanently reproduced and is, therefore, the defining moment of capitalist class relations. The chapter aims to emphasise human practice, with no hidden attempt to introduce a Marxist ontology. Instead, Bonefeld aims to disavow the bourgeois concepts of humanity and rationality by establishing a critique of fetishism which reveals that the constituted forms of capital relations, e.g. the working class, are, in fact, the forms in and through which human practice exists.

In chapter 3, Graham Taylor explores the material determinants of consciousness and the way that the mediation of social reality through the contradictory form of labour in capitalism has emerged. He argues that this has resulted in the partial and mystificatory forms of consciousness associ-

ated with both Marxist and bourgeois philosophy and everyday 'common sense' conceptualisations of reality. The chapter thus sets out to rethink the relationship between labour and subjectivity and the contradictory nature of consciousness in capitalist society. It begins by elaborating a critique of materialist analyses of the subjectivity and consciousness of labour; highlighting the limitations of both structuralist and orthodox Marxism and the labour process approach. Taylor argues that these approaches are inherently idealist and based on an essentialist ontology of labour and are thus inconsistent with Marx's own approach which stressed the historically contingent nature of abstract consciousness and the social origins of the gap between perception and reality. The work of Marx and later critical Marxists on subjectivity and consciousness is explored further in the following section which elaborates the linkages between labour and subjectivity through an analysis of the way the contradictory and dual determination of labour in capitalism necessarily results in a contradictory and dual natured reality. The final section applies this understanding of labour and subjectivity to an analysis of how we might analyse recent changes in the nature of subjectivity and consciousness that have emerged as part of the neo-liberal restructuring of the capital relation over the past two decades. Taylor argues that effective anti-capitalist social movement politics needs to recognise the material dynamics underpinning the fragmentation of consciousness and action, and build a totality of difference in order to overcome both the post-modern celebration of fragmentation and the spurious universalism of modernism.

In chapter 4, Massimo De Angelis argues that the realm of capitalist work has increased rather than declined. He explains this increase through the notion of abstract labour which he takes from Marx's formulation in *Capital*, vol. 1: 'human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure'. For De Angelis, abstract labour is not just work in factories but includes both wage and unwaged forms. What is distinctive about De Angelis's formulation is that both of these situations are sites of class struggle and that the imposition of capitalist work in the form of abstract labour must take place within a strategic framework. De Angelis develops this notion of a strategic framework through an elaboration of two apparently opposed systems: Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, i.e. 'a closed system clearly limited in space', and the market order conceptualised by Friedrich Hayek defined as that which 'spans over the social field without inherent limit'. De Angelis finds striking similarities between these two systems, which he uses to provide a 'fusion' within which to construct a

framework for the analysis of capitalist work. By means of exploring the complementarities between Hayek's and Bentham's systems, De Angelis constructs a 'fractal panopticon', i.e. a mechanism to extract labour from the entirety of the social field. De Angelis shows how recent trends in the global economy can be thought of in terms of the 'fractal panopticon' and how the 'fractal panopticon' is itself rooted in class struggle. De Angelis concludes with an exploration of the possible subjectivity beyond the confines of the strategic framework that generates abstract labour.

In chapter 5, Harry Cleaver claims that work is still the organising principle in people's lives and the central issue in social conflict. However, he is worried about the category of labour in an era of high rates of unemployment and the intensification of work. Cleaver argues against the orthodox Marxist generic and trans-historical interpretations of labour which attempt to construct a theory of revolution by projecting labour retrospectively back into the past and forward into the future. This categorical affirmation of labour is, according to Cleaver, a violation of Marx's own method as set out clearly in the introduction to the *Grundrisse*. Following Marx's theory of determinate abstraction, labour is not a principle of emancipation; but is, rather, a capitalist category. Labour is the organising principle that capitalists use to impose their command over society. Labour emerges only in capitalism and is, therefore, no basis on which to propose progressive social practices. While Marx's categories are appropriate as a way of understanding the forces ranged against us, they are not adequate in terms of thinking about the future. In order to do that, Cleaver argues that we should recognise exteriority, to develop new languages for new worlds. As an example of thinking exteriority, Cleaver refers to the ecology movements, the *Zapatistas* and the 'Global People's Action' against the World Trade Organisation. In this, Cleaver recognises a move away from new social movement and identity politics of post-modernism into a grassroots power to confront the global power of capital. This moving forward to a direct confrontation with capital leads back to an interest in Marx's work, the only body of theory providing a critique that clearly spells out the nature of capitalist exploitation.

In chapter 6, Michael Neary presents an overview of recent theoretical developments in writing about progressive activities within the labour movement. He does this through an examination of some of the main literature that supports the possibility of an alignment between the labour movement and new social movements, referred to in the literature as social movement unionism (Kelly, 1999; Moody, 1997; Waterman, 1999). Neary

argues that advocates of new social movement unionism, who claim a synthetic appreciation of the possible progressive connections between labour and other social movements, and its more orthodox Marxist critics such as Ellen Meiksins Woods (1998) who are opposed to such a connection, are both disabled by their attachment to a concrete understanding of labour. On the one hand, for advocates of social movement unionism not only is the connection between the labour movement and other social movements under-theorised, but the centrality of labour as a progressive social subject becomes untenable. On the other hand, the orthodox Marxists' dogmatic insistence on the concrete significance of labour undermines the importance of other forms of social antagonism, and is increasingly unconvincing in a world of mass poverty and unemployment. Working from Marx's formulations on the labour theory of value and, in particular, through a recognition of Marx's important, although much ignored formulations about the dual character of labour, Neary argues that labour is not simply a concrete phenomenon, but, rather, exists as a social form derived from the relation between concrete and abstract social processes. Labour, for Neary, is a problem to be addressed rather than the solution to the problems of capitalist society on its own or in connection with other social movements. In this way, Neary is able to maintain the centrality of the concept and reality of labour for Marxist studies while, at the same time, recognise and theorise the significance of other forms of progressive social antagonism that are not detached phenomena to which labour must ally itself, but which are themselves derived out of the imposition of capitalist work. He illustrates this argument by reference to his recent research in South Korea.

In chapter 7, Glenn Rikowski attempts to recover a revolutionary pedagogic practice by revealing the importance of capitalist education and training for recreating the value-form of capital. Based on a critical interpretation of the work of Postone (1993) – and utilising in particular Postone's concept of 'the social universe of capital' – Rikowski provides a theoretical exposition of the significance of the reproduction of labour in the process of capitalist production. Rikowski argues that an essential aspect of this process are the overwhelming educational and training procedures by which labour-power, or, as he calls it, 'human capital in the form of personhood', is constituted. 'Personhood' involves much more than the construction of job-skills: it is, rather, a much wider aggregation of mental and physical capabilities, existing as a unified dehumanising life-force or alienated vitality within the capitalist worker. Rikowski attempts to estab-

lish the theoretical bases for a politics of human resistance that does not foreclose the meaning and substance of what it means to be human. All of this is based on his transformative pedagogy that forms part of a wider project of socialist transformation. This chapter builds on other writing done by Rikowski, including a critical review of recent global anti-capitalist protests (Rikowski, 2001) and work done in conjunction with other radical educators including Paula Allman (2001) and Peter McLaren (2000).

In chapter 8, Ana C. Dinerstein explores Marx's method of determinate abstraction and its ability to grasp the transformation of the subjectivity of labour, by looking at the particular case of unemployment. Her main critical position is to examine unemployment as a form of labour within which human life is apparently overwhelmed by the capitalist process of *real subsumption*. Going beyond the formulation that the state, money and the law are real illusions (*forms*) which mediate the capital relation (Clarke. 1991b; Holloway and Picciotto, [1977] 1991), Dinerstein argues that subjectivity of labour is a transient and contradictory *form* of being, constituted in and through class struggle. Subjectivity does not emerge alongside, against, or as an effect of state action or the imposition of money, but it constitutes the site of conjunction of the concrete and abstract aspects of the capital relation within the subject. By contesting the dominant assumption that unemployment means the lack of work and exclusion from the labour market, Dinerstein argues that unemployment is, rather, a form of labour produced by the intensification and expansion of capitalist work. Whilst the form 'unemployed labour' is defined by the non-participation of the unemployed in the productive process, i.e. the unemployed cannot sell their labour-power, the condition of labour under capital implies also that the unemployed cannot free themselves from their commodified form of existence. This is not an economic fact, defined by a lack of money or job, but a form of political repression experienced as a particular form of life. However, while labour is really subsumed and becomes 'invisible' through its non-participation in the labour process, Dinerstein means to show how the subjectivity of unemployment (the unrealised) is still a barrier for the expansion of capital. In order to make the subjectivity of the unemployed *visible* Dinerstein extends Marx's formula for the reproduction of capital C – M – C/M – C – M′ and its crisis and recomposition in its money form, i.e. M – M′, with her own equation that highlights the critical subjectivity of labour: M – α; β; γ; δ – M′, where α, β, γ and δ portray the contradictory forms of existence (subjectivity) produced within

the process of valorisation of capital. This argument is illustrated with the exposition of the struggles organised by the unemployed, workers and entire communities in Argentina since the 1990s, struggles which take the dramatic and novel form of blocking the roads. She argues that the road-block is produced by the neo-liberal policies of stability and constitutes a new *form* of resistance in and against the virtual disappearance of labour entailed in unemployment and poverty.

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1 What Labour Debate?

1.1 Class and Classification: Against, In and Beyond Labour

JOHN HOLLOWAY[1]

This paper explores a simple question: if fetishism is understood as a process of fetishisation, what are the implications for the concept of class?

Fetishism and Fetishisation

The distinction between fetishism and fetishisation is crucial for a discussion of Marxist theory. It is the difference between seeing the world in terms of domination and seeing it in terms of struggle.

Marx's discussion of fetishism is at the centre of his whole theory. It is at once a criticism of what is wrong with capitalism, a critique of bourgeois thought and a theory of how capitalism reproduces itself. It points at once to the dehumanisation of people, to our own complicity in the reproduction of power, and to the difficulty (or apparent impossibility) of revolution.

The theme of dehumanisation is constantly present in Marx's discussion of fetishism in *Capital* and elsewhere. In capitalism there is an inversion of the relation between people and things, between subject and object. There is an objectification of the subject and a subjectification of the object: things (money, capital, machines) become the subjects of society, people (workers) become the objects. Social relations are not just apparently but really relations between things (between money and the state, between your money and mine), while humans are deprived of their sociality, transformed into 'individuals', the necessary complement of commodity exchange: 'In order that this alienation be reciprocal, it is only necessary for men, by a tacit understanding, to treat each other as private owners, and by implication as independent individuals' (Marx, 1965: 87).

In the long and detailed discussion of conditions in the factory and the process of exploitation, the emphasis is constantly on the inversion of subject and object:

> Every kind of capitalist production, in so far as it is not only a labour-process, but also a process of creating surplus-value, has this in common, that it is not the workman who employs the instruments of labour, but the instruments of labour that employ the workman. But it is only in the factory system that this inversion for the first time acquires technical and palpable reality' (Marx, 1965: 423).

It is not only for the physical misery that it brings, but above all for the inversion of things and people that Marx condemns capitalism: for the fetishisation of social relations in other words.

Inextricably linked with the condemnation of the inversion of subject and object in bourgeois society is the critique of bourgeois theory which takes this inversion for granted, which bases its categories on the fetishised forms of social relations: the state, money, capital, the individual, profit, wages, rent and so on. These categories are derived from the surface of society, the sphere of circulation, in which the subjectivity of the subject as producer is completely out of sight and all that can be seen is the interaction of things and of the individuals who are the bearers of these things. It is here, where social subjectivity is hidden from view, that liberal theory blooms. This sphere of circulation is 'a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham' (Marx, 1965: 176). The whole three volumes of *Capital* are devoted to a critique of political economy, that is, to showing how the conceptions of political economy arise from the fetishised appearances of social relations. Political economy (and bourgeois theory in general) takes for granted the forms in which social relations exist (commodity-form, value-form, money-form, capital-form and so on). In other words, bourgeois theory is blind to the question of form: commodities and money (and so on) are not even thought of as being forms, or modes of existence, of social relations. Bourgeois theory is blind to the transitory nature of the current forms of social relations, takes for granted the basic unchangeability of capitalist social relations.

Bourgeois thought, however, is not just the thought of the bourgeoisie, or of capitalism's active supporters. It refers rather to the forms of thought generated by the fractured relation between doing and done (subject and object) in capitalist society. It is important to see that the critique of bourgeois theory is not just a critique of 'them'. It is also, and perhaps above all,

a critique of 'us', of the bourgeois nature of our own assumptions and categories, or, more concretely, a critique of our own complicity in the reproduction of capitalist power relations. The critique of bourgeois thought is the critique of the separation of subject and object in our own thought.

The fetishism which is so highly elaborated in the work of the political economists and other bourgeois theorists is equally the basis of everyday 'common-sense' conceptions in capitalist society. The assumption of the permanence of capitalism is built into the daily thought and practice of people in this society. The appearance and real existence of social relations as fragmented relations between things conceal both the basic antagonism of those relations and the possibility of changing the world. The concept of fetishism (rather than any theory of 'ideology' or 'hegemony') thus provides the basis for an answer to the age-old question, 'why do people accept the misery, violence and exploitation of capitalism?' By pointing to the way in which people not only accept the miseries of capitalism but also actively participate in its reproduction, the concept of fetishism also underlines the difficulty or apparent impossibility of revolution against capitalism.

Fetishism is the central theoretical problem confronted by any theory of revolution. Revolutionary thought and practice is necessarily anti-fetishistic. Any thought or practice which aims at the emancipation of humanity from the dehumanisation of capitalism is necessarily directed against fetishism.

There are, however, two different ways of understanding fetishism, which we can refer to as 'hard fetishism' on the one hand, and 'fetishisation-as-process', on the other. The former understands fetishism as an established fact, a stable or intensifying feature of capitalist society. The latter understands fetishisation as a continuous struggle, always at issue. The theoretical and political implications of the two approaches are very different.

The more common approach among those who have emphasised the concept of fetishism is the 'hard fetishism' approach. Fetishism is assumed to be an accomplished fact. In a capitalist society, social relations really do exist as relations between things. Relations between subjects really do exist as relations between objects. Although people are, in their species-characteristic, practical creative beings, they exist under capitalism as objects, as dehumanised, as deprived of their subjectivity.

The constitution or genesis of capitalist social relations is here understood as a historical constitution, something that took place in the past. Implicitly, a distinction is made between the origins of capitalism, when capitalist social relations were established through struggle (what Marx refers to as primitive or original accumulation), and the established capitalist mode of production, when capitalist social relations are in place. In the latter phase, fetishism is assumed to be established in a stable condition. In this view, the importance of Marx's insistence on form is simply to show the historicity of capitalist social relations. Within this historicity, within the capitalist mode of production, fetishised social relations can be regarded as basically stable. Thus, for example, the transition from feudalism to capitalism involved a struggle to impose value relations, but it is assumed that, once the transition has been accomplished, value is a stable form of social relations. Value is seen as struggle only in relation to the transitional period; after that it is regarded as simply domination, or as part of the laws which determine the reproduction of capitalist society.[2]

There is a central problem for those who understand fetishism as accomplished fact. If social relations are fetishised, how do we criticise them? The hard understanding of fetishism implies that there is something special about *us*, something that gives us a vantage point above the rest of society. *They* are alienated, fetishised, reified, suffering from false consciousness, *we* are able to see the world from the point of view of the totality, or true consciousness, or superior understanding. Our criticism derives from our special position or experience or intellectual abilities, which allow us to understand how *they* (the masses) are dominated. We are implicitly an intellectual elite, a vanguard of some sort. The only possible way of changing society is through *our* leadership of *them*, through *our* enlightening *them*. If it is taken that social relations *really are* fetishised in this sense (if fetishism is seen as an established fact), then Marxist theory and practice become elitist: we, the enlightened, think and act *on behalf of* the unenlightened. The idea of revolution as the self-emancipation of the workers then becomes nonsensical, as Lenin quite logically pointed out.

The second approach, what we called the 'fetishisation-as-process' approach, maintains that there is nothing special about our criticism of capitalism. As theorists or Marxists, we occupy no privileged position above the throng, but simply have a peculiar way of articulating our participation in the conflict in which all participate. If that is the starting point, however, then there is no way that fetishism can be understood as 'hard fetishism'. If fetishism were an accomplished fact, if capitalism were

characterised by the total objectification of the subject, then there is no way that we could criticise fetishism.

The fact that we criticise points to the contradictory nature of fetishism (and therefore also to the contradictory nature of our selves), and gives evidence of the present existence of anti-fetishism. The point is made by Ernst Bloch:

> Alienation could not even be seen, and condemned of robbing people of their freedom and depriving the world of its soul, if there did not exist some measure of its opposite, of that possible coming-to-oneself, being-with-oneself, against which alienation can be measured (Bloch, 1964: 113). [3]

The concept of alienation, or fetishism, in other words, implies its opposite: not as essential non-alienated 'home' deep in our hearts, but as resistance, refusal, rejection of alienation in our daily practice. It is only on the basis of a concept of anti-alienation or anti-fetishism that we can conceive of alienation or fetishism. If fetishism and anti-fetishism coexist, then it can only be as antagonistic processes. Fetishism is a process of fetishisation, a process of separating subject and object, always in antagonism to the opposing movement of anti-fetishisation, the struggle to reunite subject and object.

Once fetishism is revealed as process of fetishisation, the hardness of all categories dissolves and phenomena which appear as things or established facts (such as commodity, value, money, the state) are revealed as processes. The forms come to life. The categories are opened[4] to reveal that their content is struggle.

Once fetishism is understood as fetishisation, then the genesis of the capitalist forms of social relations is not of purely historical interest. The value-form, money-form, capital-form, state-form etc. are not established once and for all at the origins of capitalism. Rather, they are constantly at issue, constantly questioned as forms of social relations, constantly being established and re-established (or not) through struggle. The forms of social relations are processes of forming social relations. Every time a small child takes sweets from a shop without realising that money has to be given in exchange for them, every time workers refuse to accept that the market dictates that their place of work should be closed or jobs lost, every time that the shopkeepers of São Paolo promote the killing of street children to protect their property, every time that we lock our bicycles, cars or houses – value as a form of relating to one another is at issue, constantly the object

of struggle, constantly in process of being disrupted, re-constituted and disrupted again.

All of those apparently fixed phenomena which we often take for granted (money, state, power: 'they are there, always have been, always will, that's human nature, isn't it?') are now seen to be raging, bloody battlefields. It is rather like taking a harmless speck of dust and looking at it through a microscope to discover that the 'harmlessness' of the speck of dust conceals a whole micro-world in which millions of microscopic organisms live and die in the daily battle for existence. But in the case of money, the invisibility of the battle it conceals has nothing to do with physical size, it is the result rather of the concepts through which we look at it. The banknote we hold in our hand seems a harmless thing, but look at it more closely and we see a whole world of people fighting for survival, some dedicating their lives to the pursuit of money, some (many) desperately trying to get hold of money as a means of surviving another day, some trying to evade money by taking what they want without paying for it or setting up forms of production that do not go through the market and the money-form, some killing for money, many each day dying for lack of money. A bloody battlefield in which the fact that social relations exist in the form of money brings untold misery, disease and death and is always at issue, always contested, always imposed, often with violence. Money is a raging battle of monetisation and anti-monetisation.

Seen from this perspective, money becomes monetisation, value valorisation, commodity commodification, capital capitalisation, power powerisation, state statification, and so on (with ever uglier neologisms). Each process implies its opposite. The monetisation of social relations makes little sense unless it is seen as a constant movement against its opposite, the creation of social relations on a non-monetary basis. Neoliberalism, for example, can be seen as a drive to extend and intensify the monetisation of social relations, a reaction in part to the loosening of that monetisation in the post-war period and its crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. These forms of social relations (commodity, value, money, capital and so on) are interconnected, of course, all forms of the capitalist separation of subject and object, but they are interconnected not as static, accomplished forms, but as forms of living struggle. The existence of forms of social relations, in other words, cannot be separated from their constitution. Their existence is their constitution, a constantly renewed struggle against the forces that subvert them.

Fetishisation and Class

All that I take as a starting point. The question to be addressed here is what implications this understanding of fetishisation as a process has for our understanding of class.

Most discussions of class are based on the assumption that the fetishised forms are pre-constituted. The relation between capital and labour (or between capitalist and working class) is taken to be one of subordination. On this basis, understanding class struggle involves, firstly, defining the working class and, secondly, studying whether and how they struggle.

In this approach, the working class, however defined, is defined on the basis of its subordination to capital: it is because it is subordinated to capital (as wage workers, or as producers of surplus-value) that it is defined as working class. Indeed it is only because the working class is assumed to be pre-subordinated that the question of definition can even be posed. Definition merely adds the locks to a world that is assumed to be closed. Once *defined*, the working class is then *identified* as a particular group of people, who can then be made the *object* of study. For socialists, 'working class' is then treated as a positive concept and working class identity as something to be prized. There is, of course, the problem of what to do with those people who do not fall within the definitions of working class or capitalist class, but this is dealt with by a supplementary definitional discussion on how to define these other people, whether as new petty bourgeoisie, salariat, middle class or whatever. This process of definition or class-ification is the basis of endless discussions about class and non-class movements, class and 'other forms' of struggle, 'alliances' between the working class and other groups, and so on.

All sorts of problems spring from this definitional approach to class. Firstly, there is the question of 'belonging'. Do we who work in the universities 'belong' to the working class? Did Marx and Lenin? Are the rebels of Chiapas part of the working class? Are feminists part of the working class? Are those active in the gay movement part of the working class? In each case, there is a concept of a pre-defined working class to which these people do or do not belong.

A second consequence of defining class is the definition of struggles that follows. From the classification of the people concerned there are derived certain conclusions about the struggles in which they are involved. Those who define the *Zapatista* rebels as being not part of the working class draw from that certain conclusions about the nature and limitations of

the uprising. From the definition of the class position of the participants there follows a definition of their struggles: the definition of class defines the antagonism that the definer perceives or accepts as valid. This leads to a blinkering of the perception of social antagonism. In some cases, for example, the definition of the working class as the urban proletariat directly exploited in factories, combined with evidence of the decreasing proportion of the population who fall within this definition, has led people to the conclusion that class struggle is no longer relevant for understanding social change. In other cases, the definition of the working class and therefore of working class struggle in a certain way has led to an incapacity to relate to the development of new forms of struggle (the student movement, feminism, ecologism and so on).

Defining the working class constitutes them as a 'they'. Even if we say that we are part of the working class, we do so by stepping back from ourselves and by classifying ourselves or the group to which we 'belong' (students, university lecturers and so on). On the basis of this definition, it is possible to pose the question of their class consciousness and to study it. What consciousness do they have of their class position and their class interests? Is this consciousness what it ought to be? Is it a true consciousness or a false or limited (trade union) consciousness? If, as is usually argued, it is a false or limited consciousness, then the conclusion is usually that the revolutionary transformation of society is impossible or that it must be led from outside, by a Party or by intellectuals.

The fundamental problem is that if the working class is defined on the basis of subordination – and there is no other way of defining it – then the theoretical circle is closed: there is no way out except by complementing a fictional objectivity with a fictional subjectivity.

If, on the other hand, we do not start from the assumption of the fetishised character of social relations, if we assume that fetishisation is a process and that existence is inseparable from constitution, then how does this change our vision of class?

The argument in the first part of this paper would suggest that class, like money, like state, like value, has to be understood as a process, as a process of class-ification. Capitalism is the ever renewed generation of class, the ever renewed class-ification of people. Marx makes this point very clearly in his discussion of accumulation in *Capital*:

> Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not on-

> ly surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation: on the one side the capitalist, on the other, the wage-labourer (Marx, 1965: 578).

In other words, the existence of classes and their constitution cannot be separated: to say that classes exist is to say that they are in the process of being constituted.

The constitution of class can be seen as the separation of subject and object. Capitalism is the daily repeated violent separation of the object from the subject, the daily snatching of the object–creation–product from the subject–creator–producer, the daily seizure from the subject not only of her creation but of her act of creation, her creativity, her subjectivity, her humanity. The violence of this separation is not characteristic just of the earliest period of capitalism: it is the core of capitalism. To put it in other words, 'primitive accumulation' is not just a feature of a bygone period, it is central to the existence of capitalism.

The violence with which the separation of subject and object, or the class-ification of humanity, is carried out suggests that 'reproduction' is a misleading word in so far as it conjures up an image of a smoothly repeated process, something that goes around and around, whereas the violence of capitalism suggests that the repetition of the production of capitalist social relations is always very much at issue.

Class and Classification

The understanding of class as classification[5] has implications for all aspects of the discussion of class.

(1) Class struggle is the struggle to class-ify and against being class-ified at the same time as it is, indistinguishably, the struggle between constituted classes.

More orthodox discussions of class struggle tend to assume that classes are pre-constituted, that the subordination of labour to capital is pre-established, and to start from there. In the approach suggested here the conflict does not take place after subordination has been established, after the fetishised forms of social relations have been constituted; rather, it is a conflict about the subordination of social practice, about the fetishisation of social relations. The conflict is the conflict between subordination and insubordination, and it is this which allows us to speak of insubordination (or 'dignity', to borrow the *Zapatistas'* phrase) as a central feature of capitalism. Class struggle does not take place within the constituted forms

of capitalist social relations: rather the constitution of those forms is itself class struggle. This leads to a much richer concept of class struggle in which the whole of social practice is at issue. All social practice is an unceasing antagonism between the subjection of practice to the fetishised, perverted, defining forms of capitalism and the attempt to live against-and-beyond those forms. There can thus be no question of the existence of non-class forms of struggle. Class struggle, then, is the unceasing daily antagonism (whether it be perceived or not) between alienation and dis-alienation, between definition and anti-definition, between fetishisation and de-fetishisation.

We do not struggle *as* working class, we struggle *against* being working class, against being classified. It is the unity of the process of classification (the unity of capital accumulation) that gives unity to our struggle, not our unity as members of a common class. Thus, for example, it is the significance of the *Zapatista* struggle against capitalist classification that gives it importance for class struggle, not the question of whether the indigenous inhabitants of the Lacandon Jungle are or are not members of the working class. There is nothing positive about being members of the working class, about being ordered, commanded, separated from our product and our process of production. Struggle arises not from the fact that we are working class but from the fact that we-are-and-are-not working class, that we exist against-and-beyond being working class, that they try to order and command us but we do not want to be ordered and commanded, that they try to separate us from our product and our producing and our humanity and our selves and we do not want to be separated from all that.

(2) We are/are not working class. To say that class should be understood as classification means that class struggle (the struggle to classify us and our struggle against being classified) is something that runs through us, individually and collectively. Only if we were fully classified could we say without contradiction 'we are working class' (but then class struggle would be impossible).

We take part in class struggle on both sides. We classify ourselves in so far as we produce capital, in so far as we respect money, in so far as we participate, through our practice, our theory, our language (our defining the working class), in the separation of subject and object. We simultaneously struggle against our class-ification in so far as we are human. We exist against-in-and-beyond capital. Humanity is schizoid, volcanic: everyone is torn apart by the class antagonism. We are self-divided, self-alienated. We who struggle for the reunification of subject and object are also we who

produce their separation. Rather than looking to the hero with true class consciousness, a concept of revolution must start from the confusions and contradictions that tear us all apart. There is no pure, revolutionary subject. The linking of the purity of the subject with revolution, very clearly in the case of Lenin's idea of the Party, but also in the case of Negri's 'multitude', is part of the tradition of the left, part of its tendency towards puritanical authoritarianism.

Does this mean that class distinctions can be reduced to a general statement about the schizoid character of humanity? No, because there are clearly differences in the way in which the class antagonism traverses us, differences in the degree to which it is possible for us to repress that antagonism. For those who benefit materially from the process of class-ification (accumulation), it is relatively easy to repress anything which points against or beyond classification, to live within the bounds of fetishism. It is those whose lives are overturned by accumulation (the indigenous of Chiapas, university lecturers, coal miners, nearly everybody) in whom the element of againstness will be much more present. It remains true, however, that nobody exists purely against or against-and-beyond: we all participate in the separation of subject and object, the classification of humans. Notions of class composition, decomposition and recomposition should be understood, therefore, not as the changing position of different groups but as the changing configuration of the antagonism that traverses all of us, the antagonism between fetishisation and anti-fetishisation, between classification and anti-classification.

(3) Is work central to classification? Yes-and-no.

Work is an ambiguous term. It can be understood either as labour (alienated work) or, more broadly, as purposive, creative activity. To avoid the ambiguity, we shall refer to labour as doing rather than to 'work'. Labour is the production of capital and the production of capital is the production of class, classification. The production of capital is at the same time the production of surplus-value, exploitation. If there were no exploitation, there would be no production of class.

However, the statement 'labour is the production of capital' is tautologous and misleading in so far as it assumes the pre-constitution of labour, the prior abstraction of human doing. The argument so far suggests that we cannot understand capitalism simply in terms of the conflict between labour and capital for, to do so, is to start from pre-constituted categories, from an assumed existence-in-abstraction-from-constitution. Exploitation is not just the exploitation of labour but the simultaneous transformation of human

doing into labour, the simultaneous desubjectification of the subject, the dehumanisation of humanity. This does not mean that doing, the subject, humanity exist in some pure sphere waiting to be metamorphosed into their capitalist forms. The capitalist form (labour) is the mode of existence of doing/ subjectivity/ humanity, but that mode of existence is contradictory. To say that doing exists as labour means that it exists also as anti-labour. To say that humanity exists as subordination means that it exists also as insubordination. The production of class is the suppression(-and-reproduction) of insubordination. Exploitation is the suppression(-and-reproduction) of insubordinate doing. The suppression of doing does not just take place in the process of production, as usually understood, but in the whole separating of subject and object that constitutes capitalist society.

Thus: labour produces class, but labour pre-supposes a prior classification. Similarly, production is the sphere of the constitution of class, but the existence of a sphere of production, that is the separation of production from human doing in general also presupposes a prior classification.

The answer, then, to our question about the centrality of work is surely that it is not labour that is central but doing, which exists in-against-and-beyond labour. To start from labour (as in 'labour studies' or 'the labour debate') is to enclose oneself from the beginning within a fetishised world, such that any projection of an alternative world must appear as pure fancy, something brought in from outside.

In–Against–Beyond

Underlying this discussion of class is an attempt to understand the current development of capitalism. Capitalism is in overt crisis in most of the world and in a situation of fragility in the rest, a situation in which the open outbreak of crisis is deferred through the ever-increasing expansion of credit. The crisis of class domination, however, does not correspond in any obvious way to a surge in the strength of the working class. This is a central question for anti-capitalist theory: if the world is a world of class struggle, how is it that when one side (labour) is weakened, the other (capital) is nevertheless in crisis? Elsewhere,[6] Werner Bonefeld and I have suggested that credit expansion brings about a temporal dislocation between the surge of struggle and the manifestation of crisis (as in 1917–1929, 1968–1974, 1999–). The discussion here suggests a second approach: the weakness of

capital is the result not of the strength of labour (as constituted class, as movement), but of the strength of anti-classification, of non-identity.

Capital accumulation is voracious. It requires an ever more complete subordination of humanity, an ever more profound classification of existence. This is surely the significance of Marx's discussion of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall: if exploitation and the dehumanisation which it implies is not intensified, there is crisis. Crisis then is the result not of the strength of the working class or of the labour movement, necessarily, but of the strength of the general resistance to capital's drive for an ever more profound subordination of humanity (dignity, as the *Zapatistas* say).

That in us which exists against-and-beyond capital is not our existence as working class but our struggling against being working class. We are the anti-class, those who are in-against-and-beyond being working class. That is what we need to explore and articulate.

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Notes

1. In writing this, I have had two other papers very much in mind: Richard Gunn's 'Notes on Class' (1987) and Werner Bonefeld's chapter in this book.
2. For examples of this approach, see Bob Jessop (1991); for a critique, Holloway (1991).

3. Adorno makes the same point (1990: 377–378): 'Greyness could not fill us with despair if our minds did not harbour the concept of different colours, scattered traces of which are not absent from the negative whole.' But he immediately gives the point a pessimistic, reactionary twist quite different from Bloch by adding, 'the traces always come from the past and our hopes come from that which was or is doomed.' The different colours do not come from the past: they come from present resistance.
4. This is the core of the approach often referred to as 'Open Marxism': see Bonefeld W *et al.* (1992).
5. Is classification the same as classification in general? I think so, but this is an argument that would take us beyond the bounds of this paper.
6. On this, see Bonefeld W and Holloway J 1995.

1.2 Class Struggle and the Working Class: The Problem of Commodity Fetishism

SIMON CLARKE

As my contribution to The Labour Debate, I would like to disagree with the basic positions put forward by John Holloway, and with the interpretation of Marx on which he bases those positions. The focus of my remarks will be John's interpretation and critique of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.

First, I would like to stress that I agree absolutely with John that we must start from a view of labour as an active subject of the reproduction of capitalist social relations and so as the actual or potential agent of the transformation of those social relations and even of the transformation of the form of society itself or, in simpler terms, that capitalism is based on class conflict.[1] I also agree that any democratic socialist politics that does not take the actually existing subjectivity of the working class as its starting point is bound to be self-defeating. So I agree with John's rejection of a view of the working class as a social grouping which is constituted as the passive object of capitalist exploitation, ignorant of its true interests, lacking a consciousness of its historical role, perhaps even happily integrated into capitalist society.

John's point in drawing this distinction is to develop an argument about the role of the intellectual in late capitalist society, and this is where I disagree most fundamentally with him. John argues that 'we [intellectuals] occupy no privileged position above the throng, but simply have a peculiar way of articulating our participation in the conflict in which all participate'. John rejects the attribution of any special privileges to the intellectual, because he bases his rejection of capitalism not on a critique of capitalist exploitation but on a romantic aspiration to reclaim creativity from capitalist labour. From this perspective the intellectual is just a worker like any other, robbed of his or her creativity in just the same way as is an agricultural worker or an assembly line worker. John refuses the privileges of an

intellectual, but at the same time he abdicates the responsibilities of the intellectual.

The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof

John starts by stressing the pivotal role of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, but then he disagrees quite fundamentally with what Marx actually wrote. Before we look at John's criticism of Marx, let us review Marx's theory of commodity fetishism.

One component of Marx's youthful theory of alienated labour was a romantic critique of commodity production on the grounds of the dehumanising impact of the division of labour and the reduction of human creativity to labour-time. This was the basis on which Marx initially condemned Ricardo's political economy for its 'cynicism', and it is the element of Marx's work on which Marxist romanticism, including that of John, has focused.[2] Marx continued to see labour, in the sense of self-conscious productive activity (John's creativity), as the practice that distinguishes humans from animals, but the starting point of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is not this idea of labour as creativity, but the concept of social labour, the idea that every society is based on some form of social production in which the members of society are not self-sufficient but in which they meet their needs by participating in co-operative labour.

The interdependence of the producers is articulated through the social relations within which the various members of the society produce and distribute their products, but the character of those social relations differs from one society to another. Social relations of production may be organised co-operatively or they may be organised hierarchically, they may be organised self-consciously or with little conscious co-ordination. In fact, Marx distinguished a number of typical modes of production based on typical forms of the social relations of production: two co-operative and self-conscious forms of organisation of production: primitive communism and communism, and four modes of production based on hierarchical production relations: the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist modes of production. In the analysis of a particular mode of production it is essential not only to identify the typical form of the social relations of production, but also to consider the form of the reproduction of the material forces and the social relations of production.

The organisation of social production involves the allocation of the labour of individual members of society to different activities, which is associated with the allocation of a part of the social product to the members of society to enable them to reproduce themselves. The social product may be allocated in accordance with need, or it may be allocated in accordance with social status, or it may be allocated in accordance with the contribution of the individual to production, or a part of it may be appropriated by non-producers. Allocation on the basis of the contribution of the individual to production might take the form of allocation on the basis of the amount of labour-time expended, but different kinds of labour might be judged to make qualitatively different contributions to social production and rewarded accordingly. The allocation might take place through a centralised system of distribution, it might take place on the basis of a decentralised system of reallocation or it might take place on the basis of custom and habit. There are lots of different and perfectly conceivable ways of organising a system of social production. But any society must have some means of allocating social labour and distributing the social product in such a way as to secure the reproduction of its individual members and of the material forces with which and the social relations within which they produce.

In a hypothetical society of petty commodity producers, such as formed the starting point of Adam Smith's model, commodities are exchanged between producers as the products of labour on the principle of the equalisation of the returns to the expenditure of labour-time in different activities, the social presupposition of which is the mobility of labour between occupations and the indifference of the labourer to the content of the labour, presuppositions which, Marx argued, do not in fact pertain in a society of petty commodity producers since they are fully developed only in a mature capitalist society. Nevertheless, on these assumptions, commodities would tend to exchange in proportion to the labour-time expended on their production, so that the labour theory of value is appropriate to the conceptualisation of the quantitative regulation of the social relations of such a form of commodity production.

With the systematic exchange of the products of labour as commodities, one commodity assumes the form of universal equivalent, becoming the money commodity, so that the value of each particular commodity is expressed in its exchange ratio with the money commodity. The division of labour in such a society is then regulated by the exchange of commodities for money through which the expenditure of private labour by each producer is commensurated with the labour time socially necessary for the

production of the commodity in question and social labour is allocated between the production of different commodities in appropriate proportions.

The social character of the labour of the individual is then quantitatively expressed in the exchange ratio between the product of that labour and the money commodity. The participation of the individual in social labour is realised in the actual sale of the commodity for money, which provides the means with which the producer can buy the means of production and subsistence required for his or her social reproduction.

It was this analysis of the social form of commodity production that Marx summed up in his theory of commodity fetishism, according to which 'the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things' (*Capital*, I: 73).

Fetishism and Fetishisation

This is the passage with which John is in disagreement. John says that it appears that Marx 'is describing the social relations of capitalist society as they really are. It appears, in other words, that he is describing the fetishism of social relations as an established fact, as something that is'. I think that John is wrong, both in his characterisation of what Marx is saying and in his disagreement. It is very important to be clear exactly what Marx is saying, and exactly what is his theory of commodity fetishism before we start to apply it, criticise it, develop it or generalise it.

First, Marx is not describing the social relations of capitalist society at all in this passage. At this point in Marx's analysis capital and capitalism do not exist: it is the analysis of commodity production. As we shall see in a moment, the theory of commodity fetishism is applicable in a capitalist society to the relations between capitalist commodity producers, but the working class does not participate in capitalist society as a commodity producer, so that the theory of commodity fetishism has no immediate application to the capitalist class relation.

Second, Marx is not describing all social relations or social relations in general, or social relations in a commodity-producing society, but only the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest. Third, the social relation to which Marx refers is not the relation between

the individuals exchanging those things. In his analysis of the value-form, Marx shows very clearly that the exchange relation is not the relation of barter between two private individual producers that Smith described, it is an asymmetrical relationship in which one commodity appears in the relative form of value, as the product of the private labour of the individual producer, but the other commodity stands in the equivalent form, not as the embodiment of the labour that went into its own production, but as the representative of social labour. Thus the social relation which appears in the form of a relation between things is the relation connecting the labour of one individual *with that of the rest*, it is not the relation between two private individuals, but between one individual and society as a whole. The social character of the exchange relation is immanent even in the elementary form of exchange, but becomes obvious in the sale of commodities for money. That is to say, a particular commodity enters exchange as the product of the private labour of its producer, the money commodity as the embodiment or representative of social labour.

Fourth, it should be obvious by now why these relations cannot be direct social relations between individuals at work. On the one hand, there are no such direct relations because individual commodity producers work quite independently of one another. On the other hand, these are not relations between individuals, but a relation between the individual and society. Thus Marx is quite unambiguously, and quite correctly, saying exactly what he appears to be saying, that these relations *really are* 'material relations between persons and social relations between things', the form of which he has just expounded at considerable length. Thus, what Marx shows is that the relationship between one individual producer and all other producers *only exists in the form of* material relations between persons and social relations between things. This is their only reality, it is *only* through the purchase and sale of the products of labour as commodities that the concrete labours of individuals are brought into relation with one another as component parts of the labour of society. The fetishism of social relations becomes an established fact when one commodity is detached from all the others to serve as the universal equivalent.

Capital and the Proletariat: The Only Really Revolutionary Class?

Commodity fetishism, as the theory has been developed so far, pertains to the relations between commodity producers. To understand the social

relations of capitalist production we have to move beyond the analysis of the commodity-form. 'The real science of modern economy only begins when the theoretical analysis passes from the process of circulation to the process of production' (*Capital*, III: 447).

The presupposition of the capitalist mode of production is, on the one hand, the development of generalised commodity production, which makes available the means of production and subsistence as commodities, and, on the other hand, the separation of the labourer from the means of production and subsistence.

The separation of the labourer from the means of production and subsistence, which is the basis of the class relation between capital and the working class, is both the historical presupposition and the constantly repeated result of the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, as the capitalist emerges from the circuit of capital with a larger capital, while the worker emerges with nothing but his or her labour-power. At the same time, the expanded reproduction of capital leads capital continuously to destroy the livelihoods of petty commodity and subsistence producers on a world scale. In seeking out new markets, capital first lures subsistence producers into the embrace of the market and then undermines their livelihoods as petty commodity producers by undercutting their prices. Where land and natural resources have not come under capitalist control, they still use the traditional means of enticement, force and fraud to dispossess the direct producers, so that, as Werner Bonefeld forcefully reminds us in his chapter in this book, the violence of capital lies not only in its origins, but is repeated in various forms at every stage of its expanded reproduction.

The productive forces unleashed by capital are incomparable in scale with those commanded by petty and subsistence producers, so that even a small capital employing a small number of wage-labourers can displace a vastly disproportionate number of petty producers. The same is true of the dispossession of backward by more advanced capitalists. This phenomenon was expressed by Marx in his 'absolute general law of capitalist accumulation', that the more rapid the growth of capital, the more rapid the growth of the relative surplus population and the pauperisation of a growing mass of the world's population. Thus, while capital increases the productive power of labour to an unprecedented degree and constitutes the mass of the world's population as potential labour-power for capitalist exploitation, it actually employs only a proportion of those whose labour-power it sets free. The intensification of labour and the relative sophistication of the means of production mean that only some of the dispossessed can meet the

requirements of capitalist production: the young, the old, the infirm, the insubordinate, those with inadequate or inappropriate skills have little hope of selling their labour-power to capital at any price. Others, such as those celebrated by John, may refuse to pay the price of subordination to capital and scratch a living by some other means. Nevertheless, all of the dispossessed are potential wage-labourers for capital, and in that sense are members of the working class whose existence presupposes and is presupposed by its opposition to capital.

The concrete forms in which that opposition is or is not translated into class conflict are, of course, dependent on the concrete forms of the relationships established between labour and capital in the course of the expanded reproduction of the capital relation. In this respect we can introduce an immediate distinction between those members of the working class who enter into a relationship with a particular capitalist by selling their labour-power and those who do not. It is clear that, even if in the most abstract sense the two have a common interest as members of the working class, the concrete forms of their perception and the modalities of their opposition to capital, will differ.

Frustration with the limitations of the organised labour movement, which has always had its roots in the organisation of those relatively privileged members of the working class who are able to sell their labour-power to capital, has frequently led socialists to look to relatively more marginalised groups and strata, particularly the unemployed but also peasants and petty commodity producers, young people, ethnic and national minorities, as the source and/or political base of a more radical opposition to capital. However, the repeated experience of attempts to harness such forces, including those of the 1960s and 1970s, has shown that such forms of opposition remain fragmented, isolated and ephemeral unless they are integrated into a broader labour movement, the only secure base of which has proved to be the trade union organisation that develops out of the struggle over the terms and conditions of wage-labour, which cannot by any means be reduced to organisation on the basis of the sectional interests of particular groups of wage-labourers. This was the lesson that Marx drew from the defeats following the revolutions of 1848 and the lesson that many people drew from the defeats following the 'revolutions' of 1968. At the same time, the organised labour movement has also repeatedly learned through bitter experience the dangers of exclusivity so that since the 1980s the priority has been to broaden the base and advance the unity of organ-

ised labour on a national and international scale. Thus the situation today is very different on both sides from that of the 1960s and 1970s.

The limitations of the organised labour movement were explained in the 1960s and 1970s in terms of various theories of false consciousness, according to which the organised working class failed to understand its truly revolutionary interests either because of its relatively privileged position, or because of its absorption by bourgeois ideology on the basis of the mystification of the wage form. This could lead socialists to the quasi-Leninist position, that John condemns, according to which the task of the intellectual is to bring leadership and enlightenment to the organised working class, or it could lead to the position to which John seems to have returned of proclaiming the revolutionary role of marginal strata, although John rejects any 'structural' definition of such strata, the opposition being identified on the basis of its subjectivity: the force of non-identity, which can unite the unemployed, the peasant of Chiapas, the intellectual and even the trade unionist in a romantic rejection of capitalism. But all of this is based on the idea that the workers who are at the base of the organised labour movement are the victims of fetishism or at least, in John's ameliorated form, fetishisation. John does not reject the theory of false consciousness, what he rejects is the quasi-Leninist idea that people cannot overcome false consciousness by their own efforts, on the basis of a recovery of their subjectivity and their creativity. So let us return to the theory of fetishism.

The Fetishism of Capital: Are Workers Victims of Fetishism?

On the basis of the capitalist class relation, capitalists purchase labour-power as a commodity. Thus the relation between capitalist and worker at this point in the circuit of capital assumes the form of the purchase and sale of a commodity. However, this is not a relationship in which 'the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear…as… material relations between persons and social relations between things'. The social relation between workers as potential wage-labourers, and between wage-labourers and capitalists, is not a relation between commodity producers, because labour-power is not produced as a commodity. The labour of one individual is connected with that of the rest in a completely different form.

There is no confrontation of the private labour of the individual with social labour in the form of money. The wage is a sum of money which is paid to the worker by the capitalist in exchange for the power of command over the labour-power of the worker for a particular amount of time.[3] Thus the money paid as a wage is not money in the form of the universal equivalent, but money as the means of purchase, on the one side as means of purchase of labour-power, as a part of money capital, and on the other to provide the means of purchase of the worker's means of subsistence.

This does not mean that the wage relation is transparent. Marx discusses at some length the illusion of the 'wage form', which is the representation of the wage not as the payment for command over the worker's labour-power but as payment for that labour itself, an illusion that led political economy into confusion because it led to labour apparently having two values, one corresponding to the wage and the other corresponding to the labour expended by the worker. This illusion Marx himself only dispelled for the first time in the *Grundrisse* by making the distinction between the concepts of labour and labour-power: 'What economists therefore call value of labour, is in fact the value of labour-power, as it exists in the personality of the labourer, which is as different from its function, labour, as a machine is from the work it performs' (*Capital*, I: 771). The idea that the wage represents the value of labour is absurd, since labour is itself the source of value, but such 'imaginary expressions, arise, however, from the relations of production themselves. They are categories for the phenomenal forms of essential relations. That in their appearance things often represent themselves in inverted form is pretty well known in every science except Political Economy' (*Capital*, I: 769). The appearance that is expressed in the wage form arises from the fact that the wage paid really does correspond to the amount of time that the worker is at the disposal of the employer, and the fact that the wage is normally only paid after the labour has been performed. The illusion is compounded by the use of piece-rate payment systems, where the wage is represented as a share in the product. Nevertheless, 'that which comes directly face to face with the possessor of money on the market, is in fact not labour, but the labourer. What the latter sells is his labour-power' (*Capital*, I: 769).

Although we are no longer dealing with the fetishism of commodity production, the fetishism of the commodity is a special case of a more general theory of fetishism, according to which the social qualities acquired by things are attributed to their physical characteristics – the 'fetishism peculiar to bourgeois Political Economy, the fetishism which metamorpho-

ses the social, economic character impressed on things in the process of social production into a natural character stemming from the material nature of those things' (*Capital*, II: 303). In the case of the fetishism of the commodity, it really is the case that social relations between people are constituted by relations between things. The fetishism consists in believing that this power is inherent in the things themselves, rather than being impressed on those things by the character of the social relations of production. The mystification of the wage form, however, is a pure mystification: the reality is that the capitalist pays the worker for the command of his or her labour time, the idea that this is a payment for the worker's labour is a pure mystification.

The wage is a social phenomenon, in that the wage only exists as the content of the social relation under which the labourer is employed by the capitalist as wage-labour, which is a social relation specific to a particular mode of production, yet in the wage form the wage is attributed to the physical productivity of labour. Marx goes further than this, and characterises the illusions of the wage form, like the fetishism of commodities, in terms of a contrast between the phenomenal form and the essential relation that has to be uncovered by science:

> For the rest, in respect to the phenomenal form, 'value and price of labour,' or 'wages,' as contrasted with the essential relation manifested therein, viz., the value and price of labour-power, the same difference holds that holds in respect to all phenomena and their hidden substratum. The former appear directly and spontaneously as current modes of thought; the latter must first be discovered by science. Classical Political Economy nearly touches the true relation of things, without, however, consciously formulating it. This it cannot, so long as it sticks in its bourgeois skin (*Capital*, I: 776).

But to what extent are we dealing here with a 'phenomenal form' and an 'essential relation' that is its 'hidden substratum'? The wage might well appear spontaneously to the capitalist as a payment for labour: this is how it is represented in his accounts, it is what he actually had to pay for the labour that he used, and it certainly serves his ideological purposes to represent the labour that he has used as being fully paid for. But is that how it appears to the worker? Marx did not seem to think so. In the imaginary dialogue between capitalist and worker in which the two sides debate their rights as commodity owners in relation to the length of the working day, the worker is very clear as to the true character of the wage relation. As Marx has the worker say to the capitalist, 'the commodity that I have sold to you differs from the crowd of other commodities, in that its use creates

value, and a value greater than its own. That is why you bought it. That which on your side appears a spontaneous expansion of capital, is on mine extra expenditure of labour-power' (*Capital*, I: 336–7). The essential relation may be hidden from political economy and even from the capitalist, but it is by no means hidden from the worker.

This is not to say that the worker necessarily perceives the wage relation in its true colours. The worker may perfectly well be deceived, not least by the propaganda of his employer, into believing that he or she has participated in an equal exchange and has been fully remunerated for his or her labour, particularly if the wage relation is conceived not in relation to the production of surplus-value under the domination of the capitalist, but in relation to the exchange of commodities between free and equal citizens. Thus

> this phenomenal form, which makes the actual relation invisible, and, indeed, shows the direct opposite of that relation, forms the basis of all the juridical notions of both labourer and capitalist, of all the mystifications of the capitalistic mode of production, of all its illusions as to liberty, of all the apologetic shifts of the vulgar economists (*Capital*, I: 774).[4]

The illusion of the wage form is the illusion that the labourer has been paid in full for her contribution to production. This immediately implies that the remainder of the product must be due to something else. For the Physiocrats it derived from the fertility of the soil, for Adam Smith from the enhanced productivity due to the greater division of labour, but for vulgar economy from Say to today it is due to capital, and particularly to the productivity of the means of production. This is an illusion that arises out of the social form of the capitalist labour process.

When it comes to the labour process too, however, it is not clear whether things appear the same to the worker and to the capitalist. On the one hand, the worker knows full well that she is the active agent of production, that the productivity and profitability of the production process depends on the intensity and duration of her labour. Nor does the capitalist neglect to remind her of the fact, leading to the struggle over the length of the working day and over the intensity and conditions of labour that Marx chronicles at length in Volume I of *Capital*. From this perspective, there is no fetishism and no mystery: the theory of surplus-value is not a metaphysical theory of a different, even an unobservable, order of reality, but no more than the systematic expression of the experience of the workers that the capitalist appropriates the full product of their labour and that the

amount of surplus-value that is appropriated by the capitalist is determined by the extent to which he can intensify the labour and extend the working day of his employees. In that sense, the theory of surplus-value as the difference between the length of the working day and the working time necessary to produce commodities equivalent in value to the wage is the theory of value appropriate to social production on the basis of capital.

On the other hand, Marx notes that in the capitalist form of production the powers of social labour appear to be the powers of capital. The increases of productivity achieved by the factory system are a result of the economies of scale, the greater division of labour and the application of science that is possible when a large number of workers are brought together to work co-operatively. However, co-operation on a large scale was not the result of the collective organisation of the workers, but of the purchase of their labour-power by the capitalist, so that the powers of collective labour appear to be the power of capital:

> Their union into one single productive body and the establishment of a connection between their individual functions, are matters foreign and external to them, are not their own act, but the act of the capital that brings and keeps them together. Hence the connection existing between their various labours appears to them, ideally, in the shape of a preconceived plan of the capitalist, and practically in the shape of the authority of the same capitalist, in the shape of the powerful will of another, who subjects their activity to his aims.…On entering that process, they become incorporated with capital. As co-operators, as members of a working organism, they are but special modes of existence of capital. Hence, the productive power developed by the labourer when working in co-operation, is the productive power of capital. This power is developed gratuitously, whenever the workmen are placed under given conditions, and it is capital that places them under such conditions. Because this power costs capital nothing, and because, on the other hand, the labourer himself does not develop it before his labour belongs to capital, it appears as a power with which capital is endowed by Nature – a productive power that is immanent in capital (*Capital*, I: 476, 478).

In exactly the same way, the increase in the productivity of labour that is made possible by the application of machinery appears to be a product of the power of capital.

It is this increase in the productivity of labour that is apparently made possible only by the power of capital that serves as the basis for the fetishism of capital, according to which profit is not seen as the product of the surplus labour time of the assembled wage-labourers, but corresponds in some way to the productivity of capital. This illusion is compounded by the

fact that, when it comes to the realisation of the surplus-value produced, commodities are sold not as the products of labour, but as the products of capital, and so not on the basis of the equalisation of labour-time but on the basis of the equalisation of the rate of profit. This transformation of values into prices of production means that wages and profits appear to comprise independent parts of the selling price of the commodity: wages appear as the payment for the labour employed, alongside all the other costs of production, profit appears as a percentage return on the capital laid out.

The ultimately fetishistic form of capital is that of money capital, in which no social relations at all intervene in the expansion of capital:

> The relations of capital assume their most externalised and most fetish-like form in interest-bearing capital. We have here M – M′, money creating more money, self-expanding value, without the process that effectuates these two extremes. In merchant's capital, M – C – M′, there is at least the general form of the capitalistic movement, although it confines itself solely to the sphere of circulation, so that profit appears merely as profit derived from alienation; but it is at least seen to be the product of a social *relation,* not the product of a mere *thing* (*Capital*, III: 520).

The fetishistic illusion is summed up in the 'trinity formula', discussed at the end of Volume III of *Capital*. The illusion of the trinity formula is based on the identification of the three physical factors of production, labour, land and means of production, whose co-operation is necessary to produce in any society, as the sources of the three revenues, wages, rent and profit. The illusion of the trinity formula corresponds to the practical consciousness of the capitalist, but it does not arise spontaneously. It had to be elaborated theoretically by political economy, its most developed form being that expressed in John Stuart Mill's radical separation of production relations, which are the co-operative relations between the factors of production, and distribution relations, which are the historically specific forms within which the shares in the product attributed to the particular factors of production accrue to the owners of those factors.

This illusion corresponds to the practical apprehension of the capitalist, and to the transformed forms in which capitalist social relations appear as a result of the realisation of commodities as the products of capital on the basis of the equalisation of the rate of profit. From this point of view it really is the case that wages correspond to the quantity of labour that the capitalist has employed, rent is related to the amount and fertility of the land, and the realised profit is assessed in relation to the normal rate of

return on capital. It is also clearly an illusion that corresponds to the capitalist's ideological interests.

Marx criticises this account as irrational, in deriving social phenomena characteristic only of one particular form of society from universal, natural categories, and presents his own alternative theory based on his analysis of the social form of capitalist production, within which alone social production is organised on the basis of capital and the social product is distributed in the form of wages, rent and profit. Within the capitalist social form of production, the worker sells his or her labour-power to the capitalist, who sets that labour-power to work with his means of production and then appropriates the entire product, the increased value that has resulted from the extension of the working day beyond the time socially necessary to produce commodities equivalent to the labourers' means of subsistence constituting the surplus-value, which is then distributed among the capitalist class in the form of profit, rent and interest.

As we have seen, Marx presents his account as the essential relation, that he contrasts with the phenomenal form in which the essential relation is misrepresented in the consciousness of the capitalist. But once again we must ask, what about the workers? Does capital present itself to the workers' spontaneous consciousness in the same way as to that of the capitalist? Or does it present itself to the workers in a form corresponding to the essential relation?

We can turn this question the other way around and ask, how does Marx discover the essential relation? How does he know what is the social form of capitalist production? As soon as we pose the question this way around the answer is obvious. Marx discovers the essential relation by viewing the capitalist mode of production from the perspective of the experience of the worker. The worker knows full well that she is selling her labour-power and knows full well that the more the capitalist can intensify labour and extend the working day, the greater will be his profit. This is not by any means to say that the capitalist mode of production is transparent to the worker, it is only to say that the characterisation of the social form of capitalist production, on the basis of which Marx was able to build his analysis of the capitalist mode of production, is based on and validated by the experience of workers, selling their labour-power to capitalists and labouring, however reluctantly and recalcitrantly, under the direction of the capitalist.

We have seen that there are two dimensions to Marx's theory of fetishism. On the one hand, Marx's theory of the social form of commodity

production in which social relations between people in the 'social division of labour' only exist in the form of relations between things, so that social production is dominated by forces beyond human control. On the other hand, the more general theory of fetishism, according to which social relations are misperceived and social powers attributed to things. The first aspect is a theory of social forms, the second is a theory about the perception of social forms. The problem with John's account is that he reduces the theory of social forms to a theory of perception.

The theory of commodity fetishism is a theory of the form of existence of the social relations of the capitalist production of commodities. The fact that social relations have this form is quite independent of our apprehension of those relations:

> The recent scientific discovery, that the products of labour, so far as they are values, are but material expressions of the human labour spent in their production, marks, indeed, an epoch in the history of the development of the human race, but, by no means, dissipates the mist through which the social character of labour appears to us to be an objective character of the products themselves. The fact, that in the particular form of production with which we are dealing, viz., the production of commodities, the specific social character of private labour carried on independently, consists in the equality of every kind of that labour, by virtue of its being human labour, which character, therefore, assumes in the product the form of value – this fact appears to the producers, notwithstanding the discovery above referred to, to be just as real and final, as the fact, that, after the discovery by science of the component gases of air, the atmosphere itself remained unaltered.…The determination of the magnitude of value by labour-time is therefore a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in the relative values of commodities. Its discovery, while removing all appearance of mere accidentality from the determination of the magnitude of the values of products, yet in no way alters the mode in which that determination takes place (*Capital*, I: 107–109).[5]

While it is true that we can fight against the fetishisation of social relations, in the sense of their perception as natural, eternal and unchangeable, it is not true that merely to perceive the social forms of capitalist commodity production differently will change them in any way, which is perhaps why John is led by his critique to rejection rather than transformation. But the point is not merely to understand the world, the point is to change it, and what Marx's theory of commodity fetishism showed was that the only force that could change the world was the self-organisation of the direct producers who would abolish the production of commodities based on capital and bring social production under conscious social control. We do

not have to go so far as Bernstein, who argued that the movement is everything, the ultimate aim is nothing, but without the movement the ultimate aim is just so much hot air.

Elitism and Spontaneity

Marx's critique of political economy is a critique of a theory elaborated on the basis of the practical consciousness of the capitalist from the perspective of a theory elaborated on the basis of the everyday experience of the working class. But although these theories are elaborated on the basis of two distinct class perspectives, the critique of political economy cannot be reduced to a class struggle in theory. The elaboration of the two theories is not simply a matter of the articulation of spontaneous consciousness: both required a great deal of intellectual labour to develop them to the highest possible degree of consistency and coherence. Marx does not criticise political economy from the basis of a particular class position, but on the ground of reason and reality: the theories of political economy are irrational, their concepts do not correspond to anything in reality. On any normally accepted canons of scientific practice, Marx is right and political economy is wrong.

John is concerned that if we adopt Marx's theory of fetishism then a distinction is immediately established between the consciousness of the agents of commodity production and the intellectuals who 'are able to penetrate the fetishised appearances and understand their reified relations as the historically specific form or mode of existence of relations between people'. This indeed is precisely both the purpose and the import of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, although he applied his critique not so much to the spontaneous consciousness of the agents of commodity production as to the theoretical elaboration of such a spontaneous consciousness in the form of vulgar economy and political economy. It is hardly necessary to quote the famous footnote to Chapter 1 of Volume I of *Capital*: 'It is one of the chief failings of classical economy that it has never succeeded, by means of its analysis of commodities, and, in particular, of their value, in discovering that form under which value becomes exchange-value' (p. 116). This failure of classical political economy was not a wilful deception: it was because the form of value is not immediately obvious, because its discovery requires a considerable amount of intellectual labour, and because an idealist conception of value as being a universal property of

the products of labour is a barrier to identifying the historically specific character of the commodity-form. Marx himself had spent over twenty years, on and off, breaking his head over it before the version that was published in *Capital*. So his claim to have a better understanding of the value-form than did political economy, to say nothing of the vulgar apologists for capitalism, has some foundation.

The whole point and the whole purpose of Marx's critique of political economy was to penetrate the misconceptions, the false consciousness even, that are fostered by the illusions that can arise on the basis of immediate reflection on the forms of appearance of commodity relations:

> If, as the reader will have realised to his great dismay, the analysis of the actual intrinsic relations of the capitalist process of production is a very complicated matter and very extensive; if it is a work of science to resolve the visible, merely external movement into the true intrinsic movement, it is self-evident that conceptions which arise about the laws of production in the minds of agents of capitalist production and circulation will diverge drastically from these real laws and will merely be the conscious expression of the visible movements. The conceptions of the merchant, stockbroker, and banker, are necessarily quite distorted. Those of the manufacturers are vitiated by the acts of circulation to which their capital is subject, and by the levelling of the general rate of profit (*Capital*, III: 414).

> Vulgar economy actually does no more than interpret, systematise and defend in doctrinaire fashion the conceptions of the agents of bourgeois production who are entrapped in bourgeois production relations. It should not astonish us, then, that vulgar economy feels particularly at home in the estranged outward appearances of economic relations in which these *prima facie* absurd and perfect contradictions appear and that these relations seem the more self-evident the more their internal relationships are concealed from it, although they are understandable to the popular mind. But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided (*Capital*, III: 1094–1095).

It is not the fact that 'we' are intellectuals that gives us some privileged understanding of the social relations of a capitalist commodity producing society. After all, the vulgarisers, the systematisers of the deceptive appearances of capitalist social relations, the dissemblers of contradiction and inconsistency, the apologists of the capitalist system, are intellectuals: the social position and social role of the 'intellectual' in this sense, as opposed to the scientist, is precisely to articulate the bourgeoisie's own world view. It is the fact that we, whatever our social origin or social function, adopt a

scientific view of the world and engage in arduous and rigorous intellectual work that enables us to develop a more adequate understanding.

Marx was not necessarily distinguished from the best of political economists in his dedication to intellectual work or his commitment to the values and procedures of science. I have argued that Marx was able to develop a more adequate theory of the capitalist mode of production because he took as his starting point the experience of the working class. This is why Marx's work was able to speak to the experience of the working class, why Marxism, in one form or another, became the theory of the international working class movement, why workers could read and understand and apply the analysis of *Capital*, while bourgeois intellectuals could barely get beyond the first page.

Workers do not need intellectuals to come and tell them where their interests lie. Workers have to combat capitalist exploitation and capitalist domination every day. But while the immediate object of the struggle of those in employment is the employer, the social form of commodity production means that it is not immediately apparent to workers who or what is their ultimate enemy and how they can most effectively channel their opposition to capital, and even more is this the case for those who do not have a job and so stand, at least temporarily, outside the capitalist system. Intellectuals have the training and the resources that enable them to penetrate the mysteries of the fetishism of the commodity, to produce knowledge of the workings of the capitalist system and so to inform the practice and programmes of the labour movement, whether this be in developing spontaneous local struggles or in confronting capital with a working class alternative on a global scale. If we happen to have well-paid jobs as intellectuals, then surely we have not only the ability but also the responsibility to put our skills and resources at the disposal of those who do not have such privileges, as Marx and Engels did when a group of German workers they met in a Brussels pub asked them to draft a *Communist Manifesto*, or when the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party asked them to comment on its party programmes. But why did these workers ask a couple of dishevelled intellectuals to write or amend their party programmes? Because the workers knew perfectly well that they were being exploited, but because they also knew that they did not have a thorough understanding of how they were being exploited or what they could do about it. There was nothing elitist or undemocratic about this. Having asked Marx and Engels for their views, the workers were by no means obliged to take any notice of them.

The problem of labour today is not a problem of a lack of consciousness or the lack of a desire to change the world. The problem is how to change a world which is, to a greater degree than ever before, driven by anonymous forces, dominated by the movement of money as the alienated form through which alone 'the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear'. This is a problem that confronts the millions of people without work and without any hope of work; that confronts those driven to work for wages that do not even cover their subsistence in conditions that threaten their health and life; that confronts those who may be well-paid but whose work is increasingly insecure and subject to the ever-greater intensification of labour. It is a problem that is being posed within the labour movement which, for all its faults, is the only collective expression of the interests and aspirations of labour, in hundreds of different ways, at every level and in every part of the world. In this situation progressive intellectuals have a responsibility to supplement the intellectual resources of the labour movement, to help to broaden its understanding and its horizons, to analyse the movements of capital, to contribute to the critique of the modern forms of vulgar economy, to find and learn from new ways of organising and new forms of struggle so that the labour movement can begin to reverse the setbacks and defeats of the last twenty years. It is only when the subordination of labour to the production and appropriation of surplus-value has been abolished that the potential to minimise the burden of labour that has been created by the capitalist development of the forces of production can be realised. It is only when the labourers have recovered their free time from capital that they will be transformed into a different subject, free to discover the creative powers of their labour, which in all previous societies has been the privilege of a few, whose own freedom rested on the forcible appropriation of the products of the labour of others.

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Notes

1. I leave aside the fact that John does not want to start from labour, which 'is to enclose oneself from the beginning within a fetished world', but rather from creativity, 'which exists in-against-and-beyond labour'. But that is because John, like the young Marx, wants to reserve the term labour for alienated labour (Chris Arthur, *Dialectics of Labour*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986).
2. The implication of this critique is that the distinguishing feature of socialism would be the recovery of the creative power of human labour. But in his later works Marx sees capitalism as preparing the way for socialism by developing the forces of production to an unprecedented degree, so as to minimise the amount of labour time necessary to meet the reproduction needs of the labourer. Under capitalism this minimisation of necessary labour is associated with the intensification of labour, the extension of the working day and the enforced idleness and pauperisation of a growing mass of the population. Under socialism it will be the means to shorten the working day and maximise the amount of time free from labour. 'The saving of labour time [is] equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back on the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power…It goes without saying, by the way, that direct labour time itself cannot remain in the abstract antithesis to free time in which it appears from the perspective of bourgeois economy. Labour cannot become play, as Fourier would like…Free time – which is both idle time and time for higher activity – has naturally transformed its possessor into a different subject, and he then enters into the production process as this different subject' (*Grundrisse*: 711–712).
3. Marx takes over from classical political economy the idea that labour-power has a value that corresponds to the labour-time necessary to produce the means of subsistence required to reproduce the labourer, criticising political economy only for not distinguishing the labour-power, command over which the worker sells to the capitalist, from the activity of labour. Marx is here not sufficiently radical in his critique of political economy. Labour-power is not produced as a commodity, so there is no reason why it should tend to sell for a wage corresponding to its value, as defined by Marx.
4. Note that in this passage the actual relation is not inherently invisible: it is the phenomenal form that makes it invisible.
5. It is not clear what are the conditions under which it is possible to penetrate the illusions of the commodity-form. At one point Marx notes that commodity production makes its appearance at an early date in history, though not in the same predominating and characteristic manner as now-a-days, so that 'its Fetish character is comparatively easy to be seen through' (*Capital*, I: 119–120). On the other hand, however, Marx also notes that 'it requires a fully developed production of commodities before, from accumulated experience alone, the scientific conviction springs up, that all the different kinds of private labour, which are carried on independently of each other, and yet as spontaneously developed branches of the social division of labour, are continually being reduced to the quantitative proportions in which society requires them' (*Capital*, I: 108).

1.3 The Narrowing of Marxism: A Comment on Simon Clarke's Comments

JOHN HOLLOWAY

All of Simon's comments are directed towards narrowing the scope of Marxism and the understanding of class struggle. The central thrust of Simon's argument is to limit the significance of the concept of fetishism. He does so by making a distinction between the theory of commodity fetishism and 'the more general theory of fetishism'. The former refers to the fact that the relations between commodity producers really exist as relations between things (their products); this does not affect the working class, which does not participate in capitalist society as a commodity producer. According to the latter, 'social relations are misperceived and social powers are attributed to things. The first aspect is a theory of social forms, the second is a theory about the perception of social forms.' Thus, for example, the idea that the wage is a payment for the worker's labour (as opposed to labour-power) is 'a pure mystification'. This is offered as an argument against my claim that the (real and perceived) fetishisation of social relations is pivotal to Marx's critique of capitalism.

The limitation of the scope of fetishism is related to Simon's defence of a restricted concept of class struggle. Although 'all of the dispossessed are potential wage-labourers for capital, and in that sense are members of the working class', nevertheless experience has shown that the only secure base of the labour movement 'has proved to be the trade union organisation that develops out of the struggle over the terms and conditions of wage-labour.' It is in this context, then, that Simon argues that the working class is not subject to commodity fetishism, nor, it would seem, to the 'more general theory of fetishism' either.

Thirdly, Simon would limit the meaning of Marxist scientific work. Marxist intellectual work does not, apparently, involve the critique of fetishism (since this is of limited relevance) but consists rather of 'arduous and rigorous intellectual work to develop a more adequate understanding' which can be put 'at the disposal' of those who do not have the same 'skills

and resources' and so 'inform the practice and programmes of the labour movement'.

Why do I insist on the centrality of the concept of fetishism? The most important reason is that it gives us a much richer concept of class struggle as including every aspect of human existence, and hence an understanding of our existence as an existence-in-struggle.

I see no ground at all in Marx's work for making the distinction between commodity fetishism and the more general theory of fetishism. Such a distinction leads to a peculiar separation, quite foreign to Marx's method, between social forms and the perception of social forms. Where does the perception of social forms come from if not from the forms of social relations themselves? And how can one have social forms that do not give rise to perceptions?

The core of Marx's critique of capitalism is surely that it dehumanises humans, that it deprives us of control of our activity (and 'what is life but activity?'), that it transforms (really and not just in our perception) relations between people into relations between things. This is a constant theme in the writings both of the young and the mature Marx (whereas the mature Simon seems to adopt the Althusserian conception of a rupture which the young Simon criticised so strongly). The young Marx speaks of 'alienation', the older Marx speaks of fetishism, but both concepts refer to the same objectification of the subject.

Dehumanisation is not a cultural malaise: it is not something that floats in the air. It arises from the material organisation of the activity of people as a process of exploitation, from the existence of human doing as value and surplus-value production. However, to limit Marx's critique of capitalism to a critique of exploitation (as Simon seems to do) is to weaken Marx's theory considerably.

If we understand the critique of capitalism as the critique of dehumanisation, then it is clear that every aspect of our existence is involved. Every moment of living is a struggle against dehumanisation: it is from there that our understanding of the possibilities of revolutionary change must begin. Obviously the struggle at the place of work is an extremely important aspect of this: I have never, as Simon claims, proclaimed the 'revolutionary role of the marginal strata'. But why should anyone want to restrict class struggle to 'struggle over the terms and conditions of wage-labour'? Why restrict it at all, when all existence is the struggle against capital?

If we understand the critique of capitalism as the critique of dehumanisation, then it is clear that every moment of our existence is contradictory.

The concept of fetishism points to the fact that capital does not stand outside us: it is a social relation that permeates us. Our existence and our perceptions are contradictory, whether we are workers in the factory or workers in the university. There is no pure, innocent subject, no one who stands outside the real and perceived fetishisation of human existence (not even the labour movement!) To say that existence is contradictory is to say that it is in movement, that there are no established facts, that fetishism can be understood only as fetishisation, as constant struggle.

Fetishism points to the ubiquity of struggle. Intellectual work is part of that struggle. It is not just 'arduous and rigorous' work on behalf of the labour movement, but part of the constant struggle against the fetishisation of social relations, against the transformation of relations between people into relations between things. Marxist intellectual work cannot be just the digging up of 'facts' that are useful to the labour movement. We are not *advisers* to the class struggle. Our daily doing (teaching, writing) is inevitably part of that struggle. Marxist intellectual work is part of the struggle against the dehumanisation of social relations. Its method is critique, the critique of fetishisation, the critique of all that negates the presence and the force of human social practice. Marxist intellectual work is part of the struggle of that which exists in the mode of being denied against its own denial.

Why does Simon want to narrow the scope of Marxism? I do not know. His argument is a critique of my alleged 'romanticism', presumably in the name of 'realism'. What is at issue here is surely the understanding of the failure of communist revolutions in the twentieth century. Simon's implicit argument (the argument of 'realism', I suppose) seems to be that in the past revolutionary demands were pitched too high, that we must tone down our expectations, forget all that nonsense about creating a society based on the mutual recognition of human dignity, that we must focus on 'democratic socialist politics' (what is that?), that our struggle must be centred on the 'struggle over the terms and conditions of wage-labour'. As the last phrase suggests, the realism which Simon would hold up against my alleged romanticism is quite simply the realism of capitalist reality.

My argument is just the opposite: we need to take revolutionary theory far further than the revolutionaries of the past. Revolution has failed in the past not because revolutionaries set their sights too high, but because they set them too low. Capital, and therefore class struggle and therefore revolution, penetrate every aspect of human existence. The more we see struggle as an aspect of everyday life, the more radical our concept of struggle has

to become. Our struggle is the struggle of that which does not even appear in 'realistic' accounts of capitalist reality. That is why we must break with the 'realist' logic of capitalist reality. This is what the critique of fetishism, and therefore Marxism, is all about.

2 Capital, Labour and Primitive Accumulation: On Class and Constitution

WERNER BONEFELD

Marx died over his chapter on class in Volume III of *Capital*. The analysis of capitalism is with necessity a class analysis (Ritsert, 1988) and generations of Marxists have sought to supply the Marxist 'definition' of class. I use the term 'definition' here with critical intent. How might it be possible to define 'class' within a critical project which emphasises that theoretical mysteries find their rational explanation in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice (cf. Marx, 1975: 5)? The 'definition' of the working class would require at least one additional definition, namely that of capital representing the other side of the class divide. Marx's critique of political economy showed that definitions of capital are self-contradictory and tautological. Might definitions of the working class not suffer a similar fate?

Definitional thinking seeks to render intelligible the observable 'facts' of life without conceptualising their social constitution. It concerns itself with the thing in-itself and accepts this thing as having its own mode of existence, laws of development and crisis-ridden tendencies. As a consequence, the human being is viewed as a mere structure-reproducing agency. Instead of asking how and why human beings exist as personifications of things, these personifications are assumed as a given. In this way, the 'raw sense data' of the 'sign' worker is applied to the working class. In other words, first of all a norm is abstracted from empirically observable 'signs', and then it is in the light of this norm that the significance of these same signs is assessed. This clearly tautological approach finds its *raison d'être* as a mathematical numbers game: the traditional working class might or might not have declined. Were this research to find that there are no more workers but only 'employees', would this mean that the class antagonism between capital and labour has been transformed into a different set of relations.[1]

It would be wrong to assume that the 'ideology of reification' (Adorno, 1975: 60) has not entered the Marxist tradition, especially since its canonisation in the guise of so-called Marxist-Leninism, now merely appearing as a school of thought under the banner of analytical Marxism. In this tradition, 'class' is conceived in terms of the 'objective' position of human 'agency' in the production process and in relation to political structures, and class struggle is seen to unfold within the framework of the so-called objective laws of capitalist development.[2] While favouring a vocabulary with a progressive ring, such as class position, class alliance, etc., it provides merely a theory of class. It does not offer a critique of class. In contrast to a 'theory of society', 'critique' entails intransigence towards any affirmation of the thing in-itself and thus stands opposed to the ideology of reification upon which approaches of the 'theory of society sort' rest and feed (see Gunn, 1992; IFS, 2000).

The chapter argues against 'definitions' of class. The understanding of 'class' and therewith 'class struggle' can go forward only in and through the critique of 'capital' as 'the form assumed by the conditions of labour' (Marx, 1972: 492). 'Class' is not an affirmative category but a critical concept. Marx conceived of communism as a society where all classes are abolished. Class analysis is therefore not a flag-waving exercise on behalf of the working class. It goes forward as a critique of class and therewith as a critique of the wage relation through which the working class 'exists'. As Marx (1983: 447) saw it, 'to be a productive labourer is...not a piece of luck, but a misfortune'. Theory on behalf of the working class leads to the acceptance of programs and tickets whose common basis is the everyday religion of bourgeois society: commodity fetishism. In contrast, the critique of class espouses reason's 'historic role of, at any given time, provoking insubordination and destroying horrors' (Agnoli, 1992: 44). The attempt to humanise inhuman conditions is confronted by the paradox that it, despite its unquestionably peaceful intentions, presupposes those very inhuman conditions that provoked the humanising effort in the first place. It is well known that, in the world of philosophical convictions, unfavourable conditions need not to be changed. All that is required is to interpret them more favourably. This, I suppose, underlines the commensurability between the Marxist sociology of class positions and the much more friendly bourgeois research projects of social stratification.[3] The critique of class, then, is not informed by the question on whose behalf conceptual understanding is advanced but, rather, on which side of the class divide one stands.

Class: An Affirmative Concept?

Marxist definitions of class emphasise one of the following over the other. There is the question of the 'location' of the working class in the production process, the 'position' of the working class in relation to capital on the labour market, the 'differentiation' between productive and unproductive labour in relation to the production of surplus-value, the 'separation' between mental and manual labour, etc. The working class is defined by and, within itself, distinguished through, its respective position in relation to capitalist structures.[4] The existence of these structures is not only taken for granted but they are also viewed as a force which imposes itself 'objectively' on the backs of the protagonists.[5]

Class struggle, then, must submit to the 'inescapable lines of tendency and direction established by the real world' (Hall, 1995: 15). Hirsch sums this up succinctly: '*within the framework* of its general laws, capitalist development is determined...by the actions of the acting subjects and classes, the resulting concrete conditions of crisis and their political consequences' (1978: 74–5, author's emphasis). In other words, it is 'within the framework' of the constituted existence [*Dasein*] of 'capital' that class obtains; the framework itself is deemed to exist external to class struggle.[6]

The great embarrassment for this approach is the circumstance that there are social groups that do not fit into either of the two classes, the working class and the capitalist class. Still, the embarrassment is only one of degree. All that is required is to assign a new pigeonhole for those that stand in the middle between the two opposing classes: the middle class. Again, this class is internally stratified based on income and status differentiations, ideological projections, closeness to working class interests, backwardness in terms of historical development, etc. From within sociology dressed up as Marxism, the question of class struggle becomes, then, a question of the leadership of the working class and other 'class strata' are viewed in relation to the working class to ascertain the construction of likely class alliances (cf. Althusser, 1971). The position of the working class in the production process is seen to define its objective character as a class in-itself and it becomes class 'for-itself' when it has acquired – revolutionary – class consciousness.

Class relations cannot be derived from the hypothesised 'anatomy' of bourgeois society and its – equally hypothesised – objective laws of development. Such a derivation merely serves to transform dialectical concepts

of 'human practice' (cf. Marx, 1975) into classificatory categories (cf. Adorno, 1975: ch. 6). This transformation does not lack its sinister side: it entails, as the espousal of the so-called objective laws of capital signals, that questions of 'class', 'revolution' and 'emancipation' transform into questions of rational administration.[7] The constitutive idea that the emancipation of the working class can only be achieved by the working class itself is not forgotten. It is only refined: its self-emancipation requires the leadership of the party so that it does not go astray. Kronstadt (1921) stands as a powerful example of what this might mean (Agnoli *et al.*, 1974; Pannekoek *et al.*, 1991). Communism entails the end of class and not, as affirmative views on class report, a politics on behalf of the working class. The condition for the emancipation of the working class is the abolition of every class.

In Marx's work there is hardly any reference to 'class consciousness'. I would propose that Marx was not interested in the psychology of the working class. His notion of the working class, as that of capital, was 'objective' insofar as both wage-labour and capital are treated as personifications of the social relations that subsist, contradictorily, as relations between things. There are of course such things as the middle class, the working class and the capitalist class. However, there are such things only by virtue of the separation of human practice from its conditions and that is the constitution of human practice in the perverted form of economic categories – better: personifications or charactermasks. Marx's critique of capital is, at the same time, a critique of the wage relation through which the working class subsists. His concept of class was not affirmative but critical: what constitutes 'class relations' and their historical movement. In this way, the notion of the working class is self-contradictory. It reports that the working class is the object, and not the subject, of capitalist social reproduction at the same time as social existence and reproduction goes forward only in and through the class divided practice of the social individual. This insight throws into relief the treatment of class as a class in-itself and, as such an 'in-itself', a thing. It does so by showing that this 'in itself' subsists, at the same time, for-itself.[8]

Thus, it reports that class is constituted as a living contradiction. Contradictions cannot be defined. Any such attempt would merely arrest the dynamic mode of social existence that the term 'contradiction' summons and it would do so in favour of those static categories on which the study of social stratification rests.

Labour and the Wage Relation

In his short chapter on class, Marx asks: 'What constitutes a class? – and the reply to this follows naturally from the reply to another question, namely: What makes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three great social classes?' (Marx, 1966: 886). In the following he shows the difficulty to arrive at any sensible answer: each individual occupation will constitute its own class-group, a group that needs to be divided again and again to grasp the specificity of each category's functional characteristic and social role. This sort of 'classification', as any other, contradicts its very purpose: clarification is sought by classifying human beings with the result that social categories proliferate to such an extent that the classificatory project finishes up with an unmanageable and incomprehensible topology of pigeonholes. Instead of clarity, definitions encourage, in the name of accuracy (!), an infinite number of categories. This in turn leads to the creation of more general classifications,[9] such as the level or basis of income, to provide clarity where 'accuracy' failed. The notion of, for example, 'income' as a 'tool' to indicate 'class characteristics' was of course very much criticised by Marx in his chapter 'The Trinity Formula' which precedes his short chapter on 'class'. Indeed, if class is understood as a social relationship, the definition of class according to economic positions and income resources finishes up conceptually where the critique of political economy starts (see Reichelt, 1971). The revenue of the working class is the wage and the revenue source 'wage' defines the working class. This circularity of thought proliferates into many other circularities: capital's revenue is profit, landowners revenue is rent; and the psychoanalyst – merely, as the category of unproductive labour implies, a 'parasite' just as the social worker? All these groups stand not so much in relation with each other but, rather, in relation to each other. They relate externally to each other. The concept of social groups does not inform, and is not informed by, the concept of social relations: it reports, instead, on externally related things that are seen either to be colliding with one another,[10] or capable of interpolation.[11] Is it really possible to view a group as a social relation?

Marx's critique of capital made clear that 'capital' is not a 'thing' and he argues that the standpoint of capital and wage-labour is the same.[12] Capital is not a thing because it is a definite social relationship and the standpoint of capital and wage-labour is the same because both are perverted forms of social reproduction.[13] For Marx, each 'form', even the most simple form like, for example, the commodity, 'is already an inversion and

causes relations between people to appear as attributes of things' (Marx, 1972: 508) or, more emphatically, each form is a 'perverted form' (Marx, 1979: 90).[14] The most developed perversion, the constituted fetish of capitalist society, is the relationship of capital to itself, of a thing to itself (see Marx, 1972: 515). The extreme expression of this perversion is interest bearing capital: the most externalised and most fetish-like form of capital (Marx, 1966: 391). And the 'wage' – the defining characteristic of wage-labour – 'or price of labour' is an expression that 'is just as irrational as a yellow logarithm' (*ibid*.: 818).

Orthodox accounts elevate the notion of capital as an '*automatisches Subiekt*' (Marx, 1979: 169)[15] to the *sine qua non* of the theoretical inquiry into capitalist development. 'Capital is the subject' (Jessop, 1991: 150).[16] Marx's conception of capital as the subject posits, as Backhaus (1997) has shown, no more than the theoretical hypothesis of political economy.[17] Indeed, Marx called the 'relationships among the things themselves' (Marx, 1976: 145),[18] the 'form of value'. This form is the focus of Marx's critique of fetishism where 'all productive power of labour is projected as powers of capital, the same as all forms of value are projected as forms of money' (Marx, 1979: 634).[19] All these projections and fetish-like forms hide the circumstance that they are 'the product of a social *relation*, not the product of a mere *thing*' (Marx, 1966: 391; see also Marx, 1972: 147).

Against this background, the definition of the 'working class' in terms of its position in the production process and freedom on the labour market accepts bourgeois, that is, mystified forms. Gunn (1987) makes this point succinctly: the feet of the wage-labourer 'remain mired in exploitation even while [their heads breath] in bourgeois ideological clouds'.[20] These are the clouds of equal and free bargaining over wages and the conditions of work. The class relation, however, does not amount to the wage relation. It obtains, rather, '*through* the wage relation' (cf. ibid.). This much is clear from Marx's short chapter on class where he argues that 'we have already seen that the continual tendency and law of development of the capitalist mode of production is more and more to divorce the means of production from labour, and more and more to concentrate the scattered means of production into large groups, thereby transforming labour into wage-labour and the means of production into capital' (Marx, 1966: 885). Here, two issues are emphasised: the divorce of the means of production from labour; and the consequent transformation of labour into wage-labour and of the means of production into capital. Time and time again in *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, and other works, he reports the same insight. For example, in the *Resultate*

des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses (1969: 81), he says that capital is a very mysterious being because it is an alien power that develops in and through the command over individual workers.

The notion that capital is a mysterious being calls for an understanding of the social constitution of its command over labour. This 'command' cannot be properly understood in and through the constituted mist that myth represents. As the next section will show, the mysteries of capital are founded on the divorce of labour from its conditions. The remaining task of this section is to justify this focus:

> It is not the unity of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage-labour and capital (Marx, 1973: 489).

This insight is of utmost importance. The focus is on human existence, active humanity; and he argues that this existence subsists through the separation of labour from *her* conditions, a separation that is posited in the relationship of wage-labour and capital. The issue of separation poses, then, the constitutive foundation of class.

Orthodox accounts do not raise the issue of the social constitution of human practice that suffuses and contradicts the commodified relations of capitalist reproduction. The wretched power of exchange-value production, the commodified relations of production, are not only taken for granted but, also, applied in an attempt to ascribe 'class-relevant' characteristics to social categories whose constitution, as that of capital, remains a mystery. In short, the notion of 'class' stands accepted in terms of the reified world of capital; myth is summoned as the key to unlock the meaning of myth itself. The accepted – academically viable – expression of this sort of approach is the study of social stratification.[21]

Separation and Constitution

Commodity exchange and 'money' pre-date capitalist production. For money, however, to be 'transformed into capital, the prerequisites for capitalist production must exist' (Marx, 1972: 272). The first historical presupposition is the separation of labour from her conditions and 'therefore the existence of the means of labour as capital' (*ibid.*). This separation

'is the foundation of [capitalist] production...[and] is given in capitalist production' (*ibid.*). For Marx, this separation comprises a world's history:

> Commodity and money *are* transformed into capital because the worker... is compelled to sell his labour itself (to sell directly his labour-power) as a commodity to the owner of the objective conditions of labour. This separation is the prerequisite for the relationship of capital and wage-labour in the same way as it is the prerequisite for the transformation of money (or of the commodity by which it is represented) into capital (*ibid.*: 89).

The constitution of *human* purposeful activity as relations between the things themselves is based on this separation and, once established, obtains as *the* constitutive presupposition of capitalist social relations (see Krahl, 1971: 223).

The divorce of labour from her conditions is the precondition of their existence as capital. The conditions of work confront labour 'as alien capital' (Marx, 1972: 422) because the conditions of 'production are lost to [the labourer] and have assumed the shape of alien property' (*ibid.*). The divorce, then, of human purposeful practice from her conditions and their transformation into an independent force, i.e. capital, transforms the product of labour into a commodity and makes the commodity appear as 'a product of capital' (Marx, 1966: 880). This entails 'the materialisation of the social features of production and the personification of the material foundations of production' (*ibid.*). Thus, the capitalist and wage-labourer 'are as such merely embodiments, personifications of capital and wage-labour; definite social characteristics stamped upon individuals by the process of social production' (*ibid.*). In this way, primitive accumulation appears suspended (*aufgehoben)* in the commodity-form. Yet, however suspended, it is the constitutive condition of capitalist social relations as relations between things. The presuppositions of capital, 'which originally appeared as conditions of its becoming – and hence could not spring from its *action as capital* – now appear as results of its own realization, reality, as *posited by it – not as conditions of its arising, but as results of its presence*' (Marx, 1973: 460). In short, primitive accumulation is not just an historical epoch which predates capitalist social relations and from which capital emerged. It entails, fundamentally, the constitutive presupposition through which the class antagonism between capital and labour subsists – primitive accumulation is the 'foundation of capitalist reproduction' (Marx, 1983: 585).

Primitive accumulation is the centrifugal point around which revolves the specific capitalist mode of existence of labour-power, the determination

of human purposeful activity in the form of a labouring commodity.[22] While the capitalist production and exchange relations subsist through the commodity-form, primitive accumulation is the secret history of the determination of human purposeful practice in the form of wage-labour. The commodity-form subsists through this determination, presupposes it and, through its form, denies it in the name of abstract equality and freedom. This insight is focused in Marx's critique of fetishism:

> The sum total of the labour of all these private individuals and private groups makes up the aggregate of social labour. Since the producers do not come into social contact which each other until they exchange their products, the specific social character of each producer's labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange. In other words, the labour of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labour of society, only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx, 1983: 77–78).

The social individual, then, subsists as such an individual not in an 'immediate' sense but in a 'mediated' sense: it is mediated and so subsists through the commodity-form. This form represents the social relationships between people as attributes that belong to things. The separation of human activity from its conditions is thus not only the real generation process of capital but, also, once constituted, the 'real' process of the commodity-form. In other words, primitive accumulation is suspended in the commodity-form as its 'subterranean' condition, constitutive presupposition, and historical basis. The 'logic of separation' (cf. Negri, 1984) entails that the individual capitalist has constantly to expand 'his capital, in order to preserve it, but extend it he cannot, except by means of progressive accumulation' (Marx, 1983: 555).

The risk is bankruptcy. Thus, mediated through competition, personified capital is spurred into action. 'Fanatically bent on making value expand itself, [the personified capitalist] ruthlessly forces the human race to produce for production's sake', increasing 'the mass of human beings exploited by him' (*ibid.*). The positing of the results of human labour as a force over and above the social individual, including both the capitalist and the wage-labourer, and the 'fanatic' bent to make workers work for the sake of work, is founded on the separation of labour from its means. 'The

means of production become capital only in so far as they have become separated from labour and confront labour as an independent power' (Marx, 1963: 408). In short, the freedom of labour from her conditions and their transformation into private property entails the capitalist property right to preserve abstract wealth through the 'sacrifice of "human machines" on the pyramids of accumulation' (Gambino, 1996: 55). The law of private property entails that 'labour capacity has appropriated for itself only the subjective conditions of necessary labour – the means of subsistence for actively producing labour capacity, i.e. for its reproduction as mere labour capacity separated from the conditions of its realization – and it has posited these conditions themselves as *things*, *values*, which confront it in an alien, commanding personification' (Marx, 1973: 452–453). The logic of separation is the 'real process of capital' (Marx, 1972: 422). Indeed, as Marx argues, capital is 'the separation of the conditions of production from the labourer' (*ibid.*).

In sum, Marx does not conceive of capital as a thing in-itself which, endowed with its own objective logic, exchanges itself with itself and that, by doing so, generates profit. Rather, it is conceived as a social relationship between labour and the conditions of labour which are 'rendered independent in relation' to labour (*ibid.*: 422): 'The loss of the conditions of labour by the workers is expressed in the fact that these conditions of labour become independent as capital or as things at the disposal of the capitalist' (*ibid.*: 271). Primitive accumulation, then, is not just a 'period' from which capitalist social relations emerged. Rather, it is the historical 'act' that constitutes the capitalist social relations as a whole. As Marx put it, this separation 'forms [*bildet*] the conception [*Begriff*] of capital' (Marx, 1966: 246). The separation of labour from its conditions and the concentration of these in the hands of 'non-workers' (Marx, 1978: 116) posits capital as a perverted form of human social practice where the 'process of production has mastery over man, instead of being controlled by him' (Marx, 1983: 85).

Perverted Social Categories and Social Constitution

The previous section argued that the class struggle that freed master from serf and serf from master is constitutive of the relation between capital and labour.[23] Class struggle is 'the fundamental premise of *class*' (Gunn, 1987:

16). Primitive accumulation, then, persists, within the capital relation, as its constitutive pre-positing action (*vorausetzendes Tun*).[24] This *Tun* lies at the heart of capital's reproduction: the pre-positing action of the separation of labour from her means is not the historical result of capital but its presupposition, a presupposition which renders capital a social production relation based on the divorce of labour's social productive force from her conditions, and even more pronounced, confers on these conditions the power of applying labour as a human factor of production.

The systematic character of primitive accumulation subsists, then, in suspended form through the constituted relations of capital. The separation is not the result of capital but its genesis and it is now posited as the presupposition of capital. It no longer 'figures' as the condition of its historical emergence but, rather, as the constitutive presupposition of its fanatic bent on reproducing human relations as relations between commodity owners and that is as social categories of capitalist reproduction. In short, the separation 'begins with primitive accumulation, appears as a permanent process in the accumulation and concentration of capital, and expresses itself finally as centralisation of existing capitals in a few hands and a deprivation of many of their capital (to which expropriation is now changed)' (Marx, 1966: 246).

The terror of separation, of capitalism's original beginning, weighs like a nightmare on the social practice of human purposeful activity. The commodification of social practice in terms of the category of wage-labour confronts its conditions as alien conditions, as conditions of 'exploitation, and as conditions which appear, and so exist contradictorily, as relations between things:

> Man is confronted by things, labour is confronted by its own materialised conditions as alien, independent, self-contained subjects, personifications, in short, as *someone else's property* and, in this form, as 'employers' and 'commanders' of labour itself, which they appropriate instead of being appropriated by it. The fact that value – whether it exists as money or as commodities – and in the further development the conditions of labour confront the worker as the *property of other people*, as independent properties, means simply that they confront him as the *property* of the non- worker or, at any rate, that, as a capitalist, he confronts them [the conditions of labour] not as a worker but as the *owner* of value, etc., as the *subject* in which these things possess their own will, belong to themselves and are personified as independent forces (Marx, 1972: 475–476).

Capital presupposes labour as wage-labour and wage-labour presupposes capital as capital. Each is the precondition of the other:

> Every pre-condition of the social reproduction process is at the same time its result, and every one of its results appears simultaneously as its pre-condition. All the *production relations* within which the process moves are therefore just as much its products as they are its conditions. The more one examines its nature as it really is, [the more one sees] that in the last form it becomes increasingly consolidated, so that independently of the process these conditions appear to determine it, and their own relations appear to those competing in the process as objective conditions, objective forces, aspects of things, the more so as in the capitalist process, every element, even the simplest, the commodity for example, is already an inversion and causes relations between people to appear as attributes of things and as relations of people to the social attributes of things (Marx, 1972: 507–508).

The perverted form of value presents, in other words, the mode of existence of human purposeful activity the form of impersonal relations, conferring on the human being the indignity of an existence [*Dasein*] as a personification of things. Thus, concerning the capital–labour relation, 'the workers produces himself as labour capacity, as well as the capital confronting him'. At the same time, 'the capitalist reproduces himself as capital as well as the living labour capacity confronting him' (Marx, 1973: 458). 'Each reproduces itself, by reproducing the other, its negation. The capitalist produces labour as alien; labour produces the product as alien' (*ibid.*).

Once the logic of separation is taken for granted, i.e. once its constitutive presupposition is merely assumed as a historical past, the logic of separation can be understood merely in terms of the constituted fetish of capital as the subject that structures the actions of human agents. Orthodox accounts feed on this separation between (capitalist) structure and (human) agency. Their derivation of the sociological elements inscribed in this separation such as class position, class location, class characteristic, class structure and so forth, take for granted what needs to be explained. In other words, the outward appearance of reality is accepted as a given, and then it is in the light of this outward appearance that economic and political class categories are assessed in terms of their ascribed class characteristics and 'strategic opportunities' (cf. Jessop, 1991). This outward appearance is none other than the 'material' emphasised by positivist thought: raw sense data. It is, however, only

> in the last, most derivative forms that the various aspects of capital appear as the real agencies and direct representatives of production. Interest-bearing

> capital is personified in the moneyed capitalist, industrial capital in the industrial capitalist, rent-bearing capital in the landlord as the owner of land, and lastly, labour in the wage-worker (Marx, 1972: 514).

These enter into competition as 'independent personalities that appear at the same time to be mere representatives of personified things' (*ibid.*). In the context of competition, the social relationship between capital and labour becomes externalised (see *ibid.*: 514–515) and labour's social productive force becomes 'invisible' (*ibid.*: 467); just as Adam Smith's notion of the invisible hand reports. The externalisation of capital and labour as distinct groups defined by their revenue characterises the 'bewitched world' (*ibid.*: 514) of capitalist production: labour no longer appears as a social productive force but, rather, as an appendix to, a human factor of, capitalist production. It is this appearance that the Marxist sociology of 'structure and agency' seeks to render intelligible through schemes of classification.

Approaches, whether Marxist or not, premised on the dualism between constitution and existence (*Dasein*) can, of course, provide an analysis of labour. But they can do so only in terms of labour as a human agency, and in terms of value as embodied labour. This theory of value merely shows that 'the development of social labour produces either a process of accumulation of value or a complex norm of distribution' (Negri, 1992: 70). In this view, the perverted existence of human relations as relations between things is assumed to be true in practice. Such assumptions merely confirm that 'myth' is not a condition merely of former times but, rather, that it continuous to exercise its domination over thought itself. Hence Marx's insistence on demystification: Neither 'nations' nor 'history' nor capital have made war. 'History does nothing, does not "possess vast wealth", does not "fight battles"! It is Man, rather, the real, living Man who does all that, who does possess and fight, it is not "history" that uses Man as a means to pursue its ends, as if it were a person apart. History is nothing but the activity of Man pursuing its ends' (Marx and Engels, 1980: 98). History has been the record of battles and exploitation because all history has been a history where society's laws of motion have been 'abstracting from its individual subjects, degrading them to mere executors, mere partners in social wealth and social struggle. The debasement was as real as the fact that on the other hand there would be nothing without individuals and their spontaneities' (Adorno, 1990: 304). The positing of the presuppositions of capitalist social relations shows the real 'basis' of capitalist society: labour's purposeful activity as commodified activity, as abstract labour in

action.[25] In short, and as Marcuse reports, 'the constitution of the world occurs behind the backs of the individuals, yet it is their work' (1988: 151).

Without an understanding of the social constitution of the perverted world of capital, there could be no critique of capital without, at the same time, espousing it as performing a useful economic function. This, then, would lead to the view of capital as 'the subject' that embodies the logic of an abstract market structure whose empirical reality is mediated by class struggle (Bidet, 1985). Against this theoretical rationalisation of capital as an extra-human force, it is only on the basis of an understanding of the logic of separation that a critique of capital can be supplied: this critique breaks into the understanding of capitalist exploitation and accumulation as a constituted form and 'unhinges this constitution and marks the singularity and the dynamics of the antagonism which the law of labour comprehends' (Negri, 1992: 70). The capital relation is the historical product of labour's alienation from itself. Capital is the separation of labour from the means of production and capital's existence rests not just on the exploitation of labour but, rather, on the continuous accumulation of capital through the progressive exploitation of labour (Marx, 1983: 555). Labour's 'natural power' to maintain value and to create new value (cf. *ibid.*: 568) is commanded by capital in the production process which is, at the same time, the consumption process of living labour. It is the labourer who

> constantly produces material, objective wealth, but in the form of capital, of an alien power that dominates and exploits [the labourer]: and the capitalist as constantly producing labour-power, but in the form of a subjective source of wealth, separated from the objects in and by which it can alone be realised; in short he produces the labourer, but as a wage-labourer. This incessant reproduction, this perpetuation of the labourer, is the sine qua non of capitalist production (*ibid.*, pp. 535–536).

Thus, the contention that capitalist accumulation is not just based on the results of primitive accumulation but, instead, that primitive accumulation is the constitutive presupposition of the class antagonism between capital and labour. As Marx put it, capitalist 'accumulation merely presents as a *continuous process* what in *primitive accumulation*, appears as a distinct historical process, as the process of the emergence of capital' (Marx, 1972: 272; see also Marx, 1983: 688). There would be no capitalist accumulation without the reproduction of labour as 'object-less *free labour*' (Marx, 1973: 507). Human social practice is rendered perverted in and through the divorce of labour from her conditions.

The presupposition of capitalist social reproduction is the freedom of labour from her condition; this presupposition informs and in-forms the real movement of capitalist social relations. Marx conceived of this movement as the movement of communism and that is of the social cooperation of the social individual. The social reproduction of capital and labour, then, acquires its livelihood in and through the negation of communism, a negation that the commodity-form presents. Social cooperation obtains in the perverted form of capital (see Marx, 1983: ch. 13) and this as a cooperation that seems to be established by the things themselves. This negation rests on the reproduction of human social practice in the mode of being denied, that is as a commodified activity. Capital, 'fanatically bent on making value expand itself' (*ibid.*: 555) can do no other than to intensify the division of labour so as to increase its productive power. There is no doubt that 'the subdivision of labour is the assassination of a people' (Urquhart, quoted in Marx, 1983: 343); yet it merely consolidates the 'original' separation of labour from its conditions through further and further fragmentations of the social labour process, dismembering Man [*Mensch*] (cf. Marx, 1977: 155). Still, however, while much social labour is fragmented, divided and subdivided, human co-operation remains 'the fundamental form of the capitalist mode of production' (Marx, 1983: 317). This co-operation exists against itself in the commodity-form that integrates the 'assassination of a people' with the respectful forms of equal and free exchange relations.

Labour 'is and remains the presupposition' of capital (Marx, 1973: 399). Capital cannot liberate itself from labour; it depends on the imposition of necessary labour, the constituent side of surplus labour, upon the world's working classes. It has to posit necessary labour at the same time as which it has to reduce necessary labour to the utmost in order to increase surplus-value. This reduction develops labour's productive power and, at the same time, the real possibility of the realm of freedom.[26] The circumstance that less and less socially necessary labour time is required to produce, for want of a better expression, the necessities of life, limits the realm of necessity and so allows the blossoming of what Marx characterised as the realm of freedom. Within capitalist society, this contradiction can be contained only through force (*Gewalt*), including not only the destruction of productive capacities, unemployment, worsening conditions, and widespread poverty, but also the destruction of human life through war and ecological disaster. In other words, the value-form represents not just an abstraction from the real social individual. It is an abstraction that is 'true in practice' (Marx, 1973: 105). The violence of capital's original

beginning is thus posed as the foundation of its constituted existence where the pleasant norms of equality and freedom obtain as the rights of private property. Benjamin's (1965) critique of violence reports nothing less. In short, primitive accumulation is a constantly reproduced accumulation, be it in terms of the renewed separation of new populations from the means of production and subsistence, or in terms of the reproduction of the wage relation in the 'established' relations of capital. The former seeks to bring new workers under the command of capital (Caffentzis, 1995; Dalla Costa, 1995) and the latter to contain them there as social categories 'freed' from their conditions.

Conclusion

'Class' is a critical concept. The class antagonism between capital and labour presupposes the class struggle that led to the emergence of capitalist social relations. This presupposition has constantly to be posited in the process of capitalist reproduction. Capitalist reproduction without the separation of labour from its conditions would clearly be no-thing and thus impossible. In short, class struggle is the 'logical and historical presupposition for the existence of individual capitalists and workers' and 'the basis on which exploitation rests' (Clarke, 1982: 80). Were one to espouse capitalist social relations without theorising their constitutive relations of separation, the working class could only be affirmed uncritically as a productive force that deserves a better, a new deal. The category class makes sense only as a critical concept that denotes the perverted existence of human relations. These relations suffuse and contradict the existence of the working class as a labouring commodity. Equally, the concept 'class antagonism' does not connote an economic relationship. Rather, it denotes a social relationship which is independent from individuals while obtaining only in and through them. The critique of wage-labour as a fetish category entails at the same time that the line of class antagonism falls not merely between but, also and importantly, through the social individuals.

The uncritical endorsement of the working class turns Marx's critique of the fetishism of the value-form, and of economic categories as perversions of human social relations, against itself. Within the orthodox tradition, all depends, in the last instance, on economic development.[27] In this way, Marx's critique of economic categories stands transformed into an endorsement of economic categories, and his critique of Ricardo's

labour theory of value into endorsing a productivist view where only industrial labour is deemed to be of social value. Of course, Marx accepted these views because capital amounts to the constituted existence of human social practice in precisely this productivist and constrained way. It is indeed the case that human beings exist as a resource for the accumulation of abstract wealth for accumulation's sake. This is their forsaken existence (*Dasein*). However, his acceptance did not entail endorsement. Rather, the reduction of human social practice to a commodified activity and that is, an exploitable resource, was criticised *in toto*. Marx's critique of political economy does not project a different sort of economy, a centrally planned economy of a workers' republic, a republic of labour. In the light of Marx's writing, such an understanding of his critique confuses the capitalist existence (*Dasein*) of human purposeful social practice as a labouring machine with Marx's critique of the perverted existence of capital and therewith the perverted existence of the working class as a class in-itself (and as such an 'in-itself', a thing).

Marx's work is emphasised by the critique of the value-form as a fetish which appears to possess extra-human powers. His critique of fetishism supplies an understanding of 'value' in terms of its human content, that is, as a perverted form through which social relations subsist contradictorily as relations between things (Backhaus, 1997; Holloway, 1992). The critique of economic categories shows that economic relations are, in fact, perversions of human relations. In other words, in capitalism, the social character of human social practice has to be realised in and through the categories of political economy. These categories are adequate insofar as they posit the constituted existence of perverted social relations. In this way, the category 'working class' exists in practice and thus is defined by its 'position', 'location' and 'function' within capitalist social relations. However, the acceptance of the notion 'class in-itself' is uncritical. It simply shows the human being as a mere economic thing or personification, and affirms it as a structure producing agency. In contrast, the critique of political economy shows that the reality in which the social individual moves day in and day out has no invariant character, that is, something which exists independently from it. Thus, the critique of political economy amounts to the conceptualisation of the totality of social praxis (*begriffene Praxis*) (Schmidt, 1974: 207) which constitutes, suffuses and contradicts the perverted world of things. The espousal of the world of things merely comprehends the constituted totality of capitalist social relations and it confers on this totality an objectivity in abstraction from its real movement

and constitution, and that is, for Marx, the social practice of the real human being – however perverted this practice might be (see Backhaus, 1997). In short, 'the separation between in-itself and for-itself, the substance of the subject, is abstract mysticism' (Marx, 1981: 265).[28]

The chapter has emphasised human practice. There is no hidden attempt here to introduce a Marxist ontology. The concept of human practice disavows the bourgeois concepts of humanity and rationality. The critique of fetishism reveals that the constituted forms of capital are, in fact, the forms in and through which human practice 'exists': 'in-itself' as relations between things whose constituted form is the separation of social practice from its condition and 'for-itself' because the relations between things presuppose the pre-positing action of separation that is reproduced by 'active humanity' in and through her class divided social practice. Neither do things exchange themselves with themselves nor is labour exploited by the objective laws of capital. It follows that human practice subsists also 'against-itself' as, on the one hand, a perverted social category and, on the other, as a power that makes history. Capitalist society obtains through exploitation and subsists through class struggle. The constitution of this struggle is the pre-positing action of separation whose constituted form is the reified world of capital. As Adorno (1975: 25) argues, 'reification finds its limitation in reified Man [*Mensch*]' so that reification entails, at the same time, its negation. There would be no reified world without human social practice and transformative power. Human practice, then, exists in-itself, for-itself and against-itself. This understanding is not thrown into relief by the circumstance that human purposeful practice has so far only managed to make history look like a grotesque and bloody grimace.

The understanding of the constituted forms of capital cannot be based on *a priori* notions of the capitalist laws of development. Rather, it rests on their genesis and, from within an understanding of their genesis, its established existence. The 'established existence' of the working class and capital cannot be taken as a starting point for the analysis of class struggle. Rather, their established existence can only be understood in and through the conceptualisation of their genesis, that is in and through the historical constitution of their established existence. It is this historical constitution – that of separation – that the class struggle is about. Its central category is that of necessary labour. It shows the dependence of capital upon labour; entails the continuous attempt to increase the exploitation of labour, and the associated crises of capitalist accumulation; and establishes an understanding of the real movement of communism. The reduction of necessary

labour time that capital is ever eager to achieve, poses the real possibility of human emancipation for which the 'shortening of the working day is the basic prerequisite' (Marx, 1966: 820). Paraphrasing Adorno (1975: 44), full-employment makes sense in a society where labour is no longer the measure of all things. In other words, then, the category of necessary labour is not an economic abstraction but a critical concept. It denotes the possibility of human co-operation liberated from its antagonistic link to the rela-relations of capital and that is, from its perverted existence in and through the commodity-form. Within its capitalist form, cooperation is a contradictory productive force: 'Not only have we here an increase in the productive power of the individual, by means of cooperation, but the creation of a new power, namely, the collective power of the masses' (Marx, 1983: 309). It is of course the case that the critique of political economy can be made manifest in practice only when it has seized the masses; when, in other words, the masses are seized by the understanding that it is their own labour, their social practice, that produces a world that oppresses them (cf. Marx, 1975b: 182). For human beings to enter into relationship with one another not as personifications where 'the person objectifies himself in production; the thing subjectifies itself in the person' (Marx, 1973: 89), but as social individuals, as human dignities who, no longer separated from their means, are in control of their social existence, the 'mastery of capitalist production over man' has to be abolished so that man's social reproduction is 'controlled by him' (cf. Marx, 1983: 85). Human emancipation, then, entails the transformation of the means of production into means of human emancipation. In other words, full employment makes sense in 'the society of the free and equal' (cf. Agnoli, 2000) where humanity exists not as an exploitable resource but as a purpose.

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Notes

1. See, for example, Beck (1992: 100): 'Class society will pale into insignificance beside an *industrialized society of employees.*' Beck later clarified his position when he and his co-author argue that 'the antagonisms between men and women over gender roles' amount to 'the "status struggle" which comes after the class struggle' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995: 2). It seems that, in the mindset of the Becks, their experience amounts to a generalised hypothesis of bourgeois society's constitutive conflict!
2. See, for example, Poulantzas (1973, 1977), Wright (1978, 1985, 1997), Wright *et al.* (1989) and Carling (1997).
3. As Backhaus (1992) makes clear, such commensurability, between Marxism and bourgeois theory is quite impossible. They speak different languages. The circumstance that Marxist sociology is commensurable with studies of social stratification does not open the Pandora's box. The question is who has consumed whom.
4. This is not to deny the importance of' these 'differentiations'. They are important for understanding the contradictory constitution of capitalist social relations whose 'basis' is the individualisation of the social individual in the form of a labouring commodity. The issue, however, is not the acceptance of this 'individualisation' as a constituted thing but, rather, the comprehension of its historical constitution and movement.
5. See Hirsch and Roth (1986: 37) where this view is offered.
6. For a critique of approaches premised on 'constituted' forms, see Bonefield (1995).
7. On this in relation to Lenin, see Godelier (2000).
8. The notion 'in-itself' refers to capitalist social relations as constituted relations, i.e. as relations where human practice subsists as if it were a mere personification of the things themselves. Thus, 'in-itself' accepts the established existence of capitalism. Marx's critique of fetishism amounts, then, to a critique of this 'in-itself'. His critique shows that human practice exists for itself as a perverted practice of capitalist social relations. Orthodox accounts employ the notions 'class in-itself' and 'class for-itself' to indicate the 'objective' position of the working class and its potential as a revolutionary class ('class for-itself'). This dualism between objectivity and subjectivity does not make sense when looked at through the lenses of Marx's critique. The dualist conception of objectivity (in-itself) and subjectivity (for-itself) belongs firmly to a tradition of thought that resists an understanding of our social world as a world made by Man [*Mensch*] and a world dependent upon Man's transformative power. The treatment of class as existing 'in-itself' leads to an accommodation to 'objective conditions', i.e. it leads to affirmative and apologetic accounts of a 'perverted' world (cf. Horkheimer, 1992: 246). In short, as Horkheimer (1985: 84) reports, the separation of 'genesis' from 'existence' constitutes the blind spot of dogmatic thought.
9. These general classifications are usually called, with Weber, ideal types.
10. See Hirsch (1995) where social relations are subdivided into distinct groups of social interest, such as the economic interest of the working class and the ecological interest of the ecologist. These 'interests' are seen to collide with each other, undermining the possibility of social solidarity against what he accepts as the objective power of capital.

11. See Althusser (1971: 160–165) on how distinctive class places might be interpolated.
12. See Marx (1966: 880; 1972: 491).
13. See Marx (1966: 880; 1972: 491).
14. In the English translation the German *verrückte Form*, is translated as 'absurd form' (Marx, 1983: 80). The translation is 'absurd'. In German, 'verrückt' has two meanings: verrückt (mad) and verrückt (displaced). Thus, the notion of 'perverted forms' means that these forms are both mad and displaced. In other words, they are the modes of existence of social practice, in which 'subject and object do not statically oppose each other, but rather are caught up in an "ongoing process" of the "inversion of subjectivity into objectivity, and vice versa"' (Backhaus, 1992: 60, quoting Kofler). In what follows, 'perversion' or 'perverted' will be used in this double sense.
15. In the English edition, this phrase is translated as 'automatically active character' (Marx, 1983: 152).
16. See the Preface to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he mocks those who stand external to the things upon which they report: those who claim to stand outside the things can do so only because they are not in them.
17. The endeavour to conceive capital as an automatic subject amounts, as Türcke (1986) has shown, to an attempt to posit the invisible and that is to conceptualise God. Intransigence towards the existence of humanity as a resource is replaced by a 'critical' rationalisation of, and reconciliation with, capital as a self-constituted subject. Traditionally, the upshot is the demand for the rational planning of economic development.
18. Translated from the German original. The English version is misleading: (Marx, 1972: 147).
19. Translated from the German original. The English version is misleading: (Marx, 1983: 568–569).
20. The chapter owes a great debt to Gunn (1987).
21. While orthodox Marxism recognises the centrality of the class relationship between capital and labour and seeks to position the middle classes in relation to these classes, Weberian sociology goes one step further by offering more sophisticated classifications. In Giddens (1990) the conflict between capital and labour is conceived as an economic conflict and since there are non-economic conflicts, he argues that 'different institutional complexes' generate and develop through distinctive conflicts: the peace movement (against the institutional complex of military power); civil and human rights (against administrative power); ecological conflict (against industrialism). Rather than opening a new theoretical perspective, Giddens' innovative scheme merely supplies the logical consequence of reified thought. However, when pigeonholing social relations into nice and neat sociological classifications of class and non-class groups, there should have been at least the acknowledgement that individuals who accept the mutilation of themselves during a part of the day are marked throughout the whole of their daily activity. There is no reason to assume why this should be different for the whole of society (this part paraphrases Bellofiori, 1997).
22. On this see Negt and Kluge (1981).
23. Studies, such as Gerstenberger's (1990), suggest that historical evidence does not support the view that the transition to capitalist social relations was one of class struggle. This argument is quite common. It shows that the espousal of the raw sense data of history requires a thorough conceptualisation to discover the real living relations be-

tween human beings. On the understanding that history is a history of class struggle see Adorno (1975: ch. 1). Compare also Gerstenberger (1993) with Holloway (1993).

24. On this see Psychopedis (1992).
25. On this see Bonefeld (1992) and Krahl (1971).
26. 'In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production.…Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised Man [*Mensch*], the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by the blind forces of Nature.…But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis' (Marx, 1966: 820).
27. Althusser's (1971) answer to the problem as to how to relate discrete social 'levels' or 'practices' or 'instances' is well known: *in* the last instance 'the economic movement asserts itself as necessary' (Engels in Marx and Engels, n.d.: 498).
28. For an account, see Adorno (1993).

3 Labour and Subjectivity: Rethinking the Limits of Working Class Consciousness

GRAHAM TAYLOR

> The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat at the moment considers as its aim. The question is what the proletariat is, and what, consequent on that being, it will be compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is irrevocably and obviously demonstrated in its own life situation as well as in the whole organisation of bourgeois society today (Marx and Engels, 1844).

In the above quotation from *The Holy Family* Marx and Engels allude to an issue that has been both a central focus of debate within Marxism and a central focus of criticism raised by mainstream social scientists: why is there a gap between the 'objective' conditions of domination and alienation experienced by workers in capitalism and the 'subjective' forms of consciousness through which workers make sense of and respond to these conditions. This issue has a particular resonance when the proletariat is widely perceived to have failed in their historical project of realising their revolutionary subjectivity through revolution. The working class has been consigned to the dustbin of history: workers have embraced ideologies of individualism, the dialectic of history has been transcended and the triumph of liberal capitalism marks the end of history. The paradox perhaps is that such a formulation is quite consistent with the analysis of working class consciousness developed within the orthodox Marxist perspective. The working class failed to turn their limited and partial consciousness of the 'economic' depravations of capitalism into a revolutionary 'political' project of societal transformation. The result has been a fragmentation of consciousness amongst a myriad of competing social movements and a fragmentation of identity within an increasingly fragmented and de-centred self. This is the prevailing orthodoxy: an orthodoxy in which labour has become increasingly peripheral as a focus of identity formation and political mobilisation. The notion of labour as a 'universal class' is dismissed as an outmoded 'meta-narrative' in a context in which individual conscious-

ness is increasingly unable to escape the prison of reified discursive narratives.

The crisis of structuralism and the increasing dominance of post-structuralism does not, however, demonstrate the decreasing importance of labour as a mode of social mediation. On the contrary, the two currents demonstrate at opposite poles the dual nature of labour and a one-sided grasp of its essential nature. These one-sided analyses fail to grasp the deeply contradictory determination of labour in capitalism: the social mediation of concrete by abstract labour and the emergence of the latter as part of a reified totality that simultaneously determines and obscures the imposition of abstraction. Consciousness and subjectivity cannot be detached from the totality by which they are determined and constituted: a totality in which abstract labour is the fundamental locus of social mediation. The social form of this totality is determined through struggle. To the extent that the totality of the social form is not grasped the result is the articulation of one-sided and fetished forms of consciousness that articulate the universalism of either concrete or abstract labour. Indeed, the history of capitalism is punctuated by the articulation of perverted forms of universalism expressed as classical liberalism and social democracy or in the diabolical forms of Fascism and Stalinism.

The present time is an apposite moment for rethinking the relationship between labour, subjectivity and consciousness. The ideology and practice of labourism has become increasingly challenged and discredited: the false universalism on which it was premised challenged by both neo-liberal individualism and marginalised groups and individuals excluded from social democratic discourse and practice. This has been compounded by the rejection and collapse of 'actually existing socialism' in the Soviet Bloc. The dominant political and academic discourses articulate an individualism that is constrained only by reified forms of abstract domination. In this context new forms of mobilisation and protest have emerged that defy categorisation: anti-capitalist protest that is marginal to and critical of the organised labour movement. These movements articulate new forms of consciousness and organisation that transcend the one-sided universalism of social democracy and attempt to grasp the totality of the capital relation without reproducing the totality as the mode of their organisation. These groups are often labelled as 'new social movements' in the sociological literature in an attempt to differentiate them from the 'old' social movement *qua* the labour movement. Contrary to the predictions of the sociological orthodoxy these groups have recently become increasingly

anti-capitalist in focus and are developing into networks that transcend single- issue campaigns. In the present context, examples of this type of movement include Reclaim the Streets, European-wide campaigns against neo-liberalism and the recent anti-capitalist demonstrations in Seattle, Washington, London and Prague. Within the trade unions the idea of a more inclusive 'social movement unionism' is growing in popularity.

These new forms of subjectivity and consciousness are currently undeveloped and marginal to the mainstream labour movement and are developing in an intellectual vacuum. As Pierre Bourdieu has recently noted it is important that social scientists engage in the struggle against neo-liberalism: engage in a theoretical destruction of the theories and ideologies that sustain neo-liberalism (see Bourdieu, 1998). This is very important, but intellectual renewal also demands a critique of the forms of subjectivity and consciousness traditionally associated with the labour movement and the potential of new forms of anti-capitalist struggle to overcome these forms. Above all this demands a deconstruction of the forms of the universalism and internationalism associated with Bolshevism and the potential of new anti-capitalist struggles to develop a new internationalism that is capable of embracing diversity within a totalising movement. This is the aim of this chapter. I begin by highlighting the problems underpinning the conceptualisation of consciousness and subjectivity in orthodox Marxism and more detailed analyses of labour in capitalism. This is contrasted with critical interpretations of Marx's analysis of labour in capitalism that stress its dual determination as concrete and abstract labour. This leads to an exploration of the way in which this dual determination impacts upon the nature of social reality and the forms of consciousness that are possible in capitalist society. Finally, I explore the political implications of these insights in respect of the limits and potential of anti-capitalist struggle in the contemporary era.

The Problem of Dual Consciousness

The distinction between 'true' and 'false' consciousness was a central tenet of orthodox Marxism. There was, however, an important division between Marxists who believed that revolutionary or 'true' consciousness required a vanguard of intellectuals to reveal 'true' consciousness to the working class and those who believed that revolutionary consciousness would emerge spontaneously from the self activity of the working class. The dominant

and most influential example of the former is to be found in the work of Lenin. In *What is to be Done?* Lenin argued that the objective condition of the working class as wage-labourers prevented the development of revolutionary consciousness (Lenin, 1978). The struggle of workers over the conditions of wage-labour served merely to reaffirm the importance and inevitability of wage-labour: workers thus being unable to transcend the economism and sectionalism of what Lenin termed 'trade union consciousness'. Lenin contrasted this restricted consciousness with the revolutionary or 'social democratic' consciousness possessed by a politically organised vanguard of intellectuals. The other major theme in classical Marxism is that revolutionary consciousness emerges spontaneously from the day to day struggles and experiences of the working class as wage-labourers. At the heart of syndicalism and the approach to socialist politics championed by Rosa Luxemburg is the notion that revolutionary subjectivity will erupt spontaneously from the self-activity of the working class (Luxemburg, 1925). The syndicalist position was given a peculiarly Fabian twist in the UK through the 'Guild Socialism' popularised by G.D.H. Cole. For Cole workers were imbued with an intrinsic or essential collective morality associated with 'public service' and co-operation that remained obscured and hidden by the market relations of competitive capitalism (Cole, 1972, 1980; Taylor, 1999: 66–68).

Central to both these positions, however, is the distinction between 'true' and 'false consciousness': the point at issue is the strategy through which the former can be made to prevail over the latter. The Leninist approach is profoundly idealist and undialectic: only the 'vanguard' freed from the stultifying reality of the capitalist mode of production can conceptualise true subjectivity. This was at the core of the highly idealised and metaphysical manner in which labour was represented in the Leninist discourse: labour realising itself as the subject of history and throwing off the chains of capitalist oppression. In the former Soviet Union this one-sided and idealist conceptualisation of labour was ultimately institutionalised as state ideology and practice and was responsible for the abominations of Stalinism. Within orthodox Marxism therefore labour was transformed from a historically specific mode of social mediation into an essentialist transhistorical ontological category: a category that resulted in a reconstruction of consciousness and subjectivity around the aesthetization of concrete labour.

The syndicalist position was also premised on a one-sided grasp of labour in capital as concrete labour. In an undialectic rupturing of theory and

practice advocates of this position argue that revolutionary subjectivity lies dormant and latent beneath the surface of reformist and economistic conceptualisations of capitalism that workers articulate on a day to day basis. Even at a very basic level the assertion that conservative and economistic forms of subjectivity can spontaneously explode into revolutionary subjectivity has not been able to withstand detailed empirical investigation. In a comparative analysis of working class consciousness Mann (1973) discovered many examples where consciousness and action that were premised on a deep hostility towards capitalism but that failed to develop into revolutionary forms of collective behaviour and consciousness. The issue cannot however be resolved empirically. The theory of spontaneous consciousness raises important questions regarding the ontological status of labour in capitalism: an apparent dualism between concrete forms of labour marked by limited consciousness and labour in the abstract imbued with revolutionary consciousness. These two forms of labour exist as parallel universes meeting only at times of potential ruptures to the existing order. The endurance of limited and partial consciousness amongst workers, even in societies where proletarian consciousness has developed into the ruling ideology, suggests that the development of dual consciousness is related to the fundamental form of labour as a mode of social mediation rather than an externally imposed form of domination. The important issue is thus not how to transform partial and fragmented consciousness into a universal, critical consciousness, but to enquire into what is it about the nature of labour in capitalism that results in partial and contradictory forms of consciousness.

Detailed studies of labour in capitalism have failed to adequately address this problem. The so-called 'labour process' debate responded to the idealism of orthodox Marxism with detailed studies of the forms of domination through which labour is subjugated to capital within the 'black box' of the workplace (see Thompson, 1989, for an overview of this debate). A major contribution of Braverman (1974) was to highlight the importance of the division between manual and mental labour as an important moment in determining the form and limits of working class consciousness. Indeed in the context of his comments on 'proletarianisation' Braverman is largely credited with re-emphasising the important relationship between the labour process and class. Braverman argues that with the degradation of white-collar and technical work the 'proletarian form' gradually asserts and impresses itself on the consciousness of white-collar employees (Braverman, 1974: 293–357). This illustrates the ontological essentialism central to

the conceptualisation of labour in Braverman's analysis in which the subjectivity of labour is determined by the objective unity or separation of conception and execution within the capitalist labour process. Whilst Braverman has been rightly criticised for ignoring the subjective determinants of class and workplace consciousness, the conceptualisation of labour in post-Braverman analyses of the labour process has remained one-sided and premised on an essentialist ontology of labour. There has been a focus on the way in which workers are ideologically manipulated by management ideologies (Fox, 1985; Nichols, 1980) or the way in which workers generate a psychological attachment to particular aspects of work organisation (Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979). Alternatively there has been a focus on the way in which elements of subjectivity and consciousness are imported into the labour process from other spheres of social life: the family and the domestic division of labour (Cavendish, 1982; Pollert, 1981), race and ethnicity (Castles and Kosak, 1973) and locality amongst a myriad of others. These approaches all share an implicit assumption that the concrete subordination of labour within the labour process will produce an essentially 'pure' form of proletarian consciousness that is somehow diluted and undermined by either management ideology and practice or by factors that are exogenous to the labour process. The labour process approach alongside orthodox Marxism is premised on an essentially one-sided conceptualisation of labour as concrete labour. The problem of dual consciousness can only be resolved by exploring the development of individual consciousness in the context of the social totality of the capital relation.

Individual Consciousness and Social Totality

The problem of dual consciousness develops through a fundamental misreading of Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism. As I.I. Rubin notes, the material element through which capital dominates the human mind is not illusory, but is a *social fact*; commodity fetishism is not a phenomenon of the mind but of *social being* (Rubin, 1973: 57–59). Social relations of production both take the form of things and can only be expressed through things (*ibid.*: 6): social relations appear as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx, 1954: 78). Individual consciousness cannot be detached from the totality that determines social being: dual consciousness is not a product of ideological manipulation but the dual determination of labour in capitalism. In order to

overcome the limitations and one-sidedness of the above approaches it is essential to recognise that the issue of individual or collective consciousness cannot be approached in abstraction from the social totality of the capitalist order. This is not to construct an abstract theory of human consciousness: but a theory of the determinants that make abstract consciousness the dominant form of individual and social subjectivity. It has of course been recognised that an adequate understanding of labour in capitalism requires a recognition of the historical specificity of capitalist commodification: that the capitalist labour process is simultaneously a valorisation process. An elaboration of this position requires however more than making the 'realisation' of capital a further variable in the analysis of the concrete conditions of labour (Elger, 1979). What is needed is an enquiry into the historically specific form of labour that emerges from its dual determination as concrete labour in the circuit C – M – C and as abstract labour in the circuit M – C – M′. It is the failure to grasp the totality of this dual determination that has led to the one-sided analyses of labour outlined above. Labour is at once concrete and abstract: subjective and objective. The problem of grasping this duality moreover says something important about the limitations of both Marxism and bourgeois social science in perceiving and adequately representing this dualism: that epistemologies are inseparable from the historical materialities they seek to perceive and elaborate. The dual nature of labour in capitalism results in the simultaneous existence of two realities: empirical and non-empirical reality. The problem of consciousness demands therefore a rigorous critique of epistemology.

The conception of consciousness in orthodox Marxism was ultimately idealist: true or revolutionary consciousness premised on a pre-social metaphysical conception of labour as the subject of history. In this sense it is premised on the same epistemological assumptions as bourgeois social science: the Kantian dualism between transhistorical conceptual categories of perception and an outside world of perceivable objects and events. In 'The German Ideology' Marx developed an explicit critique of this position. For Marx the production of ideas and the conception and consciousness of reality are directly interwoven with material activity and the material language of real life. Similarly with mental production: people are producers of their conceptions and ideas as much as these ideas and conceptions are conditioned by their physical life process. Consciousness is no more than conscious existence and existence no more than actual life process. Hence, Marx's remark that if in ideologies people appear upside

down as in a *camera obscura*, that this arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life process. Ideology and consciousness are merely reflexes and echoes of this real life process:

> The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life (Marx, 1970: 47).

The point is thus not to overcome the illusions of consciousness in order to implant an alternative consciousness. The illusions are real illusions and have their origins in the material life processes of existence. There is, therefore, no such thing as pure consciousness, for as Marx noted, the practical expression of consciousness is language which emerges from the need and necessity of social intercourse. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product. Consciousness appears to take on a life of its own from the moment the development of the division of labour takes the form of the division between mental and manual labour. Hence,

> From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of 'pure theory', theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. (Marx, 1970: 51–52).

It is clear, therefore, that the duality of consciousness emerges from the materiality of social life processes. Whilst the possibility of dual consciousness is premised on the separation of mental and manual labour this does little to elucidate the form and content of consciousness in the context of the historical specificity of capitalism. This provides the basis for a powerful critique not only of idealist and reductionary forms of materialism but also the philosophical underpinnings of bourgeois philosophy and social science: the notion of a pre-social and ahistorical subjective consciousness constituted by *a priori* perceptual categories – of 'being'. In other words, the riddle of working class consciousness can be solved by

recognising that the whole notion of epistemology – the separation of subjective consciousness and objective reality – is historically contingent on the social form of labour in capitalism. In order to fully grasp the problem of dual consciousness we need to focus on the intimate connections between subjectivity and objectivity.

Labour as Self-Constituting Reality

In order to explain the self-constituting nature of labour in capitalism it is necessary to return to the critique of Kant developed by Hegel. Within the Kantian approach objective reality is not accessible to human knowledge: knowledge of things is subjectively constituted through transcendental *a priori* categories through which perception is organised. Hegel highlighted the paradox that in this approach, knowledge of cognitive facilities is a precondition of knowledge and attempted to resolve the paradox and overcome the subject–object dichotomy through a demonstration of their intimate interconnection. Hegel achieved this through the notion of the *Geist* or world historical subject emerging as an identical subject–object determined through a process of self-constituting objective reality. Hence, adequate categories need to grasp the identity of subject and object as structures of absolute knowing: the absolute being the totality of subjective-objective categories that express themselves in individual consciousness. This is the important linkage between Hegel and Marx. Marx was also concerned with the intrinsic connectedness of objectivity and subjectivity. However, for Marx, social constitution is not the positing of a world of social objectivity by a human historical subject. Rather, the connectedness of subject and object is constituted through practice as a social form of existence: the way that human action constitutes forms of social mediation that in turn constitute forms of social practice (Postone, 1993: 217–218).

Hence, for Marx social objectivity and social subjectivity are not two ontologically distinct spheres but rather are intrinsically related aspects of capital as an alienated social form of existence. Thus an important difference between mainstream psychology and its sociological derivatives and historical materialism is the way in which the latter illustrates the intimate linkages between the micro and macro levels of society: between individual consciousness and social form. As Postone (*ibid.*: 155) notes Marx's categorical analysis in *Capital* highlights the way in which subjectivity or modes of thought can be understood as manifestations of

historically specific forms of social mediation. These historically specific forms of social mediation are also responsible for the emergence of the 'free, self-determining individual'. The emergence of the individual within a framework of extrinsic objective dependence is a 'real' opposition that is historically constituted with the emergence and generalisation of commodity-determined social relations. However, the important point is that this opposition is not simply between a world of subjects with a world of objects but an opposition within individuals themselves: individuals as historically-determined subject–objects.

The problematical nature of subjectivity has important epistemological implications with respect to the analysis of capitalist social forms. The generalisation of the commodity as the dominant mode of social mediation conditions the way in which the world – both natural and social – is conceived. The dual character of commodity determined labour results in the apparent and real distinction between empirical and non-empirical reality: a distinction between the objectivity of a material, thing-like world and an abstract and general sphere from which social and historical content has disappeared (Postone, 1993: 174). This dichotomy is internalised within human intellect and human personality and manifests itself in both the separation of intellectual and manual labour and the *a priori* assumptions of the Kantian categories underlying modern social science (Sohn-Rethel, 1978). Alfred Sohn-Rethel usefully highlighted the way in which the categories analysed by Kant as ahistorical *a priori* categories were in fact the products of social synthesis. The weakness of Sohn-Rethel's analysis is that he restricted his analysis of synthesis to the sphere of exchange: to an analysis of the way in which forms of thought and cognition emerge from the abstract synthesis of the commodity-form (Postone, 1993: 177–178). Sohn-Rethel thus ignored the specificity of exchange and commodification associated with capital: a specificity premised on the commodification of labour and the emergence of abstract labour as the principal locus of social constitution. This leads to the error of seeing the value-form as something that is imposed on labour rather than as a form of social being that is constituted by the abstraction of labour. As Postone argues, for Sohn-Rethel abstract labour exists only in the sphere of production. Moreover, abstract labour constitutes a form of abstraction that is not intrinsically connected to capitalist exploitation and provides the basic mode of synthesis for a future post-capitalist, classless society. For Sohn-Rethel the essence of capitalism is exchange as his analysis fails to consider the relationship between abstract labour and the development of alienated social structures. The forms

of consciousness and conceptual categories through which individuals attempt to understand their place in the capitalist order and develop strategies to overcome the contradictions and alienation inherent to capitalism as a social form are themselves a fetished and alienated product of the process they are attempting to understand and change: an attempt to cognisise abstraction through abstract categories of cognition. In order to understand consciousness and the relationship between subject and object we need to explore the critique of the Kantian dualism developed by Hegel and Marx.

The Dual Nature of Reality in Capitalism

Marx explored the inner relationship between empirical and non-empirical reality through his analysis of money and capital. In capitalist society money both expresses and obscures the role of commodity-labour as the central mode of social mediation. The contradiction between use-value and exchange-value on which the money form is premised and the generalisation of the money form divides the world into subject and objects or signified and signifiers or need and capacity. Marx explored the social and historical dynamics behind the bifurcation of concrete and abstract forms of thought and existence through his analysis of capital. Capitalism is a historically specific form of commodity production and exchange premised on the simultaneous existence of the circuits C – M – C and M – C – M′. The process of production is simultaneously a process of valorisation: the self-expansion of money-capital. The social and historical content of valorisation was explored by Marx as surplus-value: the generalisation of commodity-labour and the subordination of wage-labour within the capitalist labour process. Hence, the bifurcation of concrete and abstract thought and the schizoid nature of the human personality is premised on the historically specific form of social mediation in capitalist society: abstract labour. Following from this, the struggle is not to reunite the concrete and abstract forms of alienated consciousness as part of a workerist project to seize control of the means of production but to abolish labour as the central mediating category of the social constitution.

The critique of Kant also has important implications for the way in which the relationship between the natural and social sciences are conceptualised. Orthodox Marxism and many examples of critical theory (Bhaskar, 1997; Habermas, 1984) share an assumption that *a priori* natural and dialectic laws exist as pre-social and ahistorical categories. It is howev-

er evident that in the work of Marx society is not presented as a natural category. For Marx, there is an essential similarity between the forms of alienated social relations produced by the social mediation of labour and forms of modern thought – including the social and natural sciences. Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, therefore, reveals more than a real abstract obfuscation of capitalist class relations (Habermas, 1972): it also constitutes a theory of subjectivity that relates forms of consciousness to the social forms of existence in a society of self-mediated labour. The self-constituting reality of abstract labour is thus a basis for both the relationship between human beings and between man and nature (Postone, 1993: 240). Hence, the categories in Marx's analysis of capitalism are historically specific and this has fundamental implications for the development of a self-reflexive social epistemology. The categories through which social relations between human beings and between man and nature can only be grasped through the categories of alienated social labour. If the form of social mediation is historically contingent this implies that forms of consciousness and the mode of their constitution is similarly historically and socially contingent. Each social formation requires its own epistemology: the project of a transhistorical social theory is an impossibility. This has important implications for the critique of capital: capital socially constitutes the epistemological possibility of its own critique.

The distinction between empirical and non-empirical reality is directly attributable to the social forms and function of money. The antinomy of the commodity as value and use-value determines the dual character of social reality: as a thing world of commodities (empirical reality) and the abstract realm of non-empirical reality. However, the fetished and peculiar nature of this form of social mediation (by money) obscures the socially constituted character of both dimensions as well as their intrinsic connections (Postone, 1993: 265). The connection is obscured by the non-contingency of money and value: the role of money in social mediation appearing as the validation of pre-existing contractual relations between self-determining individuals. Money thus both expresses and veils the social mediating role of labour in capitalist society. Consciousness derives from the dual aspects of labour in capitalism. Wage-labourers are simultaneously subjects in the sphere of circulation and objects in the sphere of production: subjects and objects of a sphere of objective compulsion and subjective possibility. Whilst the totalisation of the sphere of circulation provides the basis for ideologies of legitimation in capitalist society, this does not imply that the consciousness derived from this sphere is totally illusory and in opposition to a truer

consciousness derived from the sphere of production. Both spheres are historically determinate and are produced by the twofold nature of labour in capitalism. The overcoming of capitalism is not the transcendence of the ideals of one sphere by the ideals of the other, but rather the transcendence of the antinomic division of society into distinctive spheres of existence. Herein lies the weakness and limits of traditional forms of labour movement politics and the promise of new forms of anti-capitalist struggle that attempt to transcend the fetished separations of bourgeois society and grasp the capital relation as a social totality.

Consciousness, Reification and Class Struggle

The starting point for a dialectic account of the forms of subjectivity and consciousness associated with labour in capitalism has to be an analysis of capitalism as a social totality: a totality that is obscured by the fetished categories that emerge from the mediation of concrete by abstract labour. The way in which these processes of real abstraction impact upon individual personality and intellect was explored by Lukács as a process of objectification or collective practice (Lukács, 1971). In a synthesis of Marx and Weber, Lukács argued that under capitalism intellectual and manual labour processes, and the forms of consciousness and personalities to which these give rise, are transformed into rationalised, autonomous and objective processes that confront individuals as objective things to which they must submit. In this account, the rationalisation of the labour process involves the imposition of abstraction on the working class in an attempt to prevent the conceptualisation of social totality. It involves a fragmentation of subjectivity through which psychological propensities are separated from individual personalities and constituted into fragments of objective processes through which individuals construct limited and fragmented consciousness. This process of reification, which involves the separation of form and content, subject and object, universal and particular is the terrain of struggle in capitalist society: partial and restricted struggles to overcome these antinomies by social and political movements. However, because these partial struggles do not address capitalism as a social totality these struggles are also the catalyst for new forms of reification.

The dual nature of labour leads to two forms of fetishism emerging from these struggles: the ‘fetishism of particularity’ and the ‘fetishism of spurious totality’ (Browne, 1990). The former results from struggles that

fail to transcend sectionalism in order to address the universal objective of human emancipation. Trade union action and social democratic politics are good examples of this form of fetished consciousness and action: forms that reproduce the reifying rationality within the partial spheres of the workplace and the nation state. In contrast the 'fetishism of spurious totality' emerges from the irrational content of abstract-universal forms of rationality which compensate for the formal and impersonal character of real abstractions. The most notable examples of these forms of fetishism include religious mysticism, consumerism, life-style/status, communitarianism and the aestheticisation of labour (Fascism). These constitute alienated bonds of affectation that compensate for the impersonal nature of real abstraction as constituted by the law, state and market. The forms of consciousness and action that emerges from these processes reproduce the antinomy that exists between form and content, or abstract and concrete, and thereby contribute to the constant generation of new forms of alienated universality. The important point is that these forms of alienated universality are not external to labour: imposed on the working class to pervert the ability of labour to recognise its own (true) subjectivity. Universalistic ideologies are not ahistorical products of evolutionary or teleogical processes: rather, they are intrinsic to modes of social mediation that are premised on the twofold nature of labour in capitalism and the socially and historically determinate social forms this produces. Labour is a form of social mediation that generates abstract universalism: abstract legal subjects that face each other as free and equal commodity owners. This legal fetishism (Pashukanis, 1989) obscures the qualitative specificity of particular groups and individuals: a contradiction between abstract and homogeneous universality and a concrete particularity that excludes universality.

It is, however, possible to escape the pessimism of critical theory and Weberian sociology in respect of the impact of reified structures on human consciousness. Despite the tendency for abstract labour to be self-constituting this does not lead to an increasing one-dimensionality (Marcuse, 1970). The process of self-constitution is achieved through the ongoing social mediation through the dual character of labour in capitalism. Whilst abstract labour increasingly shapes and develops concrete labour, this does not make the two identical: the potential non-identity marking out their potential separation and the transformation of socially generated powers and knowledge into concrete ends rather than socially constituted means of abstract domination. The question of consciousness is inseparable from the issue of class position and interests. While the issue of class consciousness

is often discussed in terms of the dichotomy between the objective position of wage-labour as a class in itself and the subjective position of wage-labour as a class for itself (Marx, 1956), this is inconsistent with Marx's method in *Capital*.

The determinants of class involve both objectivity and subjectivity. Both the concept of collective consciousness and the notion of interests are socially and historically determinate. Consciousness is more than a reflex of objective conditions: the categories of social mediation delineate forms of consciousness as intrinsic movements in forms of social being. Class determination therefore entails socially and historically determinate forms of subjectivity (views of self and society) that are rooted in the forms of social mediation specific to capitalism. Social class is a structured and structuring social form of meaning and consciousness (Postone, 1993: 322). This has important implications for what we are and what we can know. Consciousness is neither a straightforward reflex of our material surroundings nor a product of ahistorical essential categories. As Edward Thompson noted there is an essential ambiguity to our 'being': 'part subjects, part-objects, the voluntary agents in our own involuntary determinations (Thompson, 1978: 79). Subjectivity and consciousness are not static and fixed entities but part of a process of becoming that develop at the intersection of determination and self-activity (*ibid.*: 106). The development of a universal form of class consciousness is, therefore, by no means inevitable, but arises as a possibility owing to the logical and historical specificity of social mediation in capitalist society.

Whilst the domination of capitalist society by abstract labour generates ideologies of abstract universalism, the dual aspect of labour in capitalism allows for the emergence of another form of universality: a non-abstract and non-homogeneous form of universalism that does not exist in opposition to particularism. This form of generality is made up of activities and products that would be dissimilar outside capitalism but which are organised and categorised as similar in capitalism. This is not a totality but a whole made up of particulars. Hence, we can see both the radical possibilities and real limitations of social movements. All social movements, including the labour movement are forms of particularistic resistance that develop against reifying forms of real abstraction. The consciousness generated by these forms of struggle is necessarily partial and limited owing to the way in which it is mediated by categories and concepts that were determined through the processes of real abstraction against which these struggles are targeted. Within capital the totality can never be grasped

or adequately represented: the antinomies of capital as a social form are inseparable from the duality of human consciousness as determined by labour as self-constituting reality. The contradictions of dual consciousness cannot be resolved within this contradictory totality. The particular form and intensity of reification is historically contingent and determined through the ability of social groups to challenge abstract universalism through concrete and particularistic struggles. This can be illustrated through an exploration of the changing forms of social movement associated with the decomposition of Keynesianism and the development of neo-liberal globalisation.

Keynesianism, Neo-liberalism and Beyond…Towards a Concrete Universalism?

The social form of Keynesianism was determined by the ability of the labour movement to successfully pursue concrete and particularistic struggles. The partial and one-sided nature of these struggles, however, resulted in the fetished and perverted ideologies of labourism and social democracy. The dialectical and dynamic relationship between the dual determinations of labour resulted in the development of concrete and particularistic forms of struggle against these perverted forms: the struggle of new social movements against the abstract universalism of social democracy and an assault on organised labour within the labour process legitimated by an attack on the fetishised particularism of trade union action. Money is the ultimate expression of abstract universalism and monetarism an intensification of the processes of reification that obscures the existence of capitalism as a social totality regulated by abstract labour. The determination of the forms of consciousness associated with post-modernism (fragmentation, diversity, autonomy, flexibility) are simultaneously a challenge to the abstract universalism of money and, because of the partial and limited nature of new social movement action in the sphere of consumption and exchange, re-determines and intensifies the reified and fetishised categories of bourgeois society. This is reflected in post-structuralist accounts of consumption in which self-referential symbols constitute a reified consciousness that denies the objectivity of labour and the possibility of grounded consciousness or critique (Baudrillard, 1981). A totalising struggle against abstraction and reification is necessary to overcome capitalism. This must be premised however on a recognition of the ongoing dialectic between consciousness

and action and a critical and self-reflexive epistemology. On the margins of contemporary social movement politics there is growing evidence that a movement that embraces these traits is indeed emerging.

The process of neo-liberal restructuring has had a devastating impact on traditional labour movement politics. Whilst the mainstream response of both wings of the labour movement has been to seek different forms of productivist alliances with capital, new forms of politics are emerging at the margins that seek to defend the progressive advances associated with Keynesianism, whilst overcoming the alienated forms of organisation associated with labour movement politics and state regulated welfare services. These include new anti-capitalist alliances between workers and the unemployed, between movements across a range of single issues such as environmentalists, gay and lesbian rights, asylum-seekers and migrants. These movements are inherently internationalists. The focus of struggles are the regulatory nodes of global capital: World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, European Union, City of London. The focus is simultaneously local and global: forms of direct action that confront the realities of capital and state as it affects everyday life. The organisational form of these alliances goes beyond the reified organisational forms of both traditional labour movement and single issue politics. They also challenge the notion of the party as the 'correct' organisational form to lead an assault on state power: an attempt to grasp 'the mechanisms of the *circulation of struggles*, both across geographical areas and among different sectors of the class' (Marazzi, 1995: 90).

These struggles that have developed in opposition to neo-liberalism highlight the emergence of a new form of internationalism that is springing from the plurality of resistance to the imposition of capitalist abstraction (De Angelis, 2000). This 'concrete internationalism' is diametrically opposite to the old abstract ideological internationalism of socialist/communist ideology as expressed through the party. The new anti-capitalism articulates a consciousness of non-abstract or concrete universalism. It transcends the one-sidedness of labourism and social democracy as fetished movements of particularity and the fetishism of spurious totality underpinning the associationalism of single issue 'new social movements'. In the new transnational spaces of global capitalism, a new totalising movement of labour is developing: an anti-capitalist internationalism premised on diversity, democracy and universal human rights that transcends the limited and partial consciousness of the labour movement. The task of re-thinking working class consciousness is, therefore, more than an academic exercise:

it constitutes a praxiological process undertaken by social groups in their day to day struggles and resistance against capital. As I have argued in this chapter, it is by no means inevitable that these progressive forms of consciousness will become hegemonic. In the vacuum created by the decomposition of Keynesianism new partial and reified forms of consciousness are emerging that strengthen and reinforce the abstract power of neo-liberal globalisation. In Europe these are constituted by Third Way social democracy and the Fourth Way xenophobic nationalism and racism. The development of recent anti-capitalist mobilisation raises the possibility of a Fifth Way. The practical possibilities of this route have been demonstrated practically in recent mobilisations against neo-liberalism. These struggles will however remain marginal in the absence of a vigorous intellectual engagement with the abstract, reified social forms associated with neo-liberalism. Re-thinking the limits of working class consciousness is thus a vital prerequisite for the renewal of anti-systemic politics in the global era.

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4 Hayek, Bentham and the Global Work Machine: The Emergence of the Fractal-Panopticon

MASSIMO DE ANGELIS

Introduction

The main underlying thesis of this paper is that the realm of capitalist work has not declined with the emergence of the neoliberal form of global capital, but has increased.[1] This statement must be qualified. First, by work I mean here what Marx called 'abstract labour', which he defines as 'human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure' (Marx, 1867: 128). In another paper (De Angelis, 1995) I have argued that this aspect of work in capitalist societies is alienated, imposed and boundless in character. Also, it includes both waged and unwaged forms and it is a site of struggle. Second, because of the contested nature of abstract labour, its 'imposition' must take place within a strategic framework.

In the next section I discuss the main features of this framework in terms of the 'fusion' of two systems: the market order as conceived by neoliberal economist Friedrich Hayek, and the panopticon as conceptualised by Jeremy Bentham. The result of this 'fusion' is the planned architecture of a 'fractal-panopticon', a mechanism to extract labour from the entirety of the social field. I then proceed to illustrate how some recent trends in the global economy, namely international trade and foreign direct investment (FDI), can be conceived in terms of this mechanism, and how the latter is rooted in struggle. Finally, I conclude with some remarks regarding the constitution of subjectivities beyond abstract labour and the global fractal-panopticon.

The Market Order and Work: the Fractal-Panopticon

The movements of the 1960s and 1970s resulted in a great exodus from the confinement of authority, in the factory, in the school, in the home. Refusal of work, understood as refusal of activity imposed by an authority posed outside the subjects of the doers, forced capital to deploy strategies aiming at co-opting the subjectivities constituting this exodus. As the struggles of the 1930s forced capital to recuperate workers' demands in the form of Keynesianism, the neoliberal strategies of the 1980s and 1990s attempted to recuperate the refusal of work of the 1970s by encouraging 'flexible' forms of work on the entire social field.[2]

Neoliberal strategies promoted by states (Cornerhouse, 1998), and based on a programme of new enclosures,[3] increasingly acted as a compulsive force that aimed at providing a competitive framework of social interaction at a global level, not only in the traditional spheres of industry, but also in several other social fields such as health, education, and in the production and access of 'public goods'.

What is the relation between widespread competition and capital's imposition of work? What is the consequent vision of human sociality embedded in neoliberal strategies? To address these questions is to capture the role of both waged and unwaged labour within the global circuit of social production and reproduction. But in order to recognise this role, we must try to identify the general characteristics of this global circuit, of this mechanism that promotes and lives on human competition.

I suggest an interpretative framework of the modern market mechanism in terms of the fusion of the insights of two champions of capitalist work: Friedrich Hayek and Jeremy Bentham. The market – as viewed by Hayek – and the panopticon – the confinement house designed by Bentham – seem at first to inhabit two different universes. The first one is the galaxy of freedom, the order of a *cosmos*, kept alive as an unintended result of the interaction of choices freely made by individuals. The other is the constellation of dungeons, the *taxis* designed by the freedom of the planner that hold with a grip the lives of the subjects of the plan and who has a project in mind and wants it to put it to work. Hayek, the paladin of market freedom and spontaneous order, has no kind words for Jeremy Bentham and his likes, the rationalist constructionists with their designed order (Hayek, 1988: 52). I argue however that there is a common theoretical plane between the market mechanism understood in Hayek's terms as a mechanism of co-ordination of individual plans, and Bentham's principle of panopti-

cism, understood as mechanism of discipline, secure management of a multitude and extraction of labour. This common theoretical plane can be recognised once we discard Hayek's metaphysical views on evolution, and compare Hayek's market and Bentham's panopticism as two given mechanisms, their rationales rather than their genealogy.

Hayek and Bentham

Hayek and the Market

Hayek sees the market as a mechanism that fulfils a crucial role, that of co-ordinating individual plans in a context in which first, individuals are private individuals (isolated from each other by social barriers defined by property rights); second, no central authority can ever know *everything* regarding individual's plans and norms of action. The recognition of this space that is not colonisable by a superior authority – Hayek calls this *tacit knowledge* – is for Hayek the justification (and indeed the evolutionary cause) of a market order, an impersonal mechanism made of abstract rules within which individual subjectivities within society can be co-ordinated. The abstract character of these market rules are, for Hayek, what guarantees individual freedoms.

In Hayek thus, supreme power of control is invested in the market mechanism, in the impersonal machine. This is a necessity due to the inability of any individual (or institution) to co-ordinate individual 'efforts' and plans. Individual freedom follows from this individual's ignorance (incompleteness) of social knowledge. Since individuals use far more knowledge than that they have at their disposal, because knowledge is embedded in goods and institutions they knowingly or tacitly use in their daily business, then 'general intellect' and social power become a condition of existence of the market:

> The sum of the knowledge of all the individuals exists nowhere as an integrated whole. The great problem is how we can all profit from this knowledge, which exists only dispersed as the separate, partial, and sometimes conflicting beliefs of all men (Hayek 1960: 25).

It is not only knowledge that is dispersed. But its resulting praxis is far from being the result of the sum of individual praxis. The social power of the social co-operation of labour is far greater than the aggregate powers of

the individuals. The market machine's rationale is to profit from the dispersion, partiality and conflict. This is the core idea within Hayek's liberal philosophy of freedom: the market as an efficient machine co-ordinating individuals isolated by social barriers (property rights), who are free to choose upon the opportunities offered to them and in turn whose action create the emergent order of the market.

Prices and other market indicators are abstract representations of human activities, opportunities, and expectations. By letting themselves be guided by prices and other market indicators (Hayek, 1978: 60) people have learnt to substitute abstract rules for 'the needs of known fellows' and for coercive, imposed ends (*ibid.*: 61).

The end result of this market process cannot be judged 'by criteria which are appropriate only to a single organised community serving a given hierarchy of ends. Because such a hierarchy of ends is not relevant to the complex structure composed of countless individual economic arrangements' (*ibid*.: 183). The market order is only a *mechanism*, which cannot be judged on the values of its end results, because it is an impersonal *device* co-ordinating the multitude of ends and plans of isolated private individuals. The market is beyond ethics, and 'it does *not* ensure that what general opinion regards as more important needs are always satisfied before the less important ones. This is the chief reason why people object to it' (*ibid.*: 183).

But if the market order cannot be said to have a purpose, 'it may yet be highly conducive to the achievement of many different individual purposes not known as a whole to any single person', thus 'it clearly makes sense to try to produce conditions' for its existence (*ibid.*: 183).

Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon

Jeremy Bentham's panopticon is another mechanism of co-ordination. The role of 'freedom' here is a bit more disguised, because the panopticon is from the start an institution of confinement, and extraction of labour, and one designed explicitly for this double purpose. As it is known, the panopticon is a circular building with at the centre a watching tower with large windows. The peripheral ring is subdivided in cells, each of which has a window facing the outside and one window facing the tower. The light coming from the outside windows therefore, allows the occupants of each cell to be seen as in many little shadow theatres (Foucault, 1977), while the

inspectors in the central tower, protected by blinds and by an opposite source of light, are at any time invisible to the eye of the occupant of a cell.

The cover of the 1787 project boasts the general principle of the panopticon (here called, following Foucault [1977], *panopticism*), which applicability, according to Bentham, is generalisable to any circumstance in which, to use Hayek's terms, individual plans are not matching. What prisoners, workers, the poor, 'mad' persons, patients, students have in common is the fact that they need to be put under inspection, because their individual 'plans' do not match the plan that Bentham has in mind for them. To a variety of degrees, they all share the same desire of *escaping* from the particular confinement in which they are put, and *exercise less effort* in the work that they are asked to perform. Inspection fulfils this double role of security and the minimisation of shirking. The innovation of Bentham is in his opinion that the principle of *panopticism* is generalisable to any situation in which 'persons of any descriptions' would tend to follow or make plans that do not conform to a given norm, and, therefore, require to be kept under inspection.

Bentham promises the solution of all problems pertaining to different spheres (health, education, production, economy, crime management, and public finance) through the application of 'a simple idea of Architecture!' (Bentham, 1787: iii), that is by a spatial configuration of *relations* between bodies, through the arrangement of bodies in space.

This 'new mode of obtaining power, of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example' offered by the panopticon, is based on a simple principle: 'the *centrality* of the inspectors situation, combined with the well known and most effectual contrivances for *seeing without being seen*' (Bentham, 1787: 21). This immediately introduces a quality in the relation of power. Power is exercised not so much by the actual presence of the inspector over the inspected. The inspected does not need to *have full knowledge* of being inspected and the inspector *does not have* full knowledge of the plans and behaviour of the inspected. In fact, this 'ideal perfection' is not possible, because it 'would require that each person should actually be…constantly…under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them'. Thus, 'this being impossible, the next thing to be wished for is, that, at every instant, seeing reason to believe as much, and not being able to satisfy himself to the contrary, he should *conceive* himself to be so' (Bentham, 1787: 3).

This situation would enable 'the *apparent omnipresence* of the inspector…combined with the extreme facility of his *real presence*' (Bentham,

1787: 25). The *conception*, rather than the reality, of constant surveillance is what gives the inspector a god-like character (omnipresence). To paraphrase Hayek, Bentham knows that the individual in authority – in the name of the inspector – cannot have full knowledge of the inspected, his actions, and his plans. But Bentham uses an architectural design to reverse this potential ignorance and turn it into a potential knowledge to the inspector's advantage.

The Striking Similarities

There are striking similarities and complementarities between Hayek's and Bentham's systems. While Bentham's panopticon is a closed system, clearly limited in space, Hayek's market order is an open one, which spans over the social field without inherent limit. Yet, Bentham's micro-technology of power is generalisable thanks to the *modular* properties of the panopticon, which allow a series of watchtowers to be integrated so as to control larger areas (Bentham, 1787: 18). Hayek's market on the other hand, is the representation of a social organism, but one whose dynamics of interactions among individuals is particularisable to any area of the social field, as demonstrated in the last three centuries of commodification of many spheres of social life and its recent intensification. Therefore, though their starting sphere of application is different, the two systems can be imagined as 'convergent'.

Also, the striking similarity between the two orders is that both rely on individual freedom understood as free choice from a *given* menu. While this is obvious in Hayek's market order, it is not immediately so in Bentham. However, this is the case for both inmates and 'inspectors'. Let us take the inmates. Letter 13 is entitled 'On the Means of Extracting Labour'. These means are based on putting the prisoners in condition to exercise a *choice* and, therefore, to reap a reward.[4] Here, individual freedom of choice disconnected, as in Hayek, from the collective freedom to choose the constraints of that choice, amounts to a *means* to extract labour![5]

Another example is the co-optation of the unwaged work of the inspector's family which, according to Bentham, would increase the 'inspector force' or productivity of power.[6] This unwaged work by the inspectors' family members is one which is unintended, exercised by free individuals operating within a *context* that has been designed for the purpose of surveillance *and* labour extraction.[7]

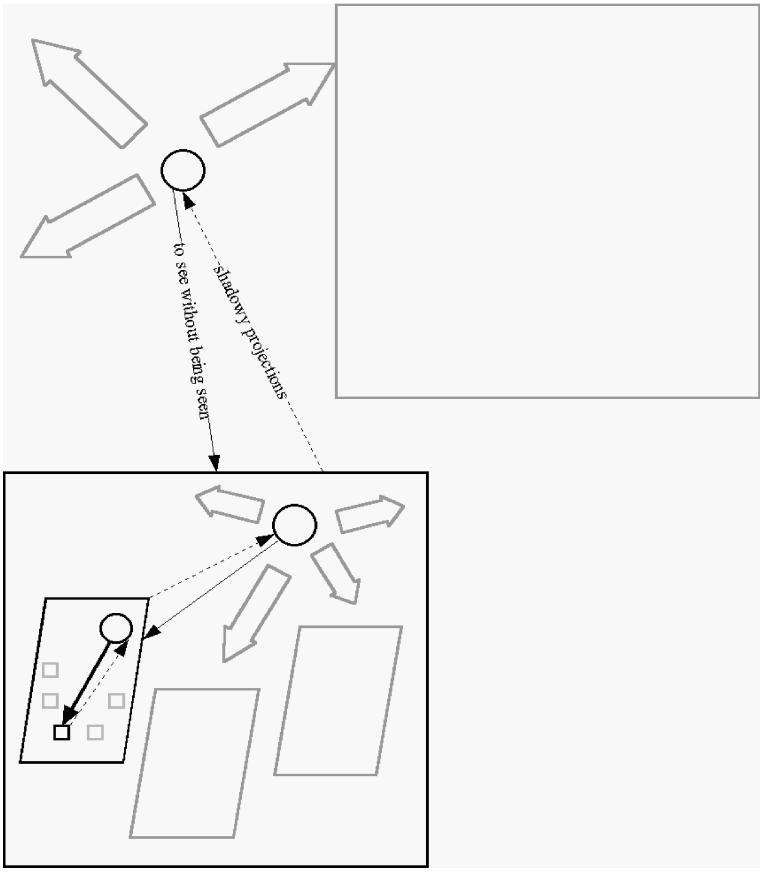
In both Bentham's and Hayek's order, power's knowledge of individual actions and plans is not perfect, and both orders' rationale is to tap into this knowledge. In both cases, this co-optation of knowledge and choices is at the basis of the system's maximisation of efficiency. Within their respective orders, power's acknowledgement of imperfect knowledge becomes an opportunity to profit.

In both Hayek and Bentham we have a clear emphasis on the management of unintended consequences of given parameters, rules. Whether these are embedded in a designed architecture (Bentham) or the (naïvely believed) product of a evolutionary order (Hayek), the point that interests both is the resulting system-like mechanism of co-ordination. The system-like co-ordination can emerge only if the individuals are allowed a sphere of freedom within which to operate. For both Bentham and Hayek this mechanism is rooted in a system of individual free-choice, but individual free-choice always comes with a rigid *given* set of 'constraints'. In the microcosm of Bentham's panopticon, this constraint is the result of an ingenious project. In the organic system of Hayek's market, constrains are believed to be the result of 'evolution', while we know this evolution is the end product of power relations defining property rights. Yet, in both cases, individual freedom is the main condition for the system to operate at the maximum and turn 'individual plans' into social efficiency.

Another similarity is the notion that the co-ordinating power, the one that distributes punishments and rewards to individual singularities, is invisible. In both cases, there is an automatic mechanism that co-ordinates individual subjectivities, and in both cases the latter do not relate to each other *directly* but through the mediation of other things. In the case of the panopticon, it is the central power of the inspectors' apparatus that mediates between individuals and thus co-ordinates the division of labour of a multitude. In Hayek's case, it is the diffused power of money and market indicators that does the mediation.

Finally, in both cases we have individual confinement as a presupposed basis of the extent of their freedom. In the case of the individuals of the panopticon, the confinement is given by physical barriers of the walls of the cell. The purpose of 'safe confinement' is to prevent escape and enforce labour. Safe confinement *isolates* the inspected from each other in order to dash their *hope*, and dangerous '*concert among minds*' (Bentham, 1787: 32). In the case of Hayek, the barriers are social, and constructed in the forms of *property rights.* In both cases however, the very existence of these barriers is *naturalised*.

Figure 1. Fractal-Panopticon



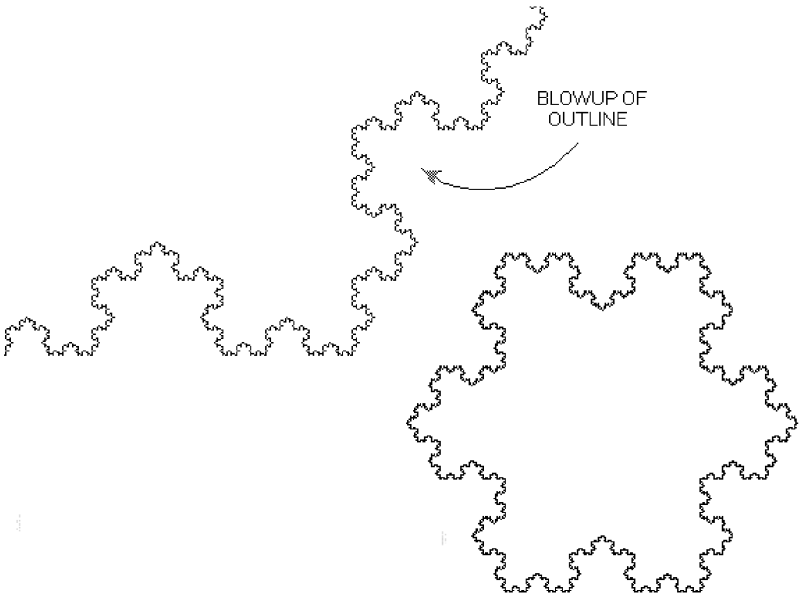
The Fractal-Panopticon

The property of modularity of Bentham's panopticon opens up an understanding of the current global market order under construction as being, in fact, imbued with the property of *panopticism*. Following Bentham, I understand the latter as a modality of power that rests on the principle of 'to see without being seen', made possible by a flow of information that turns real subjects and activities into *data*, shadowy projections of real subjects. Combining these principles of panopticism with its property of *modularity*

and Hayek's characteristics of the market as a co-ordinating mechanism of a private individual's actions, we can define the fractal-panopticon as a mechanism of interrelated virtual inspection houses. Each panopticon, that is each set of interrelationship of control and resistance, is in turn a singularity within a series of singularities which stand in relation to a 'watchtower' posited outside thus forming a greater panopticon. And so on, in a potentially infinite series. In Figure 1, each singularity (individual or set of individuals, such as 'firms', sectors, cities, nations, regions, etc.) relates to a 'watchtower' which sees, classifies, strikes, punishes and rewards according to the modality of the market. This 'watchtower' is invisible, but its effects are tangible and operate through a process of competition.

One of the properties of the fractal-panopticon is that each singularity is self-similar to the other. In the geometrical theory of fractals the property of self-similarity means that every feature of a fractal shape is reproduced by the same ratio in a reduced or blown-up picture (see Figure 2). If we reflect upon the vision of the human condition that is derived from neoliberal and globalisation strategies and summarised in the fractal-panopticon, we find an analogous characteristic. Each 'scale' of social productive aggregation (an individual, a 'firm', a city, a district, a country, a macro-region or free trade area) faces strong pressures to turn into a node set against the 'rest of the world'. An individual versus other individuals, a firm versus other firms, a city versus other cities, a country versus other countries, a free trade area versus other free trade areas. In the sense of engaging in a competitive race, each social node, each crystallised field of social relations appears as self-similar with respect to the others. At each of these scales, or levels of aggregation, each node has to cope with limited resources (budget constraint) and submit to the rules of a competitive drive *vis-à-vis* their own 'rest of the world'. These limited resources presuppose of course a definition of property rights and states strategies of enclosure analogous in their function to Bentham's safe confinement, which aim at restricting the immediate sphere of action of each productive node so as to preclude other courses of action but the capitulation to and engagement in the competitive game. The pervasiveness of competition to all spheres of life is, therefore, a force through which people engage into a continuous activity of abstract labour, in both waged and unwaged form, understood as 'human labour-power expended without regard to the form of its expenditure'.

Figure 2. The property of self-similarity in fractals



Some main properties of the fractal-panopticon can be discussed in terms of the following:

1. Operational mode of power: to see without being seen.
2. Real human activity represented through 'shadowy projections'.
3. Contextual relation between 'inside' and 'outside'.
4. Individual freedom and socially constructed cells.
5. Pervasiveness of the 'watchtower'.
6. Articulation between control and disciplinary mechanisms.

(1) To see without being seen. The relation between each singularity and a watchtower is constituted by the principle 'to see without being seen'. In Bentham, this enables 'the *apparent omnipresence* of the inspector…combined with the extreme facility of his *real presence*' (Bentham, 1787: 25). The apparent omnipresence of the inspector is obtained through an act of imagination in which the singularity 'conceives' the inspector to be omnipresent. *Fear* of omnipresence is the guiding force of the panopticon's mechanism of control. On the other hand, fear needs to be nurtured

by exemplary strikes, thus power must show the extreme facility of its *real presence*. The process of competition, combined with the flexiblisation of labour markets and the reduction in entitlements, contributes to the formation of a conception of a pervasive threat and the actualisation of fear.

(2) Real human activity represented through shadowy projection ('data'). Power is in the condition to strike when it is in the condition of watching. Shadowy projections represent the flow of information at the disposal of the 'watchtower'. In Bentham's panopticon, from the position of the watchtower, the inspector does not have a correct and comprehensive knowledge of the reality of subjects, but one which is sufficient to exercise power upon them. Shadowy projections are edited information of life-activity, and the kind of selection that goes to form that information is what is sufficient to the mechanism of control.

Shadowy projections can take many forms. In Bentham's panopticon, as in the Chinese theatre, they took the form of little human figures projected by an outside light source to the watchtower at the centre of the building. In contemporary capitalism, as in Hayek, they take the form of prices, and, when these are not possible, performance indicators of a variety of kinds that institutions operating in fields such as health and education are increasingly required to adopt. Prices and other performance indicators, embed that kind of edited information that allows an 'agent' located outside the singular panopticon, to compare, control, and strike, thus dispensing judgement *and* at the same time, acting as a virtual omnipresent inspector. As shadows, their visibility depends entirely on the real subjects and their life-experience being hidden, but only offer an edited information of real life activity. What is left out of prices is the flesh and blood life experience of work. Prices and performance indicators *are* pervasive and operational simulacra of real life, and represent the interface between one panopticon and another. As devices of 'visibility', of representation, of 'openness', they project the life-activity within a singularity to the disciplinary force of the outside, a discipline the effect of which is to turn back on the activities of the doers to shape their rhythms of work, to keep the pressure of an endless rat race. Even Bentham (1787: 40), from his late eighteenth century perspective, could see the virtues of 'open government' of his panopticon, calling for the disclosures of accounts, the possibility of its take-over if a different manager could envisage more efficient ways to extract work from the inmates.

(3) Contextual relation between 'inside' and 'outside'. With reference to Figure 1, the mechanism of competition *vis-à-vis* an external 'watchtow-

er' – among individuals on the labour market, schools, shop floors, etc. – coexists with a mechanism of discipline and control within each singularity. Thus, each singularity is part of a system *vis-à-vis* the set of interrelated 'watchtowers', and is at the same time a singularity incorporating a 'watchtower', an internal mechanism of discipline specific for that singularity. The extent to which external and internal 'watchtowers' predominate in specific cases, is a contextual and empirical matter, as discussed in the next section in the case of the relation between externalised and internalised transactions for transnational corporations.

(4) Individual freedom. Unlike freedom in Bentham's panopticon, the individual freedom in a fractal-panopticon is in principle not restricted between work and non-work (corresponding to some reward as opposed to 'bread and water'), but among a multiplicity of waged and unwaged occupations which, however, tend all to turn into work because all are regulated within the overall mechanism of the fractal-panopticon. It is as if the individuals being inspected in Bentham's panopticon had also the choice to leave their place of confinement, but as soon as they leave the front door, they enter another panopticon. It is in this context that we must study the rhetoric of flexibility and the correspondent restructuring of education which aims at teaching students to cope with the demands of the market. Of course, as we have seen, the individual freedom here arises out of a context. In the fractal-panopticon barriers are social, given by property rights, entitlements and the continuous character of enclosures.

(5) Pervasiveness of the 'watchtower'. The most insidious aspect of the fractal-panopticon is that the material presence of the 'watchtower' is combined with its apparent immateriality. It is for this reason that we have put the word in quotes. This is the trick of the market. Once we forget the genealogy and preservation of property rights as a process of enclosures, a genealogy that continuously creates the *context* of competitive interaction within and between different nodes of social fields, all 'agents' participating in the framework of the fractal-panopticon are at the same time 'inspected' as well as constitutive parts of what Bentham called the 'inspector force'. In Bentham's panopticon this is the case for the inspectors, which would be in turn inspected by visitors of the premises. However, it is only in the fractal-panopticon that also the lower ranks of the inspected become, through actively engaging in the process of competition, an inspection force.

It is for this reason that a radical process of emancipation from capital's fractal-panopticon as the mechanism for the imposition of work,

cannot only be seen as the transcendence of the 'watchtower', as this is not constituted independently of the actions of the inspected, as in Bentham's panopticon. To paraphrase Italian Marxist Mario Tronti, the inspected must recognise themselves as part of the inspection force, if they want to counterpoise all inspectors and endless rat races to themselves.[8]

(6) Articulation between control and disciplinary mechanisms. Foucault (1977) pointed out that the polarity punishment/reward embedded in disciplinary mechanisms is a factory of ethics. More recently, several authors have argued that as the confinements of disciplinary institutions were thrown into crisis by the struggles in factories, homes, schools and rice paddies of the 1960s and 1970s, capital was forced to recapture this flight of desire by deterritorialising discipline, and turn disciplinary societies into control societies (Deleuze, 1995; Hardt and Negri, 2000). While in disciplinary societies individual subjectivities faced a discrete sequence of institutions of confinement, in control societies the mechanism of cooptation is deployed on a continuous basis, with a blurred distinction among institutions.

> The family, the school, the army, the factory are no longer distinct analogical spaces that converge towards an owner – state or private power – but coded figures – deformable and transformable. Even the art has left the space of enclosure in order to enter into the open circuit of the bank. The conquest of the market is made by grabbing control and no longer by disciplinary training, by fixing the exchange rate much more than lowering costs, by the transformation of the product more than by specialisation of production.…Marketing has become the centre or the 'soul' of the corporation.…The operation of the market is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters.…Man is no longer man enclosed, but man in debt (Deleuze 1995: 181).

But debt of course is at the same time a form of enclosure, not in terms of physical confinement, but in the original sense of separation from social wealth, a separation that acts as a material force to turn activity into abstract labour and, therefore, accumulation. All the same, the instruments of monetary economic policies not only attempt to control monetary flows, but reconfigure costs of production over the social field and thus operate as a disciplinary force. Also, as we will see in the next section, in the global fractal-panopticon, the continuous reconfiguration of global production chains is not simply the attempt to direct flows of subjectivities, but also to discipline them along classic parameters of accumulation and work *vis-à-vis* their struggles.

In other words, the distinction between discipline and control is not so neat. On the contrary, they are complementary, and always have been in the history of the capitalist mode of production. What changes within this history, is the *form* of their articulation. In cybernetics, every control mechanism is based on *given* parameters, that is norms or, in a social sense, 'ethics', 'values', normalised modes of operations. There is of course a distinction between how these parameters are set, whether from the outside or, as in 'learning systems' from within control mechanisms (Skyttner, 1996). The ideal within the fractal-panopticon is that only the contextual parameters are set as discrete policies, i.e. liberalisation policies and new enclosures. Then the competitive market mechanism set in place by these parameters, with the help of the enforcement of 'law and order', is supposed to normalise, in disciplinary fashion, the cracks arising out of struggles.

Abstract Labour and the Global Fractal Panopticon

In what has now become an often-quoted formulation, geographer David Harvey (1989: 284–285) defines the current transformation of global capitalism as the result of 'time-space compression'. For Anthony Giddens 'globalisation can…be defined as the intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa'(1990: 64). These formulations are certainly suggestive but their interpretative framework ignores the centrality of the capitalist relation of work, and the boundless drive of profit making associated with it. If we put this contradictory relation at the centre of our analysis, both Harvey's 'time-space compression' and Giddens' 'intensification of world-wide social relations' imply the increased pervasiveness of capitalist relations as well as their contested nature. 'Local happenings', such as declining wages in manufacturing in countries in the North, are shaped by events happening in distant and remote places, e.g. even lower wages in countries in the South producing the same goods, or producing commodities entering the wage basket of the workers in the North. This aspect of the 'intensification of world-wide social relations' is certainly central to the process of capitalist integration in so far as they are an 'intensification' of capitalist relations of production, which are exploitative and ridded with conflict. In this section I want to

illustrate with the case of international trade and FDI how the fractal-panopticon discussed in the previous section becomes operational.[9]

Trends of Trade in Manufacturing

First, we must notice the increase in *international trade in components and semi-processed manufacturers*, the growth of which started in the 1960s and soon overtook world trade. While world trade expanded by almost 33% since the 1960s, manufactured goods as a percentage of total world exports increased from 55% in 1980 to 75% in 1990. This aggregate change has also been accompanied by changes in the suppliers of manufacturing goods (Propokemko, 1997: 11; UNCTAD, 1999b).

The increase in manufacturing productivity, the intensification of patterns of competition and consequent systemic glut in the market has started to have an effect on the terms of trade commanded by manufacturing goods. Between 1980 and 1996, the terms of trade of countries of the South exporting their manufactures (UNCTAD, 1999a: table 2.5) has fallen by 18%. As a result, 'many manufactures exported by developing countries are now beginning to behave more like primary commodities as a growing number of countries simultaneously attempt to raise their exports in the relatively stagnant and protected markets of industrial countries' (UNCTAD, 1999b: VI).

The first implication of this trend is a cheapening of goods entering the wage basket of metropolitan workers. From the perspective of wage earners, this has absorbed, at least partially, the effect of the decline in real wages that has occurred through the 1980s and 1990s in several Western countries. In Marxian terms, a greater share of import-consumption is a case of a classical relative surplus-value strategy[10] aimed at minimising and bypassing workers' resistance against a reduction in the value of labour-power (Caffentzis, 1998). On the supply side, the opening of markets implies the diffusion of the real or perceived competitive threat, and thus, together with other institutional factors, contributes to promote workers' competition among themselves, that in turn again increases relative surplus-value. At the same time of course, power relations shaping wages and productivity also greatly depends on the real and perceived *threat* of capital mobility resulting from competitive pressure.[11] This threatened mobility can, in fact, be used as a disciplinary device in wage settlements.

Another related aspect is that in the context of the global market, the increasing importance of export-oriented production allows companies located within national borders room to escape the constraints of workers' domestic purchasing power.

Transnational Corporations and International Trade

Linked to the increase in *international trade in components and semi-processed manufactures* is the internationalisation of production flows directly managed or at least overseen by big corporate capital. Indeed, another relevant stylised fact regarding trade is that the great bulk of international trade is organised by large transnational corporations (TNCs). According to UNCTAD (1996a), TNCs account for two-thirds of world exports in good and services. Not only, but what acquires importance is the growth in intra-firm trade, which is trading *within* a particular transnational corporation located throughout the world. According to UNCTAD data, in the 1970s, intra-firm trade accounted for about 20% of world trade, it was one-third by the early 1990s, excluding intra-TNC trade in services (UNCTAD, 1993). This however could be a rough underestimate (Dicken, 1998: 43).

The spatial configuration of intra-firm trade is of course directly linked to TNCs' design of production networks, both within and outside its domain (i.e. web of subcontractors). This trade pattern occurs in the context of what some authors have called 'deep integration', which is a historically very different type of global integration.[12] Shallow integration characterised international economic integration before 1913, and consisted in 'arm's length trade in goods and services between independent firms and through international movements of portfolio capital' (UNCTAD, 1993: 113). Today's deep integration is organised and promoted by TNCs and refers to the movement away from north–south complementarity and specialisation and the development of a pattern of trade from inter-product to intra-product trade. This means that 'there is no longer a neat division of labour between countries' (Hoogvelt, 1997: 22).

Although clearly both deep and shallow integration coexist today, it is important to understand the specific nature of current globalisation processes. The features of deep integration are generally analysed in terms of *global production chains*, that is maps of how a sequence of productive functions are linked together within an overall process of production of

commodities.[13] Production chain analysis helps us to map how TNCs, aided by states (Dicken, 1998: 6–7) are slicing up production at the global level, thus making full use of the fractal-panopticon architecture.

Generally speaking, from the perspective of a TNC, individual functions within a global commodity chain may be integrated with other functions in two main ways: by means of externalised or internalised *transactions*. In the first case, individual and formally independent firms linked to other firms by means of the market perform a productive function. In terms of Figure 1, the firms competing to supply the TNC are singularities exposed to an external 'watchtower' constituted by their own process of competition. In the second case, each function within a productive chain may be located within a vertically integrated firm, and the external 'watchtower' operates here as a result of TNCs' competition among each other. Furthermore, both within the singularities represented by TNC and their smaller subcontractors, we have an internal 'watchtower', that is traditionally the more direct mechanism of command over labour.

In either case, both externalised and internalised transactions, when organised cross-border, point at the central importance of trade in constituting today's capitalist production process. Thus, firms' planning departments and market mechanisms are two forms of the same thing, namely a mechanism of co-ordination and regulation of production chains and command over labour. The reasons why a TNC chooses its mix of in-house and outsource functions, depend on a range of things, all of which have to do with risk and cost assessment and, ultimately, with the firm's strategic evaluation of its profitability, condition and opportunities. Also, it is clear that the greater the flexibility and pervasiveness of markets at the global level, the greater is the number of interconnections within a global fractal-panopticon, the greater is the range of opportunities for TNCs to reduce costs and minimise and externalise risks. There is, therefore, a symbiotic relation between the neoliberal drive towards trade and market liberalisation, TNCs' vantagepoint, and the constitution of production processes worldwide and the capitalist imposition of work. It is in this sense that 'transnational enterprise is evolving from company organisation to a loosely confederated network structure (global web)' (Hoogvelt, 1997: 127). Trade thus, both internalised and externalised, is what keeps together geographically displaced production processes at the global level and enforces the discipline of abstract labour.

This is because each productive singularity within a production chain represents at the same time a configuration of value production, i.e. of

power relations, and not just a technical configuration for the production of use-values. Not only power relations between, for example, subcontractor and subcontracted firms (in the case in which the market plays the co-ordinating role) or between various departments within a vertically integrated TNC. Also, and more poignantly, it is about power relations at the point of production, that is, around the quality and quantity of expenditure of labour, both between TNCs and the subcontracted firms and *within* them.

If the framework of analysis is the whole global fractal-panopticon, every externalisation is somebody else's internalisation. Thus, TNC's externalisation of risks involved with outsourcing implies, of course, the internalisation of risks by subcontracted companies. For subcontracted firms to be able to internalise this risk, they must be able to rely on a workforce that is flexible enough to absorb required changes in production. In other words, subcontracted firms must be able to *externalise to themselves* possible costs of adjustment. A configuration of power relations that rotates around job search in a flexible labour market and 'life-long education' as unwaged work, as well as a management of public expenditures that preclude non-market ways to gain access to social wealth, are, therefore, at the cornerstone of profitably viable TNC's outsourcing strategy. This implies ultimately that doers themselves are competing with each other as singularities within their own specific fractal (the 'labour market', entitlements within workfare schemes, bursaries and grants within education), and as in any other layers of the fractal-panopticon the process of competition gives rise to the emergence of a correspondent 'watch-tower'.

Thus, as infinite, interconnected self-similar layers of invisible 'watchtowers' emerge out the pervasive process of competition, also command over labour is made invisible, as it is displaced through an archipelago of productive units in competition with each other. The command over labour appears in a more discrete and sanitised form as *market transactions* and *trade flows*. In many spheres, market transactions seem to gradually replace the conveyor-belt and the foreman's stopwatch as a device of command over labour.

There is thus a second implicit result that we can derive from production chains analysis understood within the architecture of a global-fractal panopticon: each functional node of a production chain is a site of implicit or explicit conflict over the quantity and quality of labour expenditure, as well as over the wages. It must be pointed out that within the overall sequence of a production chain, and it can be a long sequence with many

ramifications, the degree of impact and disrupting leverage of conflict within a particular node is, *ceteris paribus*, inversely proportional to the degree of spatial substitutability of that node. This continuous redefinition of commodity chains which is obtained through trade and foreign direct investment cannot be read in isolation from capital's needs to enforce capitalist work, manage conflict and regulate micro and macro patterns of insubordination at the point of production. In other words, growth of FDI and trade not only are instrumental in the continuous reshaping of global commodity chains, but create greater opportunities for capital to substitute functional nodes within global commodity chains. By therefore increasing the real or perceived degree of spatial substitutability of these nodes across space, FDI and international trade are systemic forces shaping a global fractal-panopticon.

Struggles and the Fractal-Panopticon

The fractal-panopticon is not the reality but is only one of the constitutive elements of it. Thus, our playing by the rules of the market which turns ourselves into constituting elements of a pervasive 'watchtower', whatever is our field of action, does not exhaust the determination of the real. The real is also made of struggles against disciplinary 'watchtowers', including those rooted within us. Indeed, the constitution of the fractal-panopticon on a global level results in an attempt by capital to escape the limitations imposed on accumulation by these struggles. This occurs not only in a genealogical sense – globalisation as capital's strategies to escape and co-opt the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s (Hardt and Negri, 2000) – but also in a physiological sense. By acknowledging the social conflict inherent in capitalist relations of production we can identify the dynamism of today's capital and, within it, the strategic role acquired by the mechanism of the fractal-panopticon to manage social antagonism.

Some important insights of this process can be gained by reading politically one of the most interesting models recently used to describe this continuous process of transnational re-definition of commodity chains: the 'flying geese development paradigm'. This paradigm, originally formulated in the 1930s by Japanese economist K. Akamatsu to describe change in industrial structure over time, has been recently used to describe patterns of regional integration in South Asia (UNCTAD, 1996b: 75–105). It defines trade as the most important vehicle for transferring goods and technology

across countries following a dynamic process of 'shifting comparative advantage', and, therefore, as the instrument for promoting a continuous social and geographical re-organisation of production and of the division of labour within and across countries. Although this model does not reflect the rapid catching up of certain follower countries such as China (Peng, 2000), its illustrative strength is still of great interest, as an example of a narrative embedding an alternative hidden story of social conflict.

The model divides countries within a region in two groups, followers and leaders. Imports from a leader country to follower countries allow new goods and technology in the latter. This allows production of the imported goods in the follower countries, which, eventually, will be able to export them to other countries. When at the end a country 'looses competitiveness' in one particular product, its domestic production is phased out, workers made redundant, and production replaced by imports from the country which has succeeded in building up a competitive industry in that sector by employing cheaper workers. One of the interesting insights of this model, is that the flying geese pattern of FDI 'is governed by shifts in competitiveness' which TNCs themselves help to generate (UNCTAD, 1996b: 76–77).

We can reformulate this flying geese pattern of trade and FDI in a way to bring at the forefront the embedded conflict of capitalist social relations of production and the hidden flesh and blood narrative of struggle. When workers in the leader countries succeed in setting up rigidities to the ability of their employers to offer low wages and appalling working conditions (through the often-long process of organisation), FDI shifts production or part of it into some follower countries. This has a twofold rationale. In leader countries the class composition is changed thus threatening the forms of organisation that workers were able to build on the basis of that composition. While cheaper imports from follower countries – together with restructuring of the class composition – allow the keeping in check the value of labour-power in leader countries, the development of new branches of production with a new configuration of labour processes allow starting anew the process of accumulation with a relatively lower social unrest.

In follower countries, where the imported class composition mixes with local cultural and socio-economic contents, class composition is relatively new and workers have still to go through the lengthy work of organisation. A pre-condition for this shaping of production in follower countries is of, course, a previous wave of enclosures, be this enforced

poverty on the countryside, reduction of various forms of entitlements such as food subsides, or any policy making poorly paid wage-labour a desirable alternative, especially in the context of a widespread reserve army.

This process, of course, does not have an inherent end. Both leader and follower countries will soon be hit by new waves of micro or macro forms of social unrest and struggles, in which the novelty is not only in terms of their re-occurrence in time, but also in terms of the form of organisation and characteristics of aspirations based on the new configuration of the class composition. Also, this model not only implicitly recognises a vertical hierarchy among regions within an international division of labour, but makes of this hierarchy the framework for capitalist accumulation and cannot envisage an end of this structural hierarchy, only its structural displacement. The socio-economic geography of the capitalist world is and always will be made of 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' and the dynamic principle of this development and underdevelopment is the attempt by capital to escape conflict.

In each group of countries, the slow work of organisation of a previously fragmented workforce, and the slow work of alliance building across groups in society, will reach a point in which it threats the viability of capital's accumulation. Finding a new tier of follower countries that offer large pool of labour-power and widespread poverty condition would then displace the struggles in the follower countries. Transferring relatively skilled labour production to lower tiers in the hierarchy and/or regulating/promoting inflows of migrants enjoying less rights than domestic citizens, as well as upgrading production to new lines and processes of production, will displace the struggles in the leader countries by changing their class composition.

This model reformulates at an international level the properties of regulation of class conflict that economic cycles always had at the national level (Bell and Cleaver, 1982). From the perspective of capital, the optimum management would be that in a trade region organised hierarchically, booms and busts, class composition and decomposition were synchronised in such a way as to allow a continuous *aggregate* flow of investment and thus accumulation, thus making local declines instrumental to a consistent overall accumulation and imposition of work.

The experience of South Asia seems to confirm this pattern at a regional level. The emergence of a first-tier NICs (newly industrialised countries) – Hong Kong, Republic of Korea, Singapore and Taiwan – were soon accompanied by that of a second tier – Indonesia, Malaysia and Thai-

land, under the impact of strong wage increases and the gaining of union rights in the first tier (especially South Korea). FDI from the first tier then moved to countries in the second tier in which wages were lower to promote labour- intensive production – especially in Indonesia. Finally, in the last 10 years, the rise of China as a major player in the region with a huge reservoir of cheap labour-power and a strong police/military intervening in the state planning of the promotion of infrastructures and management of social conflict, is again shifting 'comparative advantages' and contributing to displace social antagonism in the region and beyond.

In conclusion, 'shifting comparative advantage' is the economists' term for the recognition of the centrality of class struggle, its dynamic nature, and the strategies aimed at its continuous displacement within an ever-changing international division of labour. As in the case of the role played by the economic cycle in a national economy in attempting to regulate class conflict, the flying geese model captures the management of social conflict through the process of economic development, through continuous shifting of technical and social compositions from leader to followers, in such a way as to minimise workers' organisational impact. It must be observed that the disciplinary logic built within the shifting comparative advantage narrative, can only work to the extent that the different points of conflict in the leading and follower countries are temporally displaced and accept their role within the global fractal-panopticon. If David Harvey's (1989: 284–285) 'time-space compression' were to work for the organisation of struggling workers and other movements, it would not be difficult to show in practice the Achilles' heel of this capitalist strategy.

Beyond the Global Fractal-Panopticon?

At the basis of the constitution of the global fractal-panopticon, there are strategies of new enclosures which aim at the commodification of new spheres of life and at dismantling barriers erected as a result of past struggles to protect society from the market. In short, new enclosures define the parameters, the context of the global fractal-panopticon. In the contemporary world, new enclosures range from attacks on conditions of life by a World Bank-funded dam in India threatening hundreds of thousands of farming communities, to cuts in social expenditures in the UK threatening hundred of thousands of metropolitan families. Viewed in the light of the

overall *raison d'être* of the money circuit of capital, these diverse strategies share a common role: that of the *separation of people from whatever access to social wealth they have that is not mediated or co-optable by the market*. To some extent, such an access shields people from the market and from market pressures, giving them a *space* in which they are to a certain degree empowered *vis-à-vis* market discipline, competitive pressures and the grip of the global fractal-panopticon.

This set of neoliberal strategies of global integration did not occur in a vacuum, but *against* a set of social forces opposing it. 'IMF riots' against structural adjustment policies in the South (Walton and Seddon, 1994); growing 'network guerrillas' against the (failed) multilateral agreement on investment (MAI); mass action in Seattle against the WTO millennium round, are just some of the examples of these struggles against the parameters of capital's global fractal-panopticon.

The character of social movements and struggles against neoliberalism and the effects of capital's globalisation have evolved since the beginning of the 1980s. What is now occurring seems to be a process of *recomposition* of radical claims and social subjects, a process which is forcing every movement not just to seek alliances with others, but also to make the struggles of other movements their own, without first the need to submit the demands of other movements to an ideological test. Unlike the times in which communist and socialist organisations provided the hegemonic ideological frame of reference in many struggles, today the ideological frame of reference seems to be the ongoing *result* of the process of recomposition among different social subjects. The premise of this process of recomposition is the multidimensional reality of exploitative and oppressive relations as it is manifested in the lives and experiences of the many social subjects in the global fractal-panopticon. Subjectivities are emerging across fractals, and attempting to build forms of social co-operation which are alternatives to those constrained within a competitive jacket. The interaction among these social subjects in various types of struggle creates alternative modes of thinking and praxis, which are increasingly set against the hegemonic and monolithic *pensée unique*, which legitimises neoliberal strategies.

It is now impossible to define the basic elements of alternative social praxis, without testing it against the issues raised by the struggles of a great variety of social movements. The relief of poverty does not justify blind environmental destruction (thanks to the environmental movement); environmental protection does not justify the unemployment of thousands of

workers (thanks to the labour movement); job protection does not justify production of arms, instruments of torture and yet more prisons (thanks to the human rights movement); the defence of 'prosperity' does not justify the slaughter of indigenous people and their culture (thanks to the movement of indigenous people); and so on with the movements of women, blacks, students, among others. The visibility of a great variety of contentious issues and aspirations, leads, of course, to inevitable contradictions, the transcendence of which is the object of daily political practice, intra-movements communication, the continuous formation of new alliances which are helping to shape new political visions. The central issue for us is whether these movements are posing the question of autonomy *vis-à-vis* capital, whether this process of recomposition of radical claims and new subjectivities emerging from the multiplicity of global struggles is constituting a front against 'abstract labour', that 'work for work's sake' which is the basic life-substance of the global fractal-panopticon. I can here only offer a hypothesis and suggest that practices that are developing in the constitution of recent struggles seem to run counter the very foundations of abstract labour.

Against strategies of enclosure at the basis of the fractal-panopticon, the market and capitalist work, we have witnessed an abundant array of struggles around the world. Struggles against genetically modified food, intellectual property rights, the World Trade Organisation, privatisation of public utilities and others, not only oppose the commodification of a variety of aspects of life and throw a spanner in the wheels of capital, but at the same time open up spaces for developing new meanings, new ethics and social praxis beyond the logic of the fractal-panopticon. Also, in contrast to the estrangement and alienation of the doers from the product, from the activity of labour, from sociality and from ourselves as part of nature implicit in 'work for work sake', new practices seems to have emerged which refuse to consider the 'other' as object. A variety of struggles have opened up public debates on what we eat, how we relate to 'nature', and how our clothes are made. This is, of course, just a start in opening up ways to break the estrangement towards the products and activity of labour inherent in capitalist production. Although the partiality of each of these issues and others is obvious, at the same time the engagement with these fragments is necessary for a social process to transcend abstract labour. Through communication, alliances, and cross-movement 'bridge building', each oppositional fragment has the chance to acknowledge the 'other', redefine priorities, methods, and their place within an oppositional universe

constituting new social relations. Therefore, the constitution of a new sociality beyond capitalist definitions of human activity (abstract labour) is not to be found in the prior definitions of political theory, but rather in ongoing processes of self-organisation.

The methods of organisation and alliance building are also important. In the last two decades there has been a growing emphasis on 'horizontal' organisations, rather than vertical, on 'direct action' rather than delegated action, on 'consensus seeking' rather than majority vote. These practices are sinking deeply into the consciousness of the people involved in various social movements. In this sense, as the *Zapatistas* remark, the question of *power* is completely redefined. Instead of aiming at 'seizing power', those in struggle are all focused on the *exercise* of power through a process of mutual recognition of the different 'fragments'. Finally, it is becoming increasing evident that the notion of 'politics', of the fighting for different worlds, is becoming less and less separated from 'play', i.e. lived experience beyond anxiety and imposed scarcity. Together with the struggles against enclosures and alienation, the increasing relevance of play in the practice of politics, teaches the importance of setting a limit to the boundlessness of capitalist work that wants to turn all human activities into work. In a word, by posing the question of direct democracy, consensus seeking, horizontal organisation, play and access to resources, recent struggles are preparing a fertile terrain upon which it is possible to pose anew the question of human freedom, not in the sense of individual freedom limited by the cells of a fractal-panopticon, but that of free individuals defining together the parameters of their social interaction. Will these movements be able to avoid co-optation and displacement by yet new forms of commodification and competition?

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Notes

1. This thesis runs counter to some of the arguments put forwards by Rifkin, 1995 and Hardt and Negri, 1994 among others. For a criticism see Caffentzis, 1999, and the contribution of Harry Cleaver in this book.
2. For a discussion of 'flexibility' in terms of 'flexploitation', see Costello and Levidow (forthcoming).
3. See, for example, Federici, 1992 and the other contributions in the 1992 issue of *Midnight Notes on the New Enclosures*. See also Caffentzis, 1995.
4. 'If a man won't work, nothing has he to do, from morning to night, but to eat his bad bread and drink his water, without a soul to speak to. If he will work, his time is occupied, and he has his meat and his beer, or whatever else his earnings may afford him, and not a stroke does he strike but he gets something, which he would not have got otherwise' (Bentham. 1787: 67).
5. The British Library copy of the 1787 edition has a stamp of the 'Patent Office' right above the title of this letter 'on the means to extract labour'. It would be interesting to uncover the history of this 'intellectual property right'.
6. 'The more numerous also the family, the better; since, by this means, there will in fact be as many inspectors as the family consists of persons, though only one be paid for it' (Bentham, 1787: 23).
7. 'Neither the orders of the inspector himself, nor any interest which they may feel, or not feel, in the regular performance of his duty, would be requisite to find them motives adequate to the purpose. Secluded oftentimes, by their situation, from every other object, they will naturally, and in a manner unavoidably give their eyes a direction conformable to that purpose, in every momentary interval of their ordinary occupations. It will supply in their instance the place of that great and constant fund of entertainment to the sedentary and vacant in towns, the looking out of the window. The scene, though confined, would be a very various, and therefore perhaps not altogether an unamusing one' (Bentham, 1787: 20).
8. 'The working class must materially discover itself as *part* of capital, if it wants then to counterpoise all capital to itself.…The collective worker counterpoise itself not only to the machine, as constant capital, but also to labour-power itself, as variable capital' (Tronti, 1971: 55).
9. A general picture of the current character of international trade should include other important areas, such as trade in services, issues related to intellectual property rights, and analysis of new enclosures that make trade possible. I cannot deal with them here.
10. We must note that in countries such as the United States, the purchasing power of large sectors of working people has been so far maintained also by large diffusion of private debt.
11. In the US, 4% of national production was exposed to global competition in early 1960s, while it is 70% today.
12. For a review, see Hoogvelt, 1997.
13. For an overview, see Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, 1994.

5 Work is *Still* the Central Issue! New Words for New Worlds

HARRY CLEAVER

This chapter makes two arguments. First, taking sides in the historical question of whether work is ceasing to be the central dominating mechanism in capitalist society, it argues that this is so far from being the case that the general thrust of capitalist policy in this period aims at the intensified imposition of work in response to ongoing struggle against it. Second, given that work is, indeed, very much at the centre of class conflict, the chapter takes up the concept of work and argues that in order to understand both the struggles against work in capitalist society and the possibilities of moving beyond capitalism we have to learn to think about and talk about the kinds of activity that we now call work in other terms.

Capitalist Policy

Persistent high unemployment over the last two decades has added new theories to an older one that capitalism, understood as a work society, is in a fundamental crisis and threatened with doom. The older theory had argued that the rise of consumer culture was replacing work as the central organising mechanism of society.[1] Instead of keeping people working, capital, it was said, was keeping them shopping. Against the traditional image of the dominated class as industrial worker was raised that of the middle class consumer. The recent persistence of high levels of unemployment, on the other hand, has given rise to arguments that capitalism is running out of jobs – that is to say job growth is less than that of the labor force – and thus the percentage of people (or of people's time) devoted to work must continue to fall and with that fall will come that of capital.[2]

The political conclusions of these two kinds of theory have been quite different. The first critical theory of consumerist society focused on a radical critique of the reduction of human being to 'having', and 'acquiring' from the fuller life of 'doing', 'making' and self-construction. In short consumerism involved a reduction of an active life to a passive one. The

current focus on emerging lack of jobs, on the other hand, has provoked debate and discussion about how to move from traditional working class demands for full employment to demands for organizing social participation around less and less work. So for example some have argued for job sharing (spread the work over all) while others have argued for developing ways to separate income from work, that is to say how to move from a private wage to a 'citizen's income'.[3]

The limitations to the older theory of the replacement of work by consumer culture lay in two phenomena. First, those who took this position argued but failed to demonstrate that shopping (and other forms of consumption) rather than work was the central organising force that dominated people's time and lives. Indeed, it was easier to demonstrate that most of people's lives were still consumed by work and that much of 'shopping' and other forms of consumption were tied to the reproduction of people's lives as labour-power than it was to show that people worked only to spend.[4] Second, as unemployment rose in the 1970s and persisted into the 1980s and 1990s in Western Europe and some other areas, and as wages and real income fell, an accentuated struggle of many *for* work (for jobs, for second jobs, for other members of the family to find jobs, and for full-time jobs rather than part-time) precarious jobs made 'shopping culture' look like a short-term, middle class phenomenon that lived on in the 1980s only in the elite ranks of yuppiedom.[5]

The more recent prophets of the 'end of work' have focused their foreseeing on the relative growth rates of jobs and labour force and concluded, with the latter outstripping the former, that work was decreasingly able to play its former role as homogenising force in society. In both their Marxist and non-Marxist variants these prophets have focused on the displacement of waged workers by automation and computers – a process highlighted by recent epidemics of 'down-sizing' through mass layoffs. The most serious objections to this vision derive from two sources: the narrowness of their understanding of 'a job' and the successes of the current capitalist offensive to impose ever more work.

The narrowness of their vision of dwindling jobs derives from the way they largely ignore unwaged work and the way its growth must be taken into account in any contemplation of the evolution of work. In the developed world high rates of unemployment are generally accompanied by increasing unwaged work. What can no longer be paid for must be done at home on what is usually dramatically reduced income. Meals out are replaced by home cooking, medical consultations by home care, store-bought

books by trips to the library, purchased food by home grown, working on the job by the work of looking for a job and so on. In this way what a one-sided representation of high unemployment portrays as a reduction in jobs available, a more comprehensive view must understand as a redistribution of work between waged and unwaged sites.

In the South where high rates of formal unemployment and under-employment have persisted for much longer, the kinds of redistribution of work from waged to unwaged has crystallised into shifting work patterns of the so-called 'informal sector' where very large percentages of many countries' labour forces are employed in various kinds of work necessary to the functioning of capital and to their own survival. The unavailability of full-time waged jobs has not meant a reduction in work, on the contrary.

The second objective to this line of argumentation is that it fails to recognise, or to take seriously, the central thrust of capitalist policy in this period which is focused on the imposition of work, sometimes of waged work, sometimes of unwaged work, but always of work. Just as capital renews its commitment to keeping the world organised around work, these social critics think it is disappearing – someone has serious illusions, and I'm inclined to think it is the critics.

Even without retracing all the metamorphoses of capitalist policy in the last two decades it is not hard to see how policy has been oriented toward the renewed imposition of work. The basic elements of the counter-offensive in this period have been a direct assault on working class income aimed at inducing a greater willingness to work (in ways more profitable to capital) and, at the same time, a multi-dimensional restructuring designed to break the power of workers to resist the imposition of work and increased exploitation. The attack on working class income can be seen in everything from inflation to lower real wages through assaults via high interest rates and high unemployment to systematic attempts to eliminate the Welfare State whose unwaged income guarantees undergirded the wage hierarchy as a whole. The restructuring has come in everything from a recomposition of industrial sectors through technological reorganisation of what and how things are produced to the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's 'structural adjustment' programmes designed not only to impose massive austerity, but to break the power of worker organisations and police–military–paramilitary measures where such 'economic' programmes fail.

The results of such policies, to the degree that resistance has been overcome and they have been successfully imposed, has been to weaken

many workers' unwillingness to work. So for example we find waged workers fighting for longer hours to make up for wage reductions. We find the unwaged looking for waged jobs to add to their unwaged ones, or waged workers looking for second jobs. We find the unwaged working harder to survive on even less access to money than before. We find students willing to take 'practical' courses and programmes of study in a search for waged work. And so on.

All of this, however, is not to say that capitalist strategies have always worked and succeeded in imposing more work. Resistance has continued, has often been fierce, and in some places has grown apace with the increasing pressures to work. Indeed, even if the working class had abandoned the struggle against work (say to pursue consumerist ways of life) the capitalist counteroffensive to intensify the imposition of work would have been enough to put it back on the agenda.

So, to sum up this first argument, it seems to me that not only is work *still* the central mechanism through which social domination is sought, but people's resistance to the imposition of work and their efforts to go beyond it to craft new forms of social organisation *still* form the core of social conflict today.

Work is a Capitalist Category

If work is still the central issue in social conflict in contemporary society, then we need to be clear about what we understand work to be, why capitalists try to impose it, why workers struggle against it, what are the alternatives that people are trying to develop and what are the implications of these things for our struggles. Some of what I write below amounts to a sharp revision in Marxist theory and in some aspects revision in my own understanding of the subject. But these are revisions that have been slow in coming and I want to spell out in some detail why I think they make sense.

For most of its history Marxist theory has drawn a distinction between work and labour, in part thanks to Marx's own exposition of the 'labour process' in *Capital* and in part as a result of Engels' insertion of a footnote that drew a sharp line between the two. In Marx's exposition he defines 'labour' generically before going on to discuss the specific attributes of labour within capitalism.

> Labour is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabo-

> lism between himself and nature.…The simple elements of the labour process are (1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work.…Relics of bygone instruments of labour possess the same importance for the investigation of extinct economic formations of society as do fossil bones for the determination of extinct species of animals.[6]

When Marx does discuss the specificities of labour in capitalism, his primary concern is valorisation or the extraction of surplus labour from the workers.

In Engels' footnote, he argues that the term 'work' should be used to designate labour in general, while the term 'labour' be reserved for work under capitalism.

In both texts we can see a similar distinction between a generic concept of labour (work for Engels) and a more specific labour-in-capitalism. Even in Marx's earlier writing, such as the *1844 Manuscripts*, there was a distinction between alienated labour (in capitalism) versus some other kind(s) of un-alienated labour .

In making these distinctions I think both men were making a mistake, and violating a fundamental tenet of Marx's own methodology to boot. The mistake and violation lay in the conceptualisation of a generic or transhistorical concept of work (or labour) that could be applied retrospectively throughout history and, by implication, projected forward into the future. The retrospective application meant looking back at a vast array of human activities in diverse cultures in terms of 'work', e.g. studying bygone tools as a key to understanding bygone labour processes and the societies within which they occurred. The forward projection meant thinking about post-capitalist society in terms of post-capitalist work or unalienated work or communist work, or some such:

> Freedom, in this sphere [of necessity], can consist only in this, that socialized man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature.[7]

The methodological tenet being violated was the one spelled out in what is now known as the 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse.* In that introduction, written for, but not published with, his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, Marx discussed the historical character of concepts

and made two interrelated arguments. First, he argued that modern concepts can provide 'insights' into previous social forms:

> Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organisation of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also *allows insights* into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up (author's emphasis). [8]

Second, he warned against applying those concepts developed in one period to the phenomena of other periods in any simple-minded way. His example was 'ground rent', a concept that as developed within capitalist society refers to the part of surplus-value generated by labour that accrues to the owner of land used in the production process. It would be a mistake, Marx argues, to look backwards at the medieval phenomenon of 'tithe' and try to understand it in terms of the modern concept of 'rent' even though there may be superficial similarities between the two:

> The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient, etc. But not at all in the manner of those economists who smudge over all historical differences and see bourgeois relations in all forms of society. One can understand tribute, tithe, etc., if one is acquainted with ground rent. But one must not identify them.

Now I think this latter argument makes sense generally, essentially it outlaws transhistorical categories, and applies specifically to the category 'work' even though Marx clearly disagrees. For him, although the intellectual grasp of 'labour-in-general' only came with capitalism and its generalised imposition of work, he claims that

> the conception of labour in this general form –as labour as such – is also immeasurably old… The simplest abstraction, then, [labour as such]… expresses an immeasurably ancient relation valid in all forms of society…

He does not, however, provide any evidence for this claim, whatsoever. Yet, unless he can show that the concept really has been around forever but only given full meaning today (something he argues more persuasively with respect to 'money'), then the most he can claim is his earlier suggestion that knowledge of current forms (labour) can provide 'insights' into previous forms, while those insights must be leavened with the recognition that the concepts are not really appropriate and others, more specific to the time, are required.[9]

Without going into a lot of etymology and philology, I think it is true that prior to capitalism most societies had no generic concept of work. People were engaged in a wide variety of activities but it never occurred to anyone to refer to all these activities collectively as 'work'. Some people raised animals or tended crops, others made barrels or ships or silver dishes and so on. But they were referred to as shepherds or farmers, coopers or shipwrights or silversmiths rather than 'workers'. Different kinds of activities were just that and those who performed them were associated with particular castes, or subcultures or status groups. Members of exploited classes were often viewed as individuals representative of their social position, e.g. slaves or vassals or serfs, but again, not as 'workers'.

Marx took the concept of work or labour from both the philosophy and the political economy of his times. It seems to me that the reasons why the use of such a concept makes sense in capitalism – but not necessarily in any other period – are two. First, as Marx argued:

> when it is economically conceived in this simplicity [labour as such], 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple abstraction.…Indifference toward any specific kind of labour, presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant.

Second, the real indifference toward any specific kind of labour is not that of the workers, who may have very distinct preferences, but is that of capital. In commodity-producing, profit-generating, reinvesting capitalism the particular characteristics of commodity producing activities are entirely secondary. It does not matter what people are put to doing as long as they produce commodities that make possible the realisation of a profit that can be used to put them to work all over again, preferably on an expanded scale. Under such circumstances it is reasonable to refer to all of these diverse activities under one rubric: work (or labour) that refers not to the specificity of the activity but to its central role in maintaining order. It is this social dimension of work that is designated, at least in a part, by what Marx calls the 'substance of value' or 'abstract labour', is measured by socially necessary labour time and has the form of exchange. Thus value is the conceptual tool for analysing human activities incorporated into capital as work.

Moreover, I think all this is reinforced by looking more closely at Marx's analysis of the 'work process'. Of his three elements of work, only one is active and the other two are completely passive. The human agents

play the active role, imagining their project, the methods of its execution and its achievement. The tools these agents use and the nature upon which they work are the passive elements. While most people would probably concede the notion that human-made 'tools' are passive, growing numbers of people who have been focusing on ecological issues these last few decades are unwilling to accept the notion that of all of nature, only human beings can be viewed as active.[10] This vision of work as involving active, imaginative humans creatively reaching out and transforming passive non-human nature is one Marx took over from Hegel and is a very anthropomorphic, enlightenment vision common to the times, but neither common to, nor appropriate to, other times and places, past and future.

New Words for New Worlds

While Marx's formulation may quite accurately characterise the way many activities are organised within capitalism, the ecologists are suggesting that other kinds of relationships are not only possible but also desirable. Moreover, in other times and places using this kind of concept to frame an investigation into the relationship between the people in a particular culture and the earth excludes other conceptions and realities which might exist, such as an interactive as opposed to a one-sided instrumental relationship. The fact that the researcher from our time can 'see' (i.e. impute) Marx's categories in the activities observed hardly means that their use will reveal their real nature. After all, Marxists have repeatedly complained of how neo-classical economists (and formalist anthropology) imperialistically impute their categories everywhere and throughout history, reducing all humans to *Homo economicus* in their theories. Yet, despite this post-Marx sensibility, Marx's own warning against such practices is very weak:

> Although it is true, therefore, that the categories of bourgeois economics possess a truth for all other forms of society, this to be taken only with a grain of salt. They can contain them in a developed, or stunted, or caricatured form, etc., but always with an essential difference.

So too, for Marx's own concepts, such as labour. It is OK to apply it to earlier forms of society, he seems to suggest, but one should always seek out the 'essential difference'. In the case of capitalism, Marx does precisely this and provides us with a complex analysis of the central role of labour in social organisation and control. In another society he might seek to do the

same even if labour was a marginal (for slaves only) or secondary means of social organisation (as opposed to, say, politics or religion). But developing such analyses hardly removes the problem that the basic concept being employed – labour as such – is being applied transhistorically even though it originates in the capitalist period within a particular set of circumstances. On a larger scale, the problem here is reproduced in the projects of 'historical materialism' which seeks to analyse all of history with concepts develdeveloped during the period of capitalism and dialectical materialism that extend the process to the cosmos.

All this said, in order to cope with the present, and to imagine the future, we do need to be clear about what capitalism has done as it has converted human activity into work. When we examine Marx's theory of work in his writings, say *Capital*, we see that just as his discussion of the money-form hardly exhausted his understanding of money, so too does the discussion of the work process hardly exhaust his understanding of work. Money had yet to be grasped as a moment of capital and its command over people. The discussion of the labour process (Chapter 7) only began the discussion of the meaning of work in capitalism. When we want to grasp this concept, as well as others, as designations of particular moments of the social relations of capital, we probe further and situate the 'labour process' within broader meanings of work.

When we follow the development of his analysis of the work in capitalism we see that its meaning even goes beyond the extraction of a surplus (value) or profit. In Section 2 of Chapter 10 Marx begins with the statement that 'Capitalism did not invent surplus labour.' If not surplus labour, then what? His answer: the endlessness of the process of extraction within the context of commodity production and expanded reproduction. So surplus labour appears as a means to an end (more work, wider social control) and not just an end in itself.

To Marx's emphasis on the endlessness of the imposition of work, we can add another aspect of his analysis, namely the tendency of capital to progressively convert more and more human activities into commodity producing work. Today we know that this trend has become almost omnipresent, reaching into every nook and cranny of our lives, to an extent that perhaps not even Marx anticipated. Contemporary Marxist analyses have highlighted this phenomenon in the analysis of culture and the rise of the social factory.

So, the concept 'work' (or labor if you prefer) in capitalism denotes not merely the labour process but also the endless subsumption of more and

more human activities to commodity production and thus to the organisation of society through work.

In the process of examining what work is, we have also seen some of the reasons why capitalists seek to impose it and workers resist it and try to do other things.

Capitalists seek to impose work, and more work, not just because they are greedy, but because work is the only way they know to organise the totality of society they would continue to command. They employ other means, including military violence, starvation and the violence of incarceration as well as spectacle (television, films, sports) and brainwashing (formal politics, school) but all of these are geared to either getting people into work or getting rid of those who won't. These methods all appear to be operations carried on at the periphery of formal waged work with the aim of reinforcing its power to organise people's time and energy. But when we examine these activities more closely we also realise that they perform the work of producing or reproducing labour-power and in the process create a situation in which either the work of producing the commodity labour-power or the work of producing other commodities take up as much of society's time as capital can possibly impose.

Workers resist this imposition (and indeed it is their resistance that makes it an imposition) because it involves the subordination of their lives to external criteria that are limiting and alienating. First, with respect to waged labour, as Marx pointed out in the *1844 Manuscripts*, the ability of capital to impose work involves the separation of workers from their activity (because it is designed and overseen by capital), from their products (that now belong to the capitalists and are used against the workers), from their fellow workers (who are pitted against them) and thus from their ability to be human in the sense of a free collective exercise of will. In *Capital* he added to this discussion an historical one of how capitalists seek to extend the working day as much as possible, usurping people's lives in the process. And, of course, all of this is surrounded by the potential or actual violence of the state regularly brought to bear on those who resist these arrangements.

Second, the extension of capitalist power into the world outside of waged work re-creates similar conditions and similar resistance and rebellion. Parents resist being truant officers for their kids because of the way it poisons their relationships. Kids resist being brainwashed because it is deadening and they fight for studies they want. The unemployed resist doing the work of looking for work and television viewers resist their own

reduction to passive observer status by subjecting the spectacle to acerbic critique and using the material to talk about the things that interest them with others. And so on.

Finally then, with the previous discussion providing us with an analysis of what we do not want, let us turn to the question of the elaboration of conceptual alternatives. The suggestion that we should not project the concept of work either backwards or forwards into the future has implications in the present period. If we understand the creation of new worlds as something which is happening now (and not later after some Marxist-Leninist transition), as a diverse array of projects of self-valorisation, or self-constitution, then we must be wary of using only concepts appropriate to capitalism to analyse the new forms of activity and relationships we develop.

Instead of thinking about creating new forms of non-alienated work, for example, we may keep the concept of work as alienated activity as a reference to what we do not want to do but then seek to develop new concepts appropriate to the new activities and relationships we come up with. One example of this can be found in the ecological movement in the conscious shift from anthropomorphic to biocentric perspectives. Instead of Marx's 'work process' that involves a one-sided human activity imposed on an essentially passive (or dead) nature, some ecologists have sought, under the rubric of biocentrism, to reconceptualise human relationships with nature in terms of true interactivity. What such a concept means is currently debated, but the debate is a clear effort to find new ways about talking about and understanding human interactions with non-human nature. Similarly, against the familiar concepts of gender and differentiated gender traits, some feminists have raised the concept and proposal of androgyny where traits are not distributed according to sex but are accessible to all.

Beyond the use or non-use of the category of work these arguments clearly have implications for our understanding of the nature of our struggles. The first argument reasoned that the capitalist effort to impose work, and people's efforts to resist that imposition are still central to the social struggles of society. The second proposed that while Marxian categories are appropriate to understanding the forces ranged against us, they are not adequate for thinking about the future that we are trying to build. So as we fight for higher wages, or better working conditions or resist having our lives subordinated to work, it makes perfectly good sense to say we are

involved in *class struggle* in the sense that we are resisting subordination of our lives to work and to being reduced to working class.[11]

To the degree, however, that we are able to free ourselves from such subordination, then we are freeing ourselves from the reality (if not the threat) of class (or, as John Holloway says in his chapter in this book, from being 'classified') and the term 'class struggle' only grasps our self activity negatively – it denotes what we are fighting not to be. But precisely to the degree we gain some room for manoeuvre and are able to elaborate new patterns of self-valorisation that are not those of class, the concept of 'class struggle' fails. From the point of view of capital, everything we do is class struggle, including efforts to escape; it (and the Marxian categories that represent it) refuses to recognise any exteriority.

But for us, in our needs to articulate the character of our self-valorising efforts, to develop new languages for new worlds, the Marxian categories are not enough. To the degree that we fight for and win just such exteriority we need new words to talk about the new realities we create. Thus so-called 'deep ecologists' have been culling both the human experience and their own imaginations for new concepts to denote new relationships and projects of new relationships. Thus feminists have sought to escape concepts and frameworks that they have found to be imprinted with patriarchy and develop new ways of talking about what they are trying to do.

These kinds of self-valorising efforts and the intellectual efforts they generate hold the potential of constituting at least elements of post-capitalist worlds. Unfortunately, to the degree that such pioneers turn their back on Marxism because it is inadequate to their creative needs, the possibilities of that potential being realised is reduced. Without the critical analysis of capitalism that Marxism provides they are much more vulnerable to being either crushed or co-opted.

In the case of ecologists, processes of co-optation can be found not only in the willingness of institutions like the World Bank to listen, but in the corporate and state acceptance of the notion of sustainable development. Today, sustainable development is a buzzword of the corporate world and should be recognised by the ecologists as a nightmare vision of an endless capitalist exploitation of both humans and the rest of nature. In the case of feminists, the dangers of co-optation came early as the demand for 'equal rights' was translated into equal access to every level of corporate control and the system sucked women into itself turning them into female copies of organisational man. Even today some feminist journals celebrate female

entrepreneurs and in the process reinforce a major factor limiting women's self-development: capitalism.

Fortunately, there is increasing evidence that the spreading networks of grassroots social movements challenging current policy at the highest levels are casting their critiques not only in anti-neoliberal terms but anti-capitalist ones as well. In the *Zapatista*-inspired Intercontinental Encounters in Chiapas in 1996 and Spain in 1997 the theme of opposing neoliberalism was almost universally understood as involving opposition to capitalism. In a variety of European mobilisations, against unemployment and the terms of European integration, we find a similar widespread awareness. In the international mobilisation of Global People's Action against the World Trade Organisation we find, once again, a clear awareness that the problem is not just this or that policy but the system they are designed to bolster. Finally, in the global mobilisation against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) being negotiated at the OECD a more general opposition to capitalism appeared again and again in the fight against the effort to give more rights to multinational capital through the MAI. All of this suggests not only that the trend of the 1980s and 1990s toward the neglect of Marxism in favour of 'post-modern' new social movement and identity politics is passing, but that we are beginning to see the formation of a new grassroots power to confront capital politically at the global level.[12] For with the recognition of capitalism as a common enemy must come a renewed interest in the only body of theory providing a critique that clearly spells out its nature and methods of exploitation.

Notes

1. This is the theory of consumerist society, largely a legacy of the work of critical theorists out of the Frankfurt School. A recent example is some of the work by Claus Offe such as 'Work: The Key Sociological Category?', in *Disorganized Capitalism*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1985.
2. Examples are Jeremy Rifkin's book *The End of Work* and most of what André Gorz has written in the last decade.
3. Debates on these issues seem to be most fully developed in Western Europe, especially in Germany, France and Italy that have had persistent high rates of unemployment. A nice summary of these debates and the various positions taken in Italy can be found in Agostino Mantegna and Andrea Tiddi, *Reddito di cittadinanza: verso la società del non lavoro*, Infoxoa Tools, Roma, 1999.

4. See, for example, my critique of Offe's work in H. Cleaver, 'Lavoro, Valore e Dominio: Sull'attuale Rilevanza della teoriea di Marx del lavoro-valore nella crisi dello stato peiano keynesiano', *Vis à Vis*, no. 2, primavera 1994.
5. I do not want to give the impression that people had become enamoured of work. On the contrary this job search was, for the most part, a search for income to sustain falling standards of living.
6. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume I, chapter 7, 'The Labor Process and the Valorisation Process'.
7. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Volume III, chapter 48, 'The Trinity Formula'.
8. This and the next few quotes are all from the section on 'The Method of Political Economy' in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, trans. Nicolaus, Penguin Books, London, 1973.
9. He has the same problem with the equally modern concepts of production, or mode of production that he applies, willy-nilly, to earlier societies.
10. Among the few who might object to Marx's view of tools as passive are science fiction buffs and ecologists. The former keep waiting for computers to become companions (Asimov) or to revolt (Colossus), while the latter might suggest that a sheepdog is not a human constructed, passive implement, but a willing and quite active participant in herding, one quite capable, moreover of taking independent action.
11. Some have argued that battles within capital, e.g. for higher wages or better working conditions, are not against capital as such but mere recuperated moments within its dialectic. That depends. To the degree that wage struggles succeed in forcing wages up faster than productivity, it creates a crisis for capital. To the degree that struggles over better working conditions raise the costs of production and undermine profits, they are not compatible with the system. And so on.
12. Two recent papers dealing with this are H. Cleaver, 'The Zapatista Effect, the Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric', *Journal of International Affairs*, March 1998, and H. Cleaver, 'Computer-linked Social Movements and the Global Threat to Capitalism', *Journal of Conflict and Terrorism*, forthcoming.

6 Labour Moves: A Critique of the Concept of Social Movement Unionism

MICHAEL NEARY

The labour movement, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, is facing an uncertain future. As a result of the disintegration of soviet communism and the worldwide restructuring of capitalist work the organised working class appears to have lost its pre-eminent position as the progressive agent of social transformation. This situation has led to a crisis not only within conventional trade unionism, but also with regard to how the concept and reality of labour as a progressive social force is understood. In response to this crisis an attempt to construct a new political framework for the labour movement has emerged from the practical experience of struggles and an intellectual project to make sense of it all. While this new framework is written against the suggestion that the category of labour is anachronistic and outmoded and has been replaced by other new social movements (Hirsch, 1988; Offe, 1985; Touraine, 1981); there is a recognition that, in order to preserve the progressive credentials of labour in a world where social conflict has escaped the factory, there needs to be the construction of a new socialist theory that amounts to nothing less than a new societal paradigm between socialism and new social movements and their theorists (Adkin, 1999: 190). In response to this appeal there has been the attempt to reinstate labour and trade unionism as a progressive social force through the concept of social movement unionism or new social unionism. The purpose of this chapter is to examine this new approach within the terms with which it justifies itself. As the social movement unionism studied in this chapter claims Marxist credentials I will construct my response from out of Marxist social theory. I will argue that the intellectual project of social movement unionism and the formulation of the labour movement on which it is based is too static and one-dimensional and, as such, does not provide the basis for a new socialist paradigm.

The interpretation of society out of which social movement theory is derived is antithetical to a Marxist exposition of labour. Following Marx's

writing and recent critical developments on this matter (Bonefeld, 1995; Cleaver, in this book; Dinerstein, 1997; Holloway, 1995; Negri, 1989; Postone, 1993; Taylor, in this book) I will construct the basis for my own paradigm for labour based not on the concept of the labour movement; but, rather, on the way in which labour moves. I will illustrate and support this theoretical exposition with reference to the historical development of the South Korean labour movement and its current predicament, which I will set alongside new forms of protest that are occurring elsewhere. I will suggest that these new forms of struggle are neither new social movements nor traditional forms of organised labour but may be, in fact, the basis for a new life of struggle against the logic of capitalist work.

The positive appraisal of social movement unionism or labour as a new social movement is exemplified in the work of Kelly (1998), Moody (1999) and Waterman (1999). Although this work represents different degrees of enthusiasm for the social movement project and has different approaches to the issue, each share a commitment to the reinvention of the labour movement by taking up progressive social ideas and attaching themselves to a transformatory project that has developed alongside the labour movement. In what follows I shall review each of these positions as well as a critical review written from the standpoint of labour by Ellen Meiksins Wood (1986). I shall argue that despite the positive way in which labour is affirmed these appeals for and against the connection between the labour and new social movements are not able to construct a new paradigm for the dynamic and modern ways in which labour now moves.

Rethinking Labour Relations

John Kelly's avowed aim is to dismiss suggestions that the labour movement is in crisis or that the labour movement is being superseded by new social movements, the 'newness' of which he calls into question; nor is he prepared to give any credibility to the post-modernist theory on which much of it is based. For Kelly post-modernism amounts to:

> …philosophical relativism; an incoherent attack on meta-narratives; a view of the decline of mass production that does not accord with the evidence…a unitarist fantasy…[that]…owes more to caricature and assertion than evidence…[with]…claims about the decline of the labour movement that take no account of historical precedent and assertions about the end of class politics based on superficial and incoherent categories (Kelly, 1998: 125).

However, he worries that there is a problem with the way in which industrial relations theory formulates its investigation of labour. Kelly wants to enliven the study of industrial relations, which he claims has become bogged down by a lack of ambition, as evidenced by the predominance of 'middle range theories', resulting in preoccupations with descriptions of the labour process, the institutions of work-based practices and policy matters:

> Consequently we have made limited progress in tackling what I regard as the central problems in industrial relations. We don't know whether workers are less collectivist and more individualist in orientation and we don't know how to conceptualise their interests in order to answer the question. Power has rarely been conceptualised by industrial writers and the concept tends to be used in a purely commonsensical way without definition or explication (Kelly, 1998: 23).

He wants to do this by encouraging industrial relations to be more theoretically self-conscious and to form a closer attachment to the social theory of Karl Marx. While Kelly does not attribute any new significance to the empirical existence of 'new' social movements, he is interested in the Marxian inspired mobilisation theory (Tilly, 1978) that has been developed out of studies into new social movements. Kelly wants to use this theory, based on social movements, to deny that social movements have in fact overwhelmed the labour movement:

> Mobilization theory…is firmly anchored in Marxist accounts of the employment relationship as an unequal and exploitative exchange and is thus well protected against the zeitgeist of 'human resource management' and labour-management cooperation. At the same time it provides a framework of well-developed concepts that has significantly increased our understanding of a wide range of social movements and whose application to industrial relations could prove invaluable (Kelly, 1998: 132).

Other more specific and important aspects of mobilisation theory include, he argues, the way in which it questions how individuals are transformed into social actors and are willing to sustain collective action, or not. It focuses attention away from the narrow field of bargaining structures and other workplace institutions towards the processes and social relations of power within industrial relations as well as providing a structural framework through which these processes and relations can be observed. The starting point for mobilisation theory is *injustice* and the way in which workers define and respond to it:

> Workers in capitalist societies find themselves in relations of exploitation and domination in which many of their most significant interests conflict with those of their employer. The individuals need to be in paid employment and hence for economies to operate at full employment conflicts with the capitalist requirements for periodic job-destructive reorganisation and for a labour surplus…From the vantage point of mobilisation theory it is the perception of, and response to, injustice that should form the core intellectual agenda for industrial relations (Kelly, 1998: 126).

Kelly then wants to connect mobilisation theory with the well established long wave theory, i.e. Kondrattieff's waves:

> Long wave theory is anchored in Marxist analysis of the capitalist employment relationship and therefore emphasises the conflicts between labour and capital deriving from the latter's exploitation and domination of the former.…The theory's chief strength lies in the analysis of historical and international shifts in the formation of workers' organisations, in worker-employer relations and in worker mobilisation (Kelly, 1998: 105).

Kelly argues that the movement of labour follows predictable patterns that are closely associated with the rhythms of the capitalist economy. The power of labour rises as a result of upswings in the economic cycle and is reduced in the downswing when workers' organisation may be attacked during a period of counter-mobilisation by the employers and the state. According to the evidence he has collected and the current position of the economic cycle, the classical labour movement is on the threshold of resurgence.

New Social Unionism: Responding to the New Technological Revolution

Waterman wants to abandon social movement unionism – which even in its most successful form in Brazil and South Africa is 'struggling to come to terms with at least semi-liberal democracy' (Waterman, 1999: 248) and to replace it with the concept and reality of new social unionism. He maintains that new social unionism is more in tune with the contemporary world:

> This is a world increasingly marked by the dramatic expansion and equally dramatic transformations of capitalist, military, state, imperial, technical and patriarchal forms of power. It is consequently marked by the appearance of

> what I will call the new alternative social movements...alongside such old ones as those of traditional religion, nation and labour (Waterman, 1999: 247).

Based on the already established traditions of the labour movement, for whom he and others (Melucci, 1989) claim social progress was always a wider ambition than narrowly defined work-based goals, and within the more general Marxist interpretation of movement as: '*the real movement that abolishes the present state of things*', Waterman argues that the organisational framework offered by new social unionism is more appropriate for a globalised world in which, as the result of the new technological revolution within capitalism, the centrality of the capital–labour relation has been reduced and work is no longer the substance of identity:

> This is currently the leading edge of capitalism, making both possible and necessary (for capitalists) the worldwide destruction, restructuring and division of the labour force, labour processes, forms of ownership, coordination, and control. A geographically concentrated and socially homogeneous industrial working class of semi-skilled factory labourers is being increasingly replaced by socially diverse and geographically dispersed labour forces – homeworkers, part-timers, sub-contractees, in towns, villages and distant countries (Waterman, 1999: 249).

However, while these revolutionary changes – e.g. the international restructuring of the division of labour – have fragmented worker's national organisations and have made capital more resilient, this revolution has also, paradoxically, made capital more vulnerable to non-class alliances and a range of different antagonisms. While the centrality of the capital relation is reduced, the significance and scale of contradictions founded on fundamental issues (peace, a clean environment, gender awareness) that are the basis for any humane society have increased. Waterman sees an opportunity for the labour movement to become involved in these issues and at the same time 'broaden the appeal of unionism and increase the number of their allies' (Waterman, 1999: 250).

Waterman maintains that the motivation for political action has been detached from a Marxist economic reductionism and has, in fact, been inverted; economic conflict is now determined by political struggle based on the articulation of a range of different needs organised around democratic and popular demands. Following Gorz (1999) and Melucci (1989), Waterman argues that conflict, including the struggle over the liberation from work, has broadened out of economics and politics to society as a whole and across nation-states. In the face of this, worker-based move-

ments face marginalisation unless they recognise the significance of new alternative social movements and their progressive forms of organisation, especially participatory democracy:

> The terrain of struggle increasingly spreads from 'economics' and 'politics' to 'society' as a whole, and equally shifts from the national level both downwards to the local and upwards to the global. Conventional labour movements – left, right and centre – typically prioritise 'economic struggle' (against capital) or 'political struggle' (against the state), or varying combinations of the one and the other…This made sense in the period of the capitalist nation-state or of 'nation-state dependent' capitalism. But the new or revived notion of 'civil society' indicates another terrain of struggle – that of popular self-organisation outside, or independent of, the capitalist state (Waterman, 1999: 251).

Waterman argues that this project 'is realisable only by the articulation of the autonomous demands of different types of workers, of the working class and other "working classes", of class and democratic and popular demands' (Waterman, 1999: 252). And all of this based within a new understanding of internationalism which Waterman conceives as 'a movement from labour and socialist internationalism to a "new global solidarity"' (Waterman, 1999: 254).

Despite his enthusiasm for new social unionism Waterman has no fixed idea of what exact form new social unions should take. Instead he presents a long list of, as he readily admits, under-theorised propositions based on an opposition to one-dimensional Leninist view of working class politics, the experience of trade unions and new alternative social movements. This list includes the necessity for struggle for better work conditions in dialogue with affected communities; more democracy and better distribution of products, and a greater articulation with non-union, democratic and pluralist, progressive political movements based around flexible, innovative, open and non-authoritarian organisational forms. What is required is

> the presence of a new alternative social movement *within the unions* – differing from the role of the old socialist party in being non-vanguardist, non-sectarian, non-bureaucratic...and in itself proposing or addressing a plurality of worker interests and identities! (Waterman, 1999: 262, author's emphasis).

Working Class Warriors

Kim Moody provides a much more compelling account of the return of heroic resistance by the worldwide labour movement: 'working class warriors' in the 1990s. And not only compelling, but also, unusually, an optimistic assessment of working class resistance, by examining

> the roots and structures of globalisation, their impact on the working classes of different parts of the world, and the most recent working class responses to the lean regimes in the workplace, the global jobs crisis, government-imposed austerity, and the general decline in working class living standards around the world. If any picture of the globalisation process necessarily involves some overwhelming 'gloom and doom' analysis, it is the return of class confrontation in recent years that offers the hope (Moody, 1999: 4).

Moody seeks to rescue socialism and trade unionism from its current wretched lack of self-regard and critical currents exemplified by post-modernism which claims changes in the process of production, following the international division of labour, have fragmented and diluted the labour movement. Moody wants to rescue the labour movement through the concept and reality of social movement unionism, a term he borrows from the labour movements of South Africa, Brazil and elsewhere in the Third World:

> Social movement unionism is…deeply democratic, as that is the best way to mobilise the strength of numbers in order to apply maximum economic leverage. It is militant in collective bargaining in the belief that retreat anywhere only leads to more retreats.…It seeks to craft bargaining demands that create more jobs and aid the whole class. It fights for power and organisation in the workplace or on the job in the realisation that it is there that the greatest leverage exists, when properly applied. It is political by acting independently of the retreating parties of liberalism and social democracy, whatever the relations of the union with such parties. It multiplies its political and social power by reaching out to other sectors of the class, be they unions, neighbourhood-based organisations, or other social movements. It fights for all the oppressed and enhances its own power by doing so (Moody, 1999: 5).

Moody presents the progressive possibilities for organised labour through an analysis of specific class confrontations in various parts of the world (Canada, France, South Korea, South Africa, and Brazil) as the forces of internationalisation push workers into direct political intervention. The internationalisation of production has created what Moody refers to as 'production-chains' which act both as an instrument of worker oppression

but also, as workers in different parts of the world now have the same employers, it also means that workers have 'implied or real leverage...over the production chains they work in and hence over their common employer' (Moody, 1999: 79).

Moody argues that the shape of the working class has changed in response to the organisational, geographical and technical changes in capitalism. The dynamic for this process is capitalism itself: 'Real capitalist competition is the root of both its crisis and its drive to globalisation' (Moody, 1999: 46) and 'it is the constant clash of Transnational Corporations, driven by their need to accumulate, that gives rise to the crisis that has driven globalisation, in fits and starts, itself' (Moody, 1999: 49). These changes, characterised by the notion of 'lean production', have brought barriers to working class action, e.g. passivity, borne out of fear of mass unemployment, but also make the class confront those barriers. The pressures of globalisation have produced an explosive rebellion within the industrialised regions of the South which are bolstering the weakened movement in the North:

> The shape of the working class in all corners of the world has changed as capitalism itself has altered its geographical, organisational and technological contours. As old structures of the working class are altered, however, new ones arise. Yet, far from dispersing workers in some random fashion, capital has brought more workers into more extensive production systems, themselves controlled by the largest units of capital. As in the past the working class seeks out ways to overcome the new divisions of labour as well as new cultural divisions within its ranks. The paralysis of much of the working class in the developed nations is not simply a function of these changes. Like the changes themselves, the apparent passivity of the organised working class for so long is also linked to enormous transformations in the industries and economies in which people work. These are not permanent states of being, but constant transitions. These trends are part of the inherent instability of the system and its constant need to change and degrade work and society in ways that subordinate the majority to the will of that tiny minority that controls global capital. The great irony of this constant need to change things in favour of capital's insatiable needs is that it brings not only barriers to working class action, but forces that make the class confront those barriers and seek new channels of resistance and rebellion (Moody, 1999: 178–179).

Reaching beyond traditional notions of organised unionism, social movement unionism asserts the centrality of union democracy as a source of power and broad social vision and outreach as a means of enhancing that power. Moody wants to reconnect the damaging split brought about by the dualistic forms of struggle shaped by the real separation of capitalist socie-

ty into political and economic levels of struggle with a movement of class struggle that is more broadly associated with social issues that confront the working class, as exemplified by the ecological problem:

> In social movement unionism neither the unions nor their members are passive in any sense. Unions take an active lead in the streets, as well as in politics. They ally with other social movements, but provide a class vision and content that make for stronger glue than that which usually holds electoral or temporary coalitions together. The content is not simply the demands of the movements, but the activation of the mass of union members as the leaders of the charge – those who in most cases have the greatest social and economic leverage in capitalist society. Social movement unionism implies an active strategic orientation that uses the strongest of society's oppressed and exploited, generally organised workers, to mobilise those who are less able to sustain self-mobilisation: the poor, the unemployed, the casualised workers, the neighbourhood committees (Moody, 1999: 276).

For Moody, the strength of social movement unionism is that it uses the strongest of those being exploited, generally organised workers, to mobilise those who are unable to sustain class action; and union demands are organised in such a way as to have a positive effect based on a broader social agenda than just the wage. Social movement unionism recognises the new industrial working class is only part of a larger class movement for whom conditions have become intolerable. It reaches outside the workplace, is deeply democratic, militant, internationalist and political and is based on rank and file activists rather than official union structures. By reaching out to other sectors of the working class it can only increase its own social power and the social power of the oppressed through its struggles to fill a political vacuum created by the retreats of the old parties of the left. In this way, unions put themselves at the head of a broader international movement of the working class. Or in other words: 'harmonising the demands of the union with the demands of the broader needs of the class' (Moody, 1999: 278).

The Dangers of Class Alliances

Ellen Meiksins Wood points out the dangers of the labour movement associating itself too closely with new social movements and with the kind of theorising on which they are based. For Wood '*Class struggle is the nucleus of Marxism*' (Wood, 1988: 12) and, therefore,

> To displace the working class from its position in the struggle for socialism is to make a gross strategic error…[and while]…many people have challenged the revolutionary potential of the working class and offered other revolutionary agents in its place: students, women, practitioners of various alternative 'life styles'...and…more recently the 'new social movements'…none of these alternatives have been supported by a systematic reassessment of the social forces that constitute capitalism and its critical strategic targets (Wood, 1988: 15).

By writing an intellectual history, beginning around the 1970s, of the development of the theoretical basis for new social movements, a programme she refers to as 'new "true" socialism', Wood attempts to expose the dichotomy between new social movement theories and Marxist materialism. Her main point is that while new social movements have drawn attention to the problems of socialist theorising after 1968 and the various issues not adequately addressed by organised labour they have, in contradistinction to Marxism, sought to effect a 'cultural revolution' (Wood, 1988: 22) in socialist thought by rejecting the working class as the agents of social change. She identifies this theoretical programme by which social relations are discursively or hegemonically dematerialised with the drift towards post-Marxist and post-structuralist tendencies for which the groundwork was laid firstly by Louis Althusser, whose work, she argues, was disabled by an 'obsessive methodologism' (Wood, 1988: 18) and an incoherent attempt 'to combine political practice, especially revolutionary practice, with a theory that acknowledges no subjects in history' (Wood, 1988: 19); secondly, by Nicos Poulantzas who, she suggests, 'displaced the relations of production and exploitation from their central position in the theory of the state by establishing the "dominance of the political"….The immediate effect is to transform class struggle into – or rather, replace it with – a political confrontation between the power bloc organised by the state and the popular alliance…[and in which]…class struggle remains as a "structural flaw"…rather than an active practice' (Wood, 1988: 33–34); thirdly by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who 'set out to undermine the very foundation of the Marxist view that the working class will be the agent of socialist transformation, and to replace it with a political project whose object is radical democracy and whose subject is a popular alliance constituted not by relations of class, nor indeed any determinate social relations, but rather by discourse' (Wood, 1988: 54); and finally by André Gorz whose 'Farewell to the Working Class' (1982) provides us with an 'inverted technologicalism, a fetishism of the labour-process and a tendency to find the essence of the mode of production in the technical process of

work rather than in the relations of production, the specific mode of exploitation' (Wood, 1988: 16) in what amounts to a 'utopian…vision ultimately grounded in despair' (Wood, 1988: 17).

By rejecting the orthodox essentialism based on the economism and class reductionism of Marxism she reminds us that new social movements have virtually excised class struggle from the socialist project; indeed, workers by their very attachment to material interests are portrayed as reactionary and conservative (Gorz, 1982). As there is no necessary correspondence between economics and politics in the new social movement project, the working class can have no privileged position in the struggle for socialism. The conflicts of 1968 revealed that in a complex society where struggle has developed outside the factory the relations of production and exploitation appear as if they no longer constitute the central basis for struggle: the centrality of economic relations has been displaced by the dominance of the political and ideological factors. Instead a socialist movement based on various mass populist/cultural demands of the people and alliances has emerged based on a pluralistic version of subjectivity rather than the unified subject of orthodox Marxism. The new social movement politics of difference can be created by ideological and political means based on universal human demands, ethical goals, rational principles through a 'radical' democratisation of the capitalist state for the achievement of political power rather than revolutionary transformation.

Through her critique, Ellen Meiksins Wood attempts to show that there is no substance to the social world of new social movements. In the world of new social movements discourse and ideology dissolve politics and determinate social relations based on the direct opposition between capital and labour; all social interests and identities are politically negotiable. The working class disappears into a discursively plural constructed subject. The capital–labour relation is no longer the fundamental relationship on which society is constructed and, therefore, the working class, whose economic demands now need to be translated politically if they are to be successful, has no more interest in the abolition of exploitation than anyone else: class is only one collective identity among many. In this situation there is no appeal to either logic or history, indeed both are dissolved in a confusion of juxtapositions, conjectures, articulations and absolute contingencies within which she argues, the socialist project disappears. The project outlined by new social movements is merely the completion of capitalism through the expansion of formal democratisation. The transition from capitalism to

socialism has been transformed into a relatively non-antagonistic process of institutional reform.

Wood attempts to restore the connection between the working class and real social objectives identified not simply as some abstract moral good but a concrete political programme against capitalist structures of power. She is uncompromising. Socialism, she maintains, takes the form of a concrete project with identifiable targets and agencies – yet one, which is at the same time capable of connecting with the general interest, but only in so far as it is embodied in the interests and struggles of the working class. This connection is made through the 'organic relation between the "economy" and other social "spheres"' (Wood, 1988: 59).

For Wood, no other social movement has seriously challenged or is able to challenge the power of capital; only the working class as 'a class which contains the possibility of a classless society because its own interests cannot be fully served without the abolition of class and because its strategic location in the production of capital gives it a unique capability to destroy capitalism' (Wood, 1988:187). By virtue of its role in production and exploitation, workers share interests, which coincide with the interest of socialism: the classless administration of production by the direct producers themselves. As workers create value, then workers are in a crucial position to destroy capital. The collective labourer of advanced capitalism will be the direct producer of the socialist order in a socialist democracy that will be constituted by the self-organisation of freely associated producers.

While Wood is prepared to concede that new social movements do stretch politics beyond immediate class interests: 'the 'new social movements' have drawn attention to various issues inadequately addressed by organised labour' (Wood, 1988: 10) and that, therefore, there is a place for coalitions and alliances outside of class arrangements, she is adamant that it is a mistake to imagine that new social movements take us beyond class politics. It is vital, she argues, that the interests of the collective labourer must remain the guiding thread of any political movement for the construction of socialism:

> If the objective of socialism is the abolition of class, for whom is this likely to be a real objective, grounded in their own life-situation, and not simply an abstract good? If not those who are directly subject to capitalist exploitation, which are likely to have an interest in the abolition of capitalist exploitation? Who is likely to have the social capacity to achieve it, if not those who are strategically placed at the heart of capitalist production and exploitation? (Wood, 1988: 91)

While she admits that the moral force of new social movements is 'unquestionable' (Wood, 1988: 176) and an engagement with new social movements may generate new forms of organisation and new aspirations, the weakness of new social movement politics is that their appeal depends 'upon abstracting the issues of peace and ecology from the prevailing social order and conflicting social interests that comprise it' (Wood, 1988: 176). Wood concedes socialism must broaden its conception of human liberation and the quality of life, but there should be no break between workers' struggles and socialism and the recognition that the principle barrier to human emancipation is the capitalist system:

> There is no question that the socialist movement will have to find new forms of working class organisation and new ways of incorporating the emancipatory aspirations expressed by the 'new social movements'…But the first principle of socialist organisation must remain the essential correspondence between working class interests and socialist politics. Unless class politics becomes the unifying force that binds together all emancipatory struggles, the 'new social movements' will remain on the margins of the existing social order, at best able to generate periodic and momentary displays of popular support but destined to leave the capitalist order intact, together with all its defences against human emancipation and the realisation of 'universal human goods' (Wood, 1988: 199).

For Wood, then, socialism can draw on other constituencies, but it must be conceived and organised as an instrument of class struggle whose first concern must be to serve the class interest and forge the class unity of the working class.

The Problem of Labour

What is significant about these accounts of the labour movement, including Wood's critical review, is the recognition that struggle has moved outside the factory and now occurs at the level of society. This realisation of the significance of the level of society as a site for class struggle together with the recognition of the importance of both historical and internationalist perspectives when analysing the labour movement and the commitment to rigorous research methodologies, provide the accounts so far examined with a certain radical credibility. Also Wood does well to remind social movement unionists of the dangers associated with an uncritical accommodation with the theoretical basis of new social movement politics, although

her attachment to the labour movement means that she is unable to grant social movements any real theoretical or practical significance. However, what is most surpassing about all of the work so far considered is that they are, in fact, all disabled by their inability to provide a theoretical-practical account for the link between the factory and society. Although Wood makes some theoretical attempt to connect working class and new social movement politics, she is reduced to providing an undertheorised link: what she calls the 'organic connection' between the relations of exploitation that constitute the economic sphere play themselves out in 'other social domains and in the arena of politics' (Wood, 1988: 59). Nor, curiously enough, and despite the labourist nature of their protestations, are they able to locate labour centrally as the dominant force in the process of progressive social transformation. For John Kelly workers respond to the rhythm of capitalist development, for Kim Moody what matters is how labour responds to change and for Peter Waterman labour is transformed not by its own efforts but by a revolution in capitalist technology to which labour is forced to accommodate itself.

The reason for this disability is the way in which they all theorise the capital relation. In Waterman's account the capital/labour relation is no longer of central importance. For Kelly and Moody, while labour has a history and geography, the origin of its social nature is presupposed as an unproblematic axiom. Labour is simply a formal proposition described as an abstract collective of individuals whose social existence had been perverted by capitalism, presented as an aberrant and abhorrent economic arrangement. There would not be much wrong with this, it accords with much of what passes for traditional Marxism, if it were not for the fact that this kind of radical political economy and political philosophy was exactly what Marx was setting himself against in his critique of political economy (Clarke, 1981; Postone, 1993). This unwillingness to consider the form of labour is most serious for the work of Wood. She sets herself up as a materialist critique of social movement theory from the standpoint of labour in contradistinction to the ideological and discursive arguments of 'new "true" socialism'. However, as she is unwilling to consider the substantive nature of labour, her brand of materialism amounts to nothing more than a dogmatic assertion of the significance of labour and is, therefore, no less discursive and/or ideological than the work she claims to be writing against. As we will see in the next section, an investigation of the constitution of capitalist work should involve an analysis of the dual form of

labour. Wood does acknowledge the importance of the duality but situates it not within labour but within what she refers to as

> the 'two-fold' character of capitalist production, in which the production of use-values is inseparable from the production of surplus-value; about how this 'two-fold' character distorts the organisation of production, which must at the same time serve as an organisation of antagonistic relations of exploitation; about the ways in which the organisation of production is shaped by capital's need for control in conditions of class antagonism and workers' resistance (Wood, 1988: 58).

The result is that labour as an object of intellectual enquiry disappears in a one-dimensional and undertheorised account of the way in which workers' interests conflict with capitalist imperatives. The basis for this lack of dimensionality is that for Wood labour is already 'ready-made'. In what follows I shall underline the limits of this lack of dimensionality, i.e. the political problems confronted by the 'ready-madeness' of labour by attempting to deepen Karl Marx's formulations concerning the substantial nature of labour. I will do this by demonstrating Marx's concern not simply with the descriptive and formalist movement of labour but the more fundamental problem of the way in which labour moves.

Labour Moves

Marx's claim to more fundamental theoretical and practical significance is that he deals not only with distributive irregularities, technical deficiencies and metaphysical subtleties through which labour is forced to exist, but also with the expansive social substance out of which the phenomena of labour is derived. What distinguishes Marx from political economy and political philosophy is precisely the way in which he problematises bourgeois social categories including, and most especially, the category of labour. The form that labour takes is regarded by Marx as his most significant contribution to social theory (*Capital*, I: 132); and yet has been almost completely ignored by generations of Marxicologists. Marx points out that

> Although labour appears to be a simple category…Nevertheless when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple category…Indifference toward any specific kind of labour, presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant (*Grundrisse*: 103).

Marx is clearly signalling that his investigation into the modern category of labour is not based on a critique of capital from the perspective of labour, the position adopted by traditional Marxism and the standpoint that informs the work of Kelly, Moody, Waterman and Wood; but is, rather, an exposition of the very developed totality of relations, which create this apparently '*simple category*'. The main point of this chapter is that Marx's analysis of capitalist society is much more than a critique from the standpoint of labour, and that in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* Marx provides the framework for a critique of labour in capitalism within which the peculiar nature of labour is the object of the critique and not the merely the subject of his analysis (Postone, 1993: 5–6). Marx develops this exposition of the '*very developed totality*' through a value theory of labour rather than a labour theory of value (Elson, 1979). In his exposition of capitalist social relations value is not merely an economic category, but is the social substance out of which capitalist society is derived: the social matter for analysing the way in which human activities are incorporated as capitalist work. Value is not an empty, inert, neutral space but is the matter and the anti-matter of Marx's social universe (Neary 2002).

It is, of course, the case that Marx often presents labour in the metaphysical terms taken up by traditional Marxism. He is aware of his idealistic tendencies and apologises for this defect in his presentation (*Grundrisse*: 15). There are also times when Marx's sophisticated theoretical ingenuity is toned down in order that the propagandist aspect of his work is not undermined (Dinerstein and Neary, 1998). But, more significantly, for our contemporary/post-modern world capitalistic production at the end of the nineteenth century had not yet intensified to the extent that Marx outlined in his social theory. Marx was theorising a social world that had not yet completely constituted itself. The significance of this version of Marx is that it does not confuse his fundamental analysis of capital with the nineteenth century forms through which he is writing (Postone, 1993). It is only in the twentieth century that Marx's social universe has become a reality (Negri, 1989: 89). It is the responsibility of Marxist intellectuals to write Marx through the dynamic forms that constitute the twenty-first century and not to condemn Marx to the ossified nineteenth century categories through which he, himself, existed. This writing through Marx means a critical reading of Marx and Marxism through Marx, pushing it up to and beyond its own apparent limits.

Marx's radicality is not founded simply on the categorical recognition he gives to workers' movements; but, rather, in his exposition of the social

processes out of which unreconcilable antagonisms are derived. To understand the labour movement as the movement *of* labour is to regard labour as an empty formality and to concentrate on the fetished form of labour rather than the process out of which labour-power is derived. The political problem with accounts based on the movement of labour, understood as '*a simple category*', is that labour is denied the motive power necessary for its own regeneration (Nicolaus, 1972: 31–32). With no intrinsic dynamic the motivation for labour has then to be artificially invented as an extraneous social agency: in the form of the vanguard party (Lenin) or the spontaneous realisation of its metaphysical real nature (Luxemburg) or by privileging particular organisational forms, hence the attention paid to new social movements.

Marx grounds his more substantial analysis of the social relations of capital through an exposition of the contradictory nature of the commodity-form and the expansive capacity of the commodity labour-power. In Marx's social universe the commodity exists as an unstable, non-identical and, therefore, dynamic unity whose concrete particularity (use-value) is subsumed by its existence as value-in-motion: capital, the substance of which is abstract labour. The contradiction in capitalist society is not based on the relation between labour and some other extraneous social reality, but through the forms in which human social practice is forced to exist: as concrete and abstract labour. This contradictory inner-connection between this dual existence of labour provides the dynamic tension through which labour moves. In a condition of generalised commodity-labour the dynamic motion of labour is motivated by its own contradictory abstract-concrete logic. Labour then cannot be a simple category, but a process in whose various moments it is always capital and within which the movement of labour is mediated and vanishes in its own result, leaving no trace behind (*Capital*, I: 187).

From this account labour loses its rigidity as a one-dimensional tangible thing to become the real expression of a contradictory social process: a real abstraction. As a real abstraction labour moves through the contradiction that constitutes its social existence motivated by its own expansionary logic: the production of surplus-value. Labour appears as the immediate unity of the contradiction through which human life is forced to exist and as such is the limit or barrier to progressive social transformation. But the logic of the contradiction is that the dual-nature of labour is not sustainable and as a result cannot be contained:

> We have seen, too, how this contradiction bursts forth without restraint in the ceaseless human sacrifices required from the working class, in the reckless squandering of labour-powers, and in the devastating effects of social anarchy (*Capital,* I: 618).

In this condition, the contours of the '*very developed totality*' are obscured as the general interest. The law of nature has been replaced by the law of abstraction: value-in-motion. In this arrangement human practice is given social validity only to the extent that it contributes, in the form of abstract labour, to the total expansion of value: '*the very developed totality*'. It follows that labour has no independent existence outside the existence of the capital relation; hence the '*indifference to any specific kind of labour*'. As a form of value 'labour is something immaterial, something indifferent to its material consistency…which has nothing corporeal about it' (*Grundrisse*: 309). Value is then much more than an accounting device through which the rate of exploitation can be quantified and is, in fact, a determinate form of social relations, the basic structuring principle of society and the substantive nature of human life: '*a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant*'. It is not the case that Marx offers a one-dimensional version of capitalist exploitation within which 'surplus-value is pumped out of workers'; but, more fundamentally, that forms of human activity are now constituted by the logic of capitalist work:

> It is precisely as value-creating that living labour is continually being absorbed into the valorisation process of objectified labour…the worker's labour becomes one of the modes of existence of capital' (*Capital,* I: 988).

Value is then a multi-dimensional matrix within which labour is not the antithesis of capital; but is, rather, the substance of capitalist social relations. All aspects of human sociability are *really subsumed* by the logic of capitalist work (value). The traditional Marxisms reviewed in this chapter are based on an analysis of labour prior to this process of real subsumption, defined by Marx as period of formal subsumption. In this moment, based on the abstraction of absolute surplus-value, the concrete nature of the labour process had not yet been overwhelmed by the process of the production of abstraction (valorisation). It is, therefore, possible for labour to recognise itself as a concrete form of human subjectivity and to organise accordingly. Formal subsumption is a situation within which a variety of different modes of production are subjected to capitalist relations of production, not because the production is organised on capitalist lines

but because capitalist production exercises hegemony over society. However, once the process of the production of abstraction has conquered the concrete processes of production, there arrives a moment when the old forms of production, of property and circulation break down, not only are capitalist relations of production hegemonic rather they becomes the most fundamental social process:

> …the capitalist form of large scale industry reproduces this same division of labour in a still more monstrous shape in the factory proper, by converting the worker into a living appendage of the machine; *and everywhere outside the factory*... (*Capital,* I: 615, author's emphasis).

Pushing this idea further: 'The entire society becomes one enormous factory, or rather, the factory spreads throughout the whole society. In this situation, production is social and all activities are productive' (Negri, 1989: 204). This means that the expansion of the logic of capitalist work, and the struggle over its imposition, is extended to the level of society. And further, during the moment of real subsumption the contradiction inherent in the commodity-form is intensified and social antagonism is generated not simply at the level of the factory but at the level of society: 'Capital is not simply a form of class domination but a form of society' (Negri, 1989: 67) *'a…[very]… developed totality'*. And further, class struggle has not come to an end but has been displaced onto a terrain, which pertains to human totality (Negri, 1989: 174). What all of this amounts to is that social domination in capitalism, at the most fundamental level, does not consist one-dimensionally as personal domination but is the 'domination by the abstract social structures and responsibilities derived out of the logic of capitalist work that constitute capitalist society' (Postone, 1993: 31).

In this sense labour-in-capital is by no means then a '*simple category*', but an abstract social structure whose substance is abstract labour. The result is not simply a transformation in the alienated institutions of capitalist power: money and the state, but in the form of labour or human life itself. Labour exists as the reconstitution or 'transubstantiation' of human life as capital: 'wage-labour as such presupposes capital, so that, from its standpoint as well, capital is this transubstantiation, the necessary process of positing its own powers as alien to the worker' (*Grundrisse*: 308). The commodity labour becomes a 'a transfiguration of capital that has valorised itself'(*Capital*, I: 954). As a result of this purely social dynamic process human life becomes '…the totally developed individual for whom different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn' (*Capi-*

tal, I: 618). Marx is unequivocal about what this involves 'Through this movement…[the worker] simultaneously changes his own nature' (*Capital,* I: 283). Human life is reconstituted in a form that is something other than what was previously regarded as human. The worker has become 'not simply a function, however, subjugated, but a qualitative evolutionary entirety, a change of nature' (Negri, 1989: 82–83). Labour is not simply the negation of capital but is the human form through and against which capitalist work exists. Labour becomes a reconstituted form of this new expansive society that human life creates, but which dominates human sociability.

It is this change of human nature, associated with the process of the production of abstraction (valorisation), which provides the possibility for the conceptualisation of a new socialist paradigm based on the possibility not simply of a new form of work organisation but on a new form of human sociability. While work has been done on the institutional forms in which these abstract social structures take, in particular on the forms of money and the state (Clarke, 1988, 1991; Holloway and Picciotto, 1991), there is very little work on labour as an abstract social structure. This is remarkable given Marx's statement that the abstraction of private life forms the basis for the constitution of the modern alienated forms of capitalist power: '...the abstraction of the state as such only belongs to modern times because the abstraction of private life belongs only to modern times. The abstraction of the political state…[and private life]… is a modern product' (Marx: 1934: 32). Work is currently being done on this matter (Bonefeld, 1995; Cleaver, in this book; Dinerstein, 1997; Holloway, 1995; Neary, 1999; Neary and Taylor, 1998; Negri, 1989; Rikowski, 1999). I want to add to this work by using the theoretical exposition discussed in this section to trace the way in which labour moves from a condition of formal to real subsumption by making a real-time connection with a geographically specific dynamic trajectory that is already rendering the concept and reality of new social movement unionism unworkable and anachronistic.

Workers in South Korea: From Formal to Real Subsumption

In various parts of the world social movement unionism appears to have been recuperated by the liberalising tendencies inherent in the formal democratic processes that the movement of labour helped to establish. This, as we have seen, is the conclusion reached by Waterman, providing him

with a justification for inventing a new form of unionism (1999: 247). However, the problem for Waterman is that because he is not concerned with the form of labour: the dynamic way in which labour moves, he compounds this recuperatory process further by condemning the category of labour to its reified form. The result is that for Waterman, the only way out of the predicament that the labour movement finds itself in, is through reconciliation with its alleged historical antecedents and contemporary radical movements.

In what follows I will attempt to undermine this notion of recuperation by examining the movement of labour through an exposition of Marx's formulations of formal and real subsumption, using the South Korean labour movement as a real-time illustration of these tendencies. South Korean labour is a dramatic example of the points I am trying to make due to the way in which, during the course of the twentieth century, it has shown the ability to reinvent itself as a new form of critical antagonism in response to the reform and restructuring of Korean capitalist labour processes. Having said that, there is nothing unique about South Korean labour other than the speed at which these events have taken place.

The main point is that, as the project of capitalist development deepens in response to the critical antagonism which it generates, and those critical antagonisms broaden out of the factory to the level of society, the form of labour is also recomposed in ways which challenge the critical responses that were appropriate to its previous manifestation. Labour moves not simply by making strategic alliances with other disparate groups; but, rather, the production of labour as a critical antagonism within capitalist social relations generates appropriate forms of critical resistance in and against not only the obvious instruments of capital, but also its own, i.e. labour's institutional forms.

Since the exposure of the Korean peninsular to the industrialised world the Korean labour movement has shown a particular propensity for radical organisation (Cumings, 1981, 1990, 1997; Hart-Landsberg, 1998). During the Japanese colonisation (1910–1945) and the first phase of the American occupation (1945–1950), the Korean population organised itself into a series of sophisticated democratic people's institutions and leftist resistance movements that led Edwin Pauley, US Ambassador in Korea, to say, in 1946, that 'Communism in Korea could get off to a better start than practically anywhere else in the world' (Hart-Landsberg, 1998: 175). The period during which Korea was controlled by Japan was marked by rapid industrialisation, characterised by the forced mobilisation of Korea as slave-

workers. While the Japanese attempted to *japanise* Korean society, abolishing aspects of Korean language and culture, the society was not reconstituted as intrinsically capitalist and Korea remained a predominantly agrarian society (Hart-Landsberg, 1998). The result was that following the liberation of Korea in 1945, the Koreans were able to imagine themselves as something other than proletarian workers and quickly reinvented themselves around communistic principles, until they were once again subsumed by the next wave of invasion and the division of the peninsular between the various forces of modernisation: the Soviet Union and the USA.

What is striking about this process of capitalisation of Korea after the Korean War (1950–1953) is the ability of the South Korean labour movement to rapidly reinvent itself into an appropriate progressive organisational form. Following the period in the 1960s of fast export-led industrialisation imposed by repressive military governments, dominated by giant conglom-erates or *chaebols* and a tightly controlled union organisation structure, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (KFTU), that suppressed militant unionism – the Korean labour movement progressed through contact between radical intellectuals and worker-peasants (Bello and Rosenfield, 1992; Ogle, 1990; Ranald, 1998; Koo, 1993). In the 1970s the labour movement deepened and developed through spontaneous workplace agitation that was organised mainly by women workers in the burgeoning textile industry. The spirit that motivated this struggle was exemplified by the self-immolation of Chun Tae-il in 1971 who, as a mark of inspirational protest against the treatment of the women workers, set fire to himself, crying out as his body burned 'We are not machines' (Chun, 2001). This phase of the movement was assisted, in the absence of any other appropriate organisation form, by a Korean version of liberation theology (Ogle, 1990). The support role given by Christian and Buddhist priests and monks was superseded by agitational frameworks produced by the massification (intensification) of industrial production into a corresponding mass organisation of resistance around economic issues: wages and working conditions, fought over within newly created enterprise unions. The radical workers' movement that developed out of this process of massification was supported by an increasingly radical new generation of students inspired by new translations of Marx and Lenin (Ogle, 1990; Koo, 1993). This period is marked by extreme repression by the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), who, acting with the authority of labour laws that had been outlawed by the International Labour Organisation, subjected workers and their leaders to prolonged periods of imprisonment, torture and

murder (Bello and Rosenfeld, 1992; Ogle, 1990; Randal, 1998; Koo, 1993). This form of immediate and direct repression is characteristic of periods of 'primitive accumulation' or formal subsumption based on exploitation of absolute surplus-value: 'the takeover by capital of a mode of labour developed before the emergence of capitalist relations i.e. a form of compulsion by which surplus labour is extracted by extending the duration of labour-time' (*Capital*, I: 1021); and, before the mediating institutions of capitalist regulation: money and the state (e.g. democracy, welfare) have been fully established. This inability to contain the critical resistance associated with the intensification of production from abstract to relative surplus-value developed into an alliance with other emergent progressive democratic forces within Korea civil society. The significance of this form of resistance is that it has moved out of the workplace to occur at *the level of society*. During this period, the revolution against the military regime extended into the whole population in a progressive democratic movement that culminated in the collapse of the military regime and the constituting of democratic procedures in 1987. At this point we can see clearly: *how this contradiction bursts forth without restraint in the ceaseless human sacrifices required from the working class, in the reckless squandering of labour-powers, and in the devastating effects of social anarchy* (*Capital* I: 618)

This period saw the consolidation of democratic procedures and institutions including the creation and legal recognition of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the election of civilian presidents, including the former dissident politician Kim Dae Jung in 1997. The significance of this process was that labour was recognised as an inherent dynamic aspect of modern Korean society. In this moment, capitalist social relations no longer assumed hegemony over Korean society, but rather it was the moment in which Korean society was constituted, really subsumed, as 'a specifically capitalist form of production…utilising the social productive forces of labour (i.e. collective)…in contrast to the more or less isolated labour of individuals…takes the form of the productive power of capital' (*Capital,* I: 1024). The result is that capitalist production had now become society. And now, '*the entire society becomes one enormous factory, or rather, the factory spreads throughout the whole society. In this situation, production is social and all activities are productive*' (Negri, 1989: 204).

All of this is to say much more than labour has been recuperated by elite power structures. Labour has not been captured by capital, rather the quality of labour as the dynamic contradictory substance of capitalist social

relations is now recognised at the level of society: '*the capitalist form of large scale industry reproduces this same division of labour in a still more monstrous shape in the factory proper, by converting the worker into a living appendage of the machine; and everywhere outside the factory*' (*Capital*, I: 615).

Despite Chun Tae-il's protest, it is no longer possible for labour to conceive of itself as anything other than the capitalist machine: '*wage-labour as such presupposes capital, so that, from its standpoint as well, capital is this transubstantiation, the necessary process of positing its own powers as alien to the worker*' (*Grundrisse*: 308).

Contingent Workers

The process of real subsumption does not simply expand civil society and its institutions in opposition to labour, but also reconstitutes labour itself in a more intensely abstract, or contingent form. The extent of that contingency has deepened as various Korean governments have sought to rescue themselves from the social economic and political consequences of the crisis in East Asian economies following the financial crisis of 1997. The policy of the Korean government has been to intensify the process of valorisation: the production of abstraction, by generating still further the nature of contingent labour and, therefore, undermining the previous forms of worker organisation. This is not simply a question of numbers of workers in unions, even though it is the case that only 20% of Korea workers are unionised and that this number is decreasing (Oh and Chae, 2001), but, more fundamentally, the intensification of the law of value and the production of abstraction dissolves the concrete basis of worker organisational identity around which mass struggles are produced. It is not that workers become indifferent to each other, but, rather, that the intensification of capitalist law of abstraction (value) produces a society within which indifference is the organising principle: '*Although labour appears to be a simple category…Nevertheless when it is economically conceived in this simplicity, 'labour' is as modern a category as are the relations which create this simple category…Indifference toward any specific kind of labour, presupposes a very developed totality of real kinds of labour, of which no single one is any longer predominant*' (*Grundrisse*: 103).

Indifference manifests itself as a qualitative and evolutionary change of the nature of work and society. The worker becomes contingent, a condi-

tion expressed as '*the totally developed individual for whom different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn*' (*Capital* I: 618). This contingency works in two ways representing the logic of absolute and relative surplus-value extraction. In the form of the extraction of relative value, capital in Korea presents what progressive tendencies it has left by projecting itself into what counts as the capitalist future by generating increasingly abstract or immaterial (intellectual) forms of labour (Neary, 2001). This relativitisation, or '*change of nature*', includes the reconstruction of the *chaebol*-based economy and the invasion of the Korea peninsular by foreign capital which now owns over 20% of Korean manufacturing capacity (Oh and Chae, 2001). The result is the de-Koreanisation of Korea and the reconstruction of Korea into somewhere that is not recognisably Korean. In the form of the production of absolute surplus-value capital projects itself backwards into the sweated nightmare out of which it evolved. In Korea 60% of all workers and 70% of all women workers work in insecure and casualised conditions, especially in the developing hi-tech sectors. Since March 1999 there are more casualised workers than regular workers in Korea. The Kim Dae Jung government has taken up the anti-labour laws, introduced in 1996 by the Kim Young Sam government and then suspended following workers protest, to impose this condition of contingency through the generation of work insecurity by mass layoffs, discharge schemes and other reductions in workers' rights (Chang, 2001; Oh and Chae, 2001). All of this is brought together in the most recent attempts to reunify the peninsular based openly on the search for cheap labour (absolute surplus-value) and sites to install capital intensive industries (relative surplus-value) in the North. As the research department of Hyundai Industries makes clear

> One reason for the South to invest in North Korea is that the South has lost competitiveness in its labour intensive industries and is losing competitiveness in technology-based labour intensive industries such as shipbuilding and electronics components. Investment in North Korea…[where] science and technology have been emphasised for nurturing… may be a means to maintain competitiveness due to its low wages.…In the mid to long term, with improvement in inter-Korean relations, progress in the North's opening and reform, and technological advance, high value-added and capital intensive industries should become the mainstay for investment (Hyundai Research Institute, 2001).

The result is that in South Korea the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions no longer demonstrates the confidence, recorded by Moody, in its

ability to mobilise thousands of workers in a short period. The collapse in May 1999 of the attempt by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions to organise a general strike against its governments' IMF inspired neo-liberal restructuring policies marks a decisive moment in the progressive possibilities of the Korean labour movement (Neary, 2000). Under the threat of mass redundancies and repressive state practices workers were forced to realise the logic of their existence as really subsumed forms of capitalist work and return to work and to fight their political battles through the institutional forms of democratic politics established by the state.

But in the meantime, as the limits of the Korean labour movements organisation form are reached, the critical social antagonism inherent in the substantive character of labour is already conscious of the need to reinvent itself (Neary, 2000). New forms of struggle are emerging from outside of the main union confederation, led by contingent workers, in industries within which contingency is increasing, e.g. in Korea Telecom and Hyundai Motors (Chang, 2001); among the 500,000 migrant workers working legally and illegally in South Korea who where previously banned from forming unions and in forms of resistance from within the progressive democratic movement. These new forms of progressive resistance are based not on workerist issues; but, rather, for example, in human rights, the women's movement and environmental politics; and, therefore, are leading to divisions between the workers and other radicals within the progressive movement. Also from within the labour movement itself there has been a decisive attempt to organise political parties to be able to represent workers interests in the democratic political procedures. This has resulted in the formation of two main political groupings: the *Democratic Labour Party*, a social democratic group, closely linked to reformist tendencies within the KCTU and the *Power of the Working Class*, a Marxist-Leninist group inspired by the determination to continue militant action against government policy, the IMF and the Americanisation or 'de-Koreanisation' of Korean society (Neary, 2001). However, while all of this has been going on, there is also a sense in which the concrete identification of the class enemy as Kim Dae Jung, or the IMF or Americanisation is not sufficient to challenge the way in which the increasingly abstract capitalist institutional structures have come to dominate Korean society. Hwan Myung-ju, a former student activist and poet said:

> In the 1980s we knew what we were fighting against but now we are not so sure. The problem is how do we generalise the issues to include Korean society, in the way that we were able to in the 1980s. There are a whole generation

> of young people in the universities for whom the student activists are very unpopular. They are too militaristic and their songs and language and ideas have nothing to do with them. The Korean theories of revolution, that we used to argue about: national liberation or classical revolutionary Marxism seem to be no longer appropriate. The former is anachronistic in a globalised world and the latter is disabled by the inability of the labour movement to escape the factory and unemployment. We need a modern theory of revolution and a modern way of expressing it (quoted in Neary, 2000).

While Korean workers struggle to overcome the limits of their own progressive organisations, elsewhere in the world, forms of antagonism are emerging that cannot be theoretically contained by the framework of labour movement or social movement or social movement unionism politics: in Mexico the *Zapatistas* (De Angelis, 1996, 1998) in Argentina *Roadblocks* (Dinerstein, 2001) in Europe *Euromarch* (Mathers and Taylor, 1999; Taylor, in this book) and struggles against globalisation (Rikowski, 2001). An analysis of these protests lie outside the remit of this chapter, and the issue is dealt with elsewhere in this book (Dinerstein and Neary, in this book), but, for the moment, the point is made by contributors to this volume that these protests may be, in fact, the basis for a new life of struggle against the logic of capitalist work. What distinguishes these movements and what makes them pertinent for any critique written in and against the notion of capital as an overwhelming and yet vulnerable totalising social relation, is that these protests are defined precisely by their determination to confront global capital at the global level.

Scritti Politi

The intellectual responsibility for Marxist academics is not to privilege these new forms of global struggle over the more limited aspirations of social movement politics, but to recognise the former as a development of the success and failure of the latter, to grant them both theoretical and practical significance and use them to develop a new transformatory paradigm. The theory for such a paradigm does not have to be invented: it already exists in the work of Karl Marx. What is most at stake in Marx's work is not the organisational form of the labour movement, but the dynamic and contradictory substance (value) out of which labour moves and the impossibility of the containment of the antagonism that is constituted as labour. Labour is as much an organisational form of capital as are the institutions through which it is organised. As such the progressive trans-

formation of human society involves not the realisation of labour on its own or in conjunction with other institutions, as argued by Kelly, Waterman, Moody and Meiksins Wood, but the abolition of labour and the society out of which it is constituted. It is only as a result of this abolition that a new practical paradigm for human sociability can be established.

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7 Fuel for the Living Fire: Labour-Power!

GLENN RIKOWSKI

> Labour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things, their temporality, as their formation by living time (Marx, *Grundrisse*: 361).
>
> [There is]…a light that always burns in some hearts, somewhere; the task is to enable it to burn more brightly and widely until it obliterates the horizon of capitalism (Paula Allman, 'Education on Fire!', foreword to Cole *et al*., *Red Chalk*, 2001: 13).

Introduction

For Karl Marx, labour in capitalist society is a process that, in conjunction with the means of production, gives *form* to commodities; labour is the 'form-giving fire' (1858: 361). Marx refers here not just to superficial particularities of commodities (shape, arrangement of features, etc.) but points towards the *social* form attained by labour in capitalist society. There is a duality in labour's unified social existence. It has two aspects, as a process that produces use-values (useful 'things', as wealth) and as a phenomenon that produces value (valorisation). There are not two forms of labour expressed firstly as use-value production, and secondly as value. Rather, the same labour expresses itself in two modes, and Marx notes that he was 'the first to point out and to examine critically this two-fold nature of the labour contained in commodities' in capitalist society (1867a: 48–49). It is the second aspect, its mode of expression as value generation, which fixes the social form assumed by labour in capitalist society: the value-form. It is this that distinguishes the particular social form attained by labour in capitalist society from the forms it takes in pre-capitalist societies.

This chapter focuses on the *fuel for the living fire*: labour-power, the capacity to labour. Labour-power provides the social energy that generates value and surplus-value. As surplus-value is the first form attained by capital, then labour-power is capital's 'fuel dump'. Of course, the problem for capital's human representatives is that labour's fuel is incorporated within the personhood of labourers, potentially (in the labour market) and

in actuality (in the labour process). Its expenditure has therefore to be forced and driven, coaxed, manipulated, incentivised – indeed, the tactics of ensuring that labour-power is transformed into labour is at the heart of management 'sciences' (human resource management, industrial relations etc.). Furthermore, education and training are implicated in the social production of labour-power. It is this that establishes their capitalist form; that is, makes it possible for us to refer meaningfully to 'capitalist' education and training (Rikowski, 1996, 1999, 2000d). In capitalism, labour-power takes a specific social form as *human capital* (Rikowski, 1999, 2001b). Thus, we have the 'human' capitalised, hence *capitalised humanity* – the 'human' as capital (Hill, 2001; McLaren, 1999, 2000, 2001; McLaren and Rikowski, 2001; Rikowski, 1999, 2000a–d, 2001b).

Labour-power is capital's weakest link: it exists within us as alien 'life-form' (human capital), but always subject to our individual and collective acts of willing. A precondition for the liberation of the 'human' from its incorporation within capital is subversion of the smooth flow of labour-production within capitalist education and training. To educate and train for the generation of forms of labour-power expenditure that do not manifest themselves as expressions of the value-form of labour constitutes a further stage of development towards a future beyond the social domination of capital. As Peter McLaren (1998, 1999, 2000) and myself (McLaren and Rikowski, 2001; Rikowski, 2001b) have argued, education and training should be at the forefront of thinking regarding oppositional strategies to capital's social domination, and also be a core concern of Marxist theory. Today, they are neither. This chapter seeks to uncover the significance of capitalist education and training for terminating the value-form of labour and effecting the dissolution of capital, and in the process to bring in capitalist education and training from the outer regions of anti-capitalist social theory.

The argument proceeds in five stages. The first section explores some of the features and dynamics within Karl Marx's social universe: the social universe of capital (after Postone, 1996). It focuses on value as a specific form of social energy (Neary and Rikowski, 2000). The second section shifts to labour-power, its characteristics and definition, its transformation into labour, and hence its role in value generation. The third section examines the contradiction-ridden nature of labour-power through exploring what I call its 'aspects'. Section four outlines the social production of labour-power in capitalism. This production process points towards the significance of systems of education and training in capitalism today. The

concluding section argues that the effectiveness of critical or revolutionary pedagogy (after McLaren, 2000) is one of the key questions facing Marxists and anti-capitalists today. It has the potentiality for disrupting the smooth flow of labour-power production and reconfiguring labour-power for the prospect of social transformation. This final section builds upon some of the arguments first advanced in *The Battle in Seattle: Its Significance for Education* (Rikowski, 2001b).

Karl Marx's Social Universe[1]

The idea of a 'social universe' can be traced back to Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (1996: 259) and ultimately back to the social cosmology of Karl Marx's doctoral dissertation of 1840 (Neary, 2000b). For both Postone and Marx, 'social universe' refers not to some abstract and a-historical ontological presuppositions underpinning the 'social' but to a particular, historical form of social life. This is Karl Marx's social universe: the *social universe of capital* that is the subject of the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*, the *Grundrisse* and early works such as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

The substance of capital's social universe is value (Neary, 2000a; Neary and Rikowski, 2000; Rikowski, 2000c). Or, more specifically, capital's existence rests on surplus-value – i.e. value over-and-above that as represented by the value of labour-power that guarantees the social reproduction of the worker. Capital is value-in-motion (Kay and Mott, 1982). As John Holloway (1995) has noted, 'capital moves' through its constant transformations into other forms of capital (money form, state form and so on) and also through its loops into the production of itself through further production cycles. The flows and movements of capital are simultaneously those of labour: labour moves too (Neary, in this book). Firstly, on the basis of the generation of value and surplus-value in the labour process (so labour moves in the form of value, or as the value-form of itself) but also as the mediator of capital's various transformations (Postone, 1996). Capital moves, but not of its own accord: the mental and physical capabilities of workers (labour-power) enable these movements through their expression in labour. The social universe of capital then is a universe of constant movement; it incorporates and generates a restlessness unparalleled in human history such that 'All that is solid melts into air' (Marx and Engels, 1848: 83). Furthermore, the social universe of capital moves as a totality. It

is set on a trajectory, the 'trajectory of production' as outlined by Postone (1996: ch. 9). This trajectory is powered not simply by value but by the 'constant *expansion* of surplus-value' (Postone, 1996: 308; author's emphasis). The consequences of the particular form and direction of the movement of capital's social universe are momentous and tragic:

> The modern capitalist world, according to Marx, is constituted by labor, and this process of social constitution is such that people are controlled by what they make. Marx analyzes capital as the alienated form of historically constituted, species-general knowledge and skills and, hence, grasps its increasingly destructive movement toward boundlessness as a movement of objectified human capacities that have become independent of human control (Postone, 1996: 384).

The trajectory of capital's social universe is based on a form of movement that forces it to continually crash against the limits of its own constitution and existence. It is movement out of control (Hudis, 2000). As Marx notes, 'the goal of the economic system is the unhappiness of society' (1844: 26). The tragedy of labour is that this 'destructive movement towards boundlessness' rests on our skills, our knowledge and the transformation of our capacity to labour, our labour-power, into labour. The whole movement is powered by and is dependent upon our labour.

In its first incarnation in the capitalist labour process, value is incorporated within some material 'things', in commodities; though it can be created through the production of immaterial commodities too (Burford, 2000; Dinerstein and Neary, 1998; Lazzarato, 1996).[2] Neither should value, as the substance of capital's social universe, be viewed as some kind of 'stuff', some material substratum. It is, after all, a *social* substance. As Marx noted in the preface to the first German edition of *Capital*: 'In the analysis of economic forms…neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of use. The force of abstraction must replace both' (1867b: 19). Value can be viewed as being social energy that undergoes transformations: its first metamorphosis being its constitution as capital in the form of surplus-value. As Ana Dinerstein notes, 'social energy is permanently being transformed' (1997: 83), and created too. Value is a 'multi-dimensional field of social energy: a social substance with a directional dynamic (expansion) but no social identity' (Neary and Rikowski, 2000: 18). It is the 'matter and anti-matter of Marx's social universe' (*ibid*.).

Recent work by Neary (2000) has added significantly to our understanding of the cosmology of capital, the nature of capital's social universe. Neary notes that it is clear that Marx thought about his work cosmological-

ly. Marx held that the law of value as delineated in his major work, *Capital*, was like the law of gravity. On Neary's analysis:

> …the law of gravity to which he [Marx] was eluding was Newton's law. [And] what he could not know was that his elaboration of the law of value was in fact in advance of the science of the day and anticipated the revolutionary ways in which Einstein's theories of relativity and gravity recomposed our notions about the relationships between time, space, matter and energy. (Neary, 2000: 10, cf. Neary, 1997: ch. 3, 'Theory and Relativity').

The crucial point about gravity for Albert Einstein was that it was not a self-contained power but was constituted as a 'field of force' (Hey and Walters, 1997). The argument here is that value, within the social universe of capital, constitutes a social force field analogous to gravity as a force field within the known physical universe. Neary indicates that:

> For Einstein, gravity is not force acting between bodies. It is an energy field created by matter, itself the result of the distortion of time and space affected by the intensification of the density of frozen quantities of matter. These distortions create paths along which movement occurs and also the way in which matter in that movement maintains itself in a solid state (Neary, 2000: 11).

Following the argument through, value is a social energy field whose effects as a social force are mediated by the movements of capital (in its various forms) and the social relations between labour and capital. These latter, their movements in fact, condition the social distortions within capital's social universe, its constant disruptions and perturbations.

Social phenomena within capital's social universe are neither self-sustaining nor constitute stable entities. Furthermore, the social energy field (value) is constantly at risk of implosion. We ensure its maintenance. This is the tragedy of our social existence within capital's social universe. For although value is the substance constituting the social universe of capital it is not self-generating. It cannot create itself, nor can it morph into capital on its own accord. It is labour (Marx, 1867a) that creates value and mediates its various transformations (Postone, 1996), firstly into capital on the basis of surplus-value, and then the myriad forms of capital springing from surplus-value. Thus: the existence of the substance (value as social energy) that constitutes capital's social universe depends upon our labour. As Harry Cleaver notes:

> Capital can never win, totally once and for all. It must tolerate the continued existence of an alien subjectivity which constantly threatens to destroy it. (Cleaver in Neary, 1997: 25).

Labour, in turn, is dependent upon our capacity to labour; the energy, skills, knowledge, physical and personal qualities that we, as labourers, possess. In sum, the activity of our labour (in conjunction with means of production and raw materials) rests upon our *capacity* to labour: our labour-power. The following section examines labour-power, the 'fuel for the living fire'.

Fuel for the Living Fire

Karl Marx begins his first volume of *Capital* with the commodity, not capital. Marx draws our attention to the fact that

> The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as 'an immense accumulation of commodities,' its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of a commodity (Marx, 1867a: 43).[3]

For Marx, the analysis of capitalism begins with the commodity as it is the 'economic cell-form' (Marx, 1867b: 19) of that society. It is the most simple and basic form that can enlighten us about more complex phenomena springing from it, in the same way that human DNA provides significant data on the more concrete features of humans in general and particular individuals. The commodity was the perfect starting point for Marx as it also incorporated the basic structuring elements of capitalist society: value, use-value and exchange-value posited on the basis of abstract labour as measured by labour-time (Postone, 1996: 127–128). The commodity is the condensed 'general form of the product' in capitalist society (*ibid*.: 148), the 'most elementary form of bourgeois wealth' (Marx, 1863a: 173), and hence the 'formation and premise of capitalist production' (Marx, 1866: 1004). Commodities are also 'the first result of the immediate process of capitalist production, its product' (Marx, 1866: 974).

In *Theories of Surplus-value – Part One* (Marx, 1863a), Marx makes it clear there are two classes or categories of commodities within the social universe of capital:

> The whole world of 'commodities' can be divided into two great parts. First, labour-power; second, commodities as distinct from labour-power itself (Marx, 1863a: 167).

Labour-power was defined earlier in this chapter simply as the 'capacity to labour'. However, Marx has a formal definition that is very interesting. This is that labour-power is:

> …the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description (Marx, 1867a: 164).

On this formal definition of labour-power, and on the basis of research undertaken by myself (Rikowski, 1990, 2000d, 2001a), labour-power includes not just the usual 'skills', physical dexterity and knowledge but also incorporates the attitudes and personality traits essential for effective performance within labour processes. It depends, therefore, on what is included within 'mental capabilities'. Empirical research on the recruitment process (the process where employers assess labour-power) (e.g. many studies cited in Rikowski, 1990, 2001a), suggests 'mental capabilities' must include work attitudes, social attitudes and personality traits – aspects of our 'personalities'. These are incorporated too within labour-power as it transforms itself into labour. Cuming's (1983) research, on labour recruitment in Leicestershire, adds further weight to this suggestion. This extension of Marx's definition of labour-power *radicalises* the concept; it opens up the problematic relation between labour-power and personhood. Furthermore, exploring this relationship exposes the fragility of capital's social universe as it is ultimately dependent on acts of willing and desiring on the part of labourers – an issue pursued elsewhere (Rikowski, 1999, 2000d,e).

On Marx's formal definition above, labour-power has real social existence only when it is transformed within the labour process into actual labour. But this is only one aspect of labour-power's dual mode of social existence. On the one hand, labour-power exists as a virtual entity (a capacity, a potential) within the labour market, or to be more accurate, the market in labour-power (McNally, 1993). On the other hand, in the capitalist labour process, labour-power has *real* social existence; labourers call forth and activate an array of capacities, attributes and capabilities within their personhoods as they set about the *process* of labour. Hence,

> Labour itself, in its immediate being, in its living existence, cannot be directly conceived as a commodity, but only labour-power, of which labour itself is the *temporary manifestation* (Marx. 1863a: 171; author's emphasis).

For Marx, labour-power has real existence when it is transformed into labour. In the labour process, labour-power (potential, capacity to labour) is transformed into labour (activity, actuality). The personal and physical qualities, powers, skills and so on of labourers are activated by the will of the labourer for the performance of labour.

Labour-power then, is the special, unique commodity that generates value and surplus-value. It is the only commodity that has the capacity to generate value over-and-above its *own* value (the value for its reproduction), to create new, surplus-value (as first form of capital). Without human labour-power, there is no capital – no matter what the level of technological development. Labour-power is the most important commodity in capitalist society, the living commodity on which the existence of the whole capitalist system rests. As Marx notes, labour-power is a 'presupposition of capital' (1858: 320). Thus,

> …the basis for the development of capitalist production is, in general, that *labour-power*, as the commodity belonging to the workers, confronts the conditions of labour as commodities maintained in the forms of capital and existing independently of the workers (Marx, 1863a: 45; author's emphasis).

For:

> The activity of labour-power, i.e. labour, *objectifies* itself in the course of production and so becomes *value* (Marx, 1866: 1016; author's emphasis).

Labour is the *activity* of labour-power (*ibid*.). Education and training are elements in the social production of labour-power; therefore founding Marxist educational theory on the basis of labour-power uncovers their *strategic significance* in capitalist society. They are one of the foundations making for the existence and maintenance of contemporary capitalism.

Labour-power, as the *aggregation* of those mental and physical capabilities existing within persons that they exercise whenever they produce use-values, is a *unified force* within human beings. In selling herself to the capitalist the labourer sells her abilities and talents (Marx, 1878: 285) as the basis for value creation. The specific use-value labour-power has for capital is that is creates more value than that represented by the wage (Marx, 1865, 1867a). This has some unfortunate consequences for owners of labour-

power (labourers), for labour-power preserves 'its property of producing value only so long as it is employed and materialised in the labour process' (Marx, 1865: 381). The longer labour-power is away from the labour process, the more its quality deteriorates – a fact borne out in studies of unemployed people. It 'comes alive' as active value-creating force only when consumed by capital in the labour process (Rikowski, 1999: 62–63). The notion of a social force that exists within individuals as the 'life-force', or vitality of individual labourers, underpins Marx's conception of labour-power. The life-force of individuals as labour-power is expressed through, and as, those 'mental and physical capabilities' activated by the labourer when producing use-values which, in the capitalist labour process, is also the act of producing value.

Labour-Power: Its Aspects

The account of labour-power advanced in the previous section brings us to one of its key features. Although it is a unified social force, labour-power is nevertheless a highly contradictory phenomenon. Furthermore, as labour-power cannot be separated from the 'bodyliness of the worker' (Marx, 1858) then these contradictions become incorporated within personhood itself. We are 'screwed up' *by capital*. The contradictions inherent within labour-power flow from the existence of capital as a mode of being within labour, or labour in capital; what I have called *aspects* of labour-power (Rikowski, 1990). By 'aspects', I do not mean that labour-power is composed of different 'parts'. Furthermore, to split it up into 'parts' or 'bits' would reify these as discrete elements of labour-power, destroying its characterisation as a *unified* social force flowing throughout personhood. Rather, these aspects can best be viewed as *different modes of expression* of this self-same unified social force: labour-power. In this section, three labour-power aspects that are expressed as *capital within labour* are presented: the use-value, exchange-value and value aspects of labour. Three labour-power aspects expressed as *labour within capital* are presented: the concrete, subjective and collective aspects of labour-power. The first three exist as modes of labour-power expression flowing from aspects of value. The other two exist as modes of labour-power expression flowing from the alienated existence of labour within capitalist social life, and specifically within the labour process.

This discussion of these labour-power aspects begins from Marx's important distinction between 'quantity and quality'. It was misreading this distinction that led me to confuse and conflate exchange-value and value over 10 years ago in Rikowski (1990). This confusion was partly a result of following Cressey and MacInnes's (1980) distinction between use-value and exchange-value aspects of *labour*, where their rendering of use/ exchange-value confused the latter with value. So: to begin with Marx on quality/quantity.

On the first page of *Capital*, Volume I, Marx asserts that: 'Every useful thing, as iron, paper, and..., may be looked at from the two points of view of quality and quantity' (1867a: 43). A thing's utility constitutes its use-value. Use-values have the property of 'usefulness' 'independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities' (Marx, 1867a: 44). In capitalist society, notes Marx, use-values are also 'depositories of exchange-value' which 'at *first sight* presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort' (*ibid*.; my emphasis). However, commodities can only exchange with each other on the basis of something they have in common. Marx argues that their commonality is socially average labour-power (that yields homogenous human labour). It is this form of labour, abstract labour, that is the social substance of *value*, and it is value that inheres in all commodities in capitalist society on the basis of this equality of labour-powers (and hence of labours). Therefore,

> …the common substance that manifests itself in the exchange-value of commodities, whenever they are exchanged is their value.…[And]…exchange-value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed (Marx, 1867a: 46).

On this basis, a commodity has value 'only because human labour in the *abstract*' (as the labour of socially average labour-power yielding homogenous labour) 'has been embodied or materialised in it' (*ibid*.). The magnitude of value within commodities is measured by the quantity of this labour expressed through socially average labour-power. This quantity is measured by its duration, the labour-time (on the basis of socially average labour-power) it takes to produce the commodity. Thus,

> the labour-time socially necessary is that required to produce an article under the normal conditions of production, and with the average degree of skill and intensity prevalent at the time…We then see that that which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour socially neces-

> sary, or the labour-time socially necessary for its production. Each individual commodity, in this connexion, is to be considered as an average sample of its class (Marx, 1867a: 47).

The value of a commodity changes on the basis of the socially necessary labour-time it takes to produce it. It changes with the 'productiveness of labour' (*ibid*.), and this in turn is determined by

> …various circumstances, amongst others, by the *average amount of skill of the workmen*, the state of science, and the degree of its practical application, the social organisation of production, the extent and capabilities of the means of production, and by physical conditions (Marx, 1867a: 47; author's emphasis).

The quantitative aspect of labour is set by the following considerations:

> In general, the greater the productiveness of labour, the less is the labour-time required for the production in that article, the less is the amount of labour crystallised in that article, and the less is its value; and *vice versa*, the less the productiveness of labour, the greater is the labour-time required for the production of an article, and the greater its value. The value of a commodity, therefore, varies directly as the quantity, and inversely as the productiveness, of the labour incorporated in it (Marx, 1867a: 48).

If a capitalist enterprise produces a commodity at a value below the average for its class (by raising labour productivity) it can, for a while, sell it below its value and clean up in the market place. That is until other enterprises start to adopt the new technology or new training programme and a value for the product is established on this basis. This summarises the *quantitative* aspect of labour: the social drive to produce commodities at a value below the social average for their class. On the other hand, the qualitative aspect is significant in terms of realising value produced. For,

> If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore *creates no value* (*ibid*.).

As Marx notes in the *Grundrisse*:

> Use-value is concerned only with the *quality* of labour already objectified (1858: 363).

Marx argues that labour (like commodities) *also* has a dual character, a twofold nature: use-value (its qualitative aspect) and value (its quantitative

aspect) (Marx, 1867a: 48–49). This establishes two *aspects of labour*: the use-value and value aspects.

However, I wish to maintain that there must also be quantitative and qualitative aspects *of labour-power* too: the use-value aspect (qualitative) and the value aspect (quantitative) of labour-power. This must be so, as there are two modes of expression (of transformation into labour) of labour-power for the generation of these two aspects of labour. Labour-power must be adequate to the point of expressing itself in these two ways. Furthermore, when it does this simultaneously the labourer experiences a *contradiction* within her concrete existence. When labourers have regard to the quantity and quality of their work, then a tension, an irresolvable conflict is set in motion. Whether to spend labour-time on a commodity's quality or to spend less labour-time on it (thereby raising productivity): in this way the worker is faced with a banal, everyday contradiction in working life. Managers of labour-power are subject to this too, both in terms of the transformation of their own labour-powers into labour and in terms of managing the labour-powers of others.

In the social production of labour-power, therefore, the various labour-power attributes – the itemised constituents of labour-power, the skills, attitudes and so on – also have this contradiction flowing through them. Thus: it could be expected that in schooling and training in contemporary capitalist society, where raising the quality of labour-power has become increasingly favoured as a strategy for increasing labour productivity, this duality could be demonstrated. Furthermore, the same duality would run through the labours and labour-powers of teachers and trainers.

Finally, the exchange-value aspect of labour also carries with it an exchange-value aspect of labour-power. This establishes the *equality* of labour, of labour-powers and the equal social worth of labourers. On the basis of exchange-value our labour is equal (Rikowski, 2000b). This is the only form of equality recognised, or socially validated, in the social universe of capital. This form of equality has nothing to do with 'morality', for capital is 'without ego' (Postone, 1996). Furthermore, we are of equal 'worth' only if our labour-powers are of equal value. Again, this has nothing to do with ethics. An argument could be advanced that social justice can only be equality of labour-power values: labour-powers that have the capacity to produce value to equal degrees on standard labour-time, implying equality of development on the basis of education and training. This was argued in Rikowski (2000b). But on reflection it is difficult to see in what sense this could be something that we ought to strive for without

introducing moral values that have no currency within the social universe of capital (like all *other* values).

Next, there are the three aspects of labour-power deriving from labour's existence in capital. The optimum starting point is with the *concrete* aspect of labour-power, as its characteristics can be brought out most productively in relation to the previous, exchange-value aspect of labour-power. This is the differentiating aspect of labour-power that is tied to the specifics of workers' labour-power qualities and attributes and the concrete expression of these in particular labour processes. It acknowledges that labour-powers are different at the concrete level; so 'we're all individuals' and 'everyone is different' as labour-power. This outlook on labour-power comes to the fore especially within the recruitment process (Rikowski, 1990, 1992) when employers must necessarily discriminate on labour-power quality (there being a necessary relation between the use-value and concrete aspects of labour-power at this point). It is also clear that this differentiating aspect runs counter to the exchange-value aspect of labour-power. Thus: workers are intrinsically equal and the same, and also unequal and different as labour-powers. We live this contradiction.

The subjective aspect of labour-power is labour-power in its individual and *will-determined* moment. Labour is the subjective element in the labour process. Its expression, the transformation of the labourer's labour-power into labour, depends upon the labourer's activation of her labour-power. This active moment (i.e. 'which he exercises') is built into Marx's formal definition of labour-power provided earlier. Cressey and MacInnes (1980) noted correctly that Marx makes the human will a defining characteristic of all human use-value creating labour. The attributes, or 'powers' (as Chris Arthur calls them) that constitute the labourer's labour-power:

> …can only be externalised if they are objectified in production, and this latter requires, not the exclusion of…[the labourer's]…will but the use of…[her/his]…powers, however grudgingly (Arthur, 1980: 12).

Insofar as the will of the labourer is subordinated to the purposes, desires and ends of capital and its human representatives then it is incorporated within labour-power itself as it expresses itself in production through acts of labour. To the extent that this occurs, the labourer *becomes* capital. On this basis, the statement 'I am capital' has social validity (Neary and Taylor, 1998: 128). This subordination is never complete; the will of the labourer is capricious and subject to the contradictory aspects of labour-power (and hence personhood itself) now under consideration. The fact that

in capitalism workers do not own the means of production forces them to submit to the dictatorship of capital in the labour process. As Marx notes, because of this, the labourer 'activates his life to acquire the means of life' (1844: 269).

The collective aspect of labour-power reflects the fact that in capitalist society labour-powers are co-ordinated (through co-operation and division of labour). Thus, labour-power can be viewed through its *collective* aspect, as 'an accumulation of labour-powers' (Marx, 1858: 585). This is where the *quality* of co-operation between labour-powers is brought to the fore. Such co-operation forms a significant collective force within the labour process, a force that capital and its representatives seek to control and channel into the value-form of labour, into value creation. The collective aspect of labour-power can be viewed as an agglomeration and amalgamation of the individual labour-powers of workers set in motion for capital. As Marx noted, this

> …collective power of labour, its character as a social force, is therefore the collective power of capital (1858: 585).

Hohn (1988) has explored the collective aspect of labour-power (thought he does not call it that) to explain the social exclusion of some ethnic groups from the workplace on the basis that the quality of the aggregated labour-powers falls if the workgroup is less homogenous. Thus, this constitutes a starting point for a materialist explanation of some forms of racism in the labour market and the labour process.

What has been indicated thus far is that labour-power is a complex phenomenon with inherent contradictions and tensions that become incorporated within personhood – given labour-power's fusion with the person of the labourer. To bring out the full complexity of these contradictions between labour-power aspects, empirical and historical studies illustrating these would be required – a project not pursued here. However, as well as these diverse aspects of the unified social force that is labour-power, there is a deeper rift that destabilises labour-power and the person within which its force flows.

Labour-power, which takes the form of human capital, is at odds with the person (*de facto* with itself) as not-labour-power; the person with interests, desires, motives (dreams even) that run counter to the subsumption of the self as labour-power. The antagonistic labour–capital relation is a *relation within personhood* too in capitalist society. Our existence as *labour against capital* (as opposed to labour within and as capital) places a

limit on the capitalisation of our souls, the capitalisation of humanity through the phenomenon of labour-power.

Labour-power: it is *this* living commodity that schools and training organisations are in the business of socially producing, and it is this process of production that leads us to characterise education and training organisations and institutions today as being decisively *capitalist* in nature. This social production occurs on the basis of the labour-powers of the producers also being subject to contradictions and tensions flowing from the nature of labour-power.[4] The next section outlines briefly the social production of labour-power.

Social Production of Labour-Power: Preliminary Investigations

> …what he [the labourer] pays out for education is devilishly little, but when he does, his payments are productive, for *education produces labour-power* (Marx, *Theories of Surplus-value – Part One*, 1863a: 210).

The social production of labour-power is at the heart of contemporary education and training policy. Raising labour-power quality for national economic competitiveness is deemed to be essential for success in global capitalism by governments today (Cole, 1998). I have indicated this in relation to England and Wales (Rikowski, 2001b) but it is a phenomenon readily acknowledged in other countries (e.g. McLaren, 1999, 2000 for the United States; and Grant Banfield for Australia). In England, it is human capital, the form that labour-power assumes in today's capitalism, that frames education and training policy. I have shown this specifically in relation to lifelong learning policy (Rikowski, 2000f) and more recently indicated how it is the organising concept in New Labour's Green Paper on compulsory schooling for the government's second term of office (Rikowski, 2001c). The crucial point is that enhanced labour-power quality, *ceteris paribus*, increases relative surplus-value as socially necessary labour-time is diminished (and Rikowski, 1999: 73–74, expands on this point). Representatives of capital perceive this as increased labour productivity, yielding a competitive edge for products at the point of sale, and on this basis urge governments to meet their 'needs' regarding labour-power quality enhancement.

The social production of labour-power was a process Marx hardly recognised. Its social existence was very hazy in his time, with state schooling just emerging. Indeed, its lack of social definition in Marx's day led him to conclude that

> Labour as a social and natural force does not develop within the valorization process as such, but within the *actual labour process*. It presents itself therefore as a set of attributes that are intrinsic to capital as a thing, as its use-value (1866: 1056).

Thus: the labour process itself is a force that develops labour-power. Marx (1863b: 148; 1865a: 292) distinguishes occasionally between the costs of production of specific labour-powers and their reproduction. But the social production of labour-power remains shadowy. I have argued elsewhere that there are basically two aspects to the social production of labour-power. First, there is the development of labour-power *potential*, the capacity to labour effectively within the labour process. Secondly, there is the development of the willingness of workers to utilise their labouring power, to expend themselves within the labour process as value-creating force. This is manifested in all the studies that pinpoint work attitudes as the most sought after and significant attribute of workers in recruitment studies, and the exhortations of employers that schools must produce 'well motivated' young people, with sound attitudes to work and recruits who are 'work-ready' and embody 'employability' – though these points would need to be driven home.

This characterisation of the processes involved oversimplifies, however, on at least two main counts. First, the commodity that schools and training organisations are engaged in 'producing' is, as has been indicated, a highly contradictory commodity. Institutions involved in the social production of labour-power are, basically, engaged in producing the *impossible commodity*. The impossibility of its final production rests on a number of considerations. (1) to socially produce labour-power means to reproduce its constituent contradictions engendering inherent instability. (2) as indicated in Rikowski (2001a), the necessary production requires co-ordination for various categories and functions of capital (e.g. capital-in-general, national capitals, fractions and sectors of capital, and individual capitals). Whilst this is not logically impossible, it defies practical realisation. (3) the drive to increase labour-power quality asserts itself as an *infinite social drive* (Rikowski, 2000a,b,d), and, by default, this applies also to all the labour-power aspects described in the previous section too. There is no logical end to the process of enhancing labour-power quality, as there are no 'natural' or 'ethical' levels of surplus-value production that are socially validated on the basis of value as the substance of capital's universe (Rikowski, 2000b). Therefore, there is no limit on the social drive to enhance labour-power quality.

Secondly, the social production of labour-power refers to a process that is highly institutionally fragmented in capitalist society. Today, it typically includes compulsory education. However, it can include training (on- and off-the-job), various forms of personal development programmes, further and higher education, computer-based education/training and many other elements. It also develops through labour itself, in the labour process. This last element is labour-power's 'automatic' production which, through various 'learning company' strategies, are attempts to formalise the process. Empirically and historically, the actual *concrete* forms of labour-power production vary enormously, and a study on the recruitment of apprentices to the engineering industry I undertook in the early 1980s indicated about five main forms, with many variants.

Nevertheless, a repositioning of Marxist educational theory onto the ground of labour-power theory is to be advocated. For a Marxism that is *against* society, rather than a Marxism that seeks to establish itself as just another theory *of* society, this move is necessary. It opens up the lunacies involved and the necessarily thwarted aspirations of those aiming to mould contemporary education and training policy to employers' education and training 'needs'. Furthermore, it exposes the horror of the capitalisation of humanity and the specific roles that capitalist education and training play in this process (Rikowski, 1999, 2000e). The shift from conventional Marxist educational theory to exploring the essentially *capitalist* nature of today's education and training means that the social production of labour-power becomes a key focus: for theory, for research and for educational politics. This 'educational politics of labour-power production' appears to be complex (as the social production of labour-power is fragmented). Essentially though, it is simple. It is a politics of *human resistance* to processes of dehumanisation generated by the social production of labour-power. This is resistance to becoming *capital*, human-capital; the social form labour-power assumes in capitalist society. Today, education and training are forcing processes, production processes for human capital, and it is the reduction of our humanity to *capital* that is at issue. 'Human capital' is not just some arcane bourgeois concept with an origin in the 1960s to be ignored or derided. It is an expression of our predicament, of what we are becoming. It highlights the fact that we live in a society that incorporates a social drive to recast the 'human' as human capital which also deforms and reforms education and training as elements of this process.

A politics of human resistance has also a deeper significance. It is a politics aimed at an *open future*, a future where capital's social relations

and forms do not foreclose the meaning and substance of the 'human'. It is, therefore, a politics that seeks the abolition of the value-form taken by labour in contemporary society, and hence the abolition of capital itself.

Conclusion: Revolutionary Pedagogy against Capital

We live in the social universe of capital. The substance of this social universe is value. Labour-power is the unique commodity in capital's social universe: it is the only commodity that can generate value greater than that required for its own maintenance and social reproduction, that is, surplus-value. Effective value-producing labour depends on the transformation of labour-power into labour in the labour process. Raising labour-power quality increases relative surplus-value. These fantastic transformative and creative qualities establish labour-power as the commodity that generates the substance of the social universe of capital (value) and the expansion and intensification of capital's social universe. Education and training are implicated in this process as institutions that socially produce labour-power. There is a dual process involved here. On the one hand, education and training have become increasingly capitalised, and we are entering a new World Trade Organisation-sponsored phase here with the corporate take-over of schools, colleges and universities in its early stages (Rikowski, 2001b). On the other hand, education institutions are being increasingly reconfigured as human capital producers, human capital being the social form assumed by labour-power in capitalist society. The intensity of this process varies between nations, but is apparent wherever we look.[5] As human capital producers, education and training institutions are implicated in the social production of the 'human' as capital, the human as a form of capital. As Marx noted, capitalist production 'does not simply produce man as a *commodity*, the *human* commodity, man in the role of commodity; it produces him in keeping with his role as a *mentally* and physically *dehumanised* being.…Its product is the *self-conscious and self-alienating commodity*…the *human* commodity' (1844: 82; original emphases).[6]

Labour-power is capital's soft machine, its weak point; as the single commodity on which capital's social universe depends. The *strategic significance* of capitalist education and training is that they are involved in the development of this precious commodity. Furthermore, they contain possibilities for the questioning and disruption of labour-power production. They hold possibilities for its subversion and the promise of debates on

principles and practices that challenge the constitution of education and training as processes of labour-power production. Critical education can challenge the premises of currently constituted society (Allman, 1999, 2001b). The insertion of principles and values incompatible with the constitution of capital's social universe can be promoted (Cole and Hill, 2001; McLaren, 1998) for destabilising and challenging the patterns of inequality established in contemporary capitalism. At this point, the significance of a *critical pedagogy* – pedagogy antithetical to capital's social domination and supportive of revolutionary social transformation asserts itself. But where is critical pedagogy today?

When this question is raised prospects appear to be bleak. First, governments instinctively grasp that education and training institutions have the business of labour-power (human capital) development in their orbit. This process is too important (on a national competitiveness agenda) to be left to education and training institutions themselves. Hence, various systems of control are developed (targets, tests, various inspection and 'quality' mechanisms) that seek to ensure that labour-power development is at the core of pedagogical endeavour and that education and training are aimed at socially enhancing the quality of labour-power. Whether these actually 'work' is not the point (and much education and training research addresses this question); the social drive to enhance labour-power quality is *infinite* (though it cannot, obviously, be expressed infinitely as concrete education and training policies and practices) and *immanent*. Secondly, the critical pedagogy movement is in bad shape, and it is to this sad situation we now turn.

What is known as the Critical Pedagogy School has its roots in the writings of the Brazilian socialist and radical educator Paulo Freire. It has relatively strong roots in North America, though in Europe it is much less studied and hardly ever attains reality in educational institutions. Paula Allman (1999, 2001b) and Peter McLaren (2000) demonstrate how Freire's work has been tamed and domesticated so that it now fits cosily into a liberal framework. In the classrooms of liberal educators, Freire's concept of 'conscientisation' has generated into mere consciousness-raising – torn apart from its roots in Marx and revolutionary social praxis. As McLaren argues: 'Critical pedagogy for me is not the class struggle in theory; it's not a textualist revolution – but a struggle in practice! It is historical materialist practice' (Cole *et al.*, 2001: 56). In his *Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, and the Pedagogy of Revolution* (2000), McLaren indicates how Paulo Freire's highly successful programmes for adult literacy were, for Freire, intrinsi-

cally linked to projects of socialist advance and human liberation. They were 'critical literacy' projects, not just technical methods for solving the 'literacy problem'. Given the degeneration of mainstream critical pedagogy, McLaren urges us to adopt a definite *revolutionary* pedagogy that is increasingly necessary, for

> Regardless of the personal, epistemological, ontological, and moral paths that we choose to take as educators, at some point we have to come face-to-face with the naked reality of capitalist social relations in both local and global contexts. We cannot ignore these relations, and if we are to engage in a revolutionary educational praxis, we need to do more than rail against the suffering and tribulations of the oppressed and instead seek ways of transforming them (McLaren, 2000: 190).

The works of Peter McLaren (1998, 1999, 2000), Paula Allman (1999, 2001a,b) and Peter Mayo (1999) are significant opening shots for revitalising 'critical' pedagogy so that it becomes a truly *revolutionary*, transformative pedagogy aimed at reconfiguring education and training as part of a wider project of socialist transformation. These writers give us a revolutionary pedagogy against capital. The key task is to extend this work and to adapt it for different national contexts, but always keeping in view that revolutionary pedagogy is an aspect of the struggle against capital in its entirety, a struggle against its social relations and its value-form of labour.

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Notes

1. This section draws heavily from a paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference 2000, 'Messing with the Explosive Commodity: School Improvement, Educational Research and Labour-Power in the Era of Global Capitalism' (Rikowski, 2000c), and also from *Marx and the Future of the Human* (Rikowski, 2000e).
2. As Burford (2000) notes, this point has far-reaching implications for theorising social class. The main one being that – as against mainstream neo-Weberian sociological conceptions of class – there is no essential rift between manual and non-manual labour, nor a split between manufacturing industry and services. Labour in service industries also creates value and surplus-value. This challenges the whole basis of the conception of social class currently in use in sociological discussions. For Burford, social class is based on *value*, the social substance at the heart of capitalist society, not on some superficial cultural, status, occupational or income considerations that are subject to market, lifestyle or fashion prerogatives.
3. Marx had made this point earlier in *A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy* (1859: 27) and also in the *Grundrisse* (1858: 881).
4. There is another set of contradictions flowing from clashes between processes of social production, social reproduction and maintenance of labour-power. These are not dealt with here.
5. There are possible tensions between these two social drives: the neoliberal business penetration of education may not necessarily lead to a system that makes for labour-

power enhancement. In my 'Six Points' paper (Rikowski, 2001c) I discuss this issue in depth through the notion of the Contracting State advanced by Ainley (1999). This state form could be framed to ensure that education and training contracts handed out to private contractors have in-built safety guards, standards and targets in relation to aspects of labour-power (human capital) development.

6. Strictly speaking, the 'human commodity' as labour-power is a concept Marx had not shifted centre-stage in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. However, as potentiality, labour-power does indeed flow throughout the whole of personhood and so Marx is not off the mark. But in its social reality (as actuality, its expression within the labour process) only a limited range of personal attributes (labour-power attributes: Rikowski, 1990) are utilised, conditioned by the specifics of the concrete commodity, the labour process and labour organisation.

8 Regaining Materiality: Unemployment and the *Invisible* Subjectivity of Labour

ANA C. DINERSTEIN

> To give unreality to reality one must give reality to the unreal, until the point is reached – inadmissible, unacceptable to the reasoning mind – when the unreal elements speak and move…and the nothingness can be heard, is made concrete (Ionesco, comment on *The Chairs* in Esslin, 1991: 152).
>
> – And where's the script?
> – It is in us, sir…the drama is in us. *We* are the drama and we are impatient to act it – so fiercely does our inner passion urge us on (Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*).
>
> It was as if he were being forced to watch his own disappearance, as if, by crossing the threshold of this room, he were entering another dimension, taking up residence inside a black hole (P. Auster, *The Invention of Solitude*, Faber and Faber, London, 1982: 77).
>
> Oh God! What *could* I do? I foamed – I raved – I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder – louder – *louder*! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? (E. A. Poe, *The Tell-tale Heart*).

This chapter explores the constitution of subjectivity of labour through Marx's method of determinate, by looking at the particular case of unemployment. Since 1993 there has been taking place in Argentina an almost uninterrupted process of social protests against the neo-liberal stabilisation plans and economic reforms initiated by the Menem administration. These social protests take the form of *roadblocks* organised by workers, the unemployed and entire communities affected by poverty, isolation and unemployment. The emergence and persistence of the *roadblocks* have

inspired some work which has aimed to grasp this new phenomenon; for example, as the site for the emergence of new cultural identities (Favaro *et al*., 1997); as a demand to get into the capitalist system; as an 'effect' of institutional and political weakness (Gauchet in Tenti Fanfani, 1996: 266); as the post-industrial form of conflict where 'the capital and labour relation is not any longer central to the development of capitalism' (García Delgado, quoted by Favaro *et al*., 1997: 22); as 'popular rebellions' (Iñigo Carre-Carreras and Cotarelo, in Klachko, 2000); as an indicator of the re-emergence of the left in Latin America (Petras, 1997); as social struggles with a revolutionary potential to break down the system in the future (Lizaguirre *et al*., 1997); as 'food riots' (Walton and Seddon, 1994).[1] Whilst in some cases the *roadblock* is seen as a desperate attempt to fight social exclusion, in others it becomes the site to constitute the new project for social change.

My aim is not to classify the *roadblock* but, rather, to allow it to speak for itself by reconsidering the categories and forms in which the issue is being approached. I will argue that the sociological assumption that unemployment means the *lack of* work and the 'exclusion' of workers from the process of commodity production leading to social exclusion (see Castel, 1991) does not allow an understanding of the constitution of the subjectivity of unemployment This concept is extremely disempowering as it has become a barrier to the appreciation of the significance of the new forms of resistance led by the so-called marginalised sectors of society. I argue that, although it looks as if it were the opposite, unemployment is a *form* of labour produced by the intensification and expansion of capitalist work in its most abstract forms: money (or abstract labour in motion). The temporary 'avoidance' of labour by capital (M – M′) (*Capital*, III) implies an apparent *jump* of capital into the future *without* labour. While labour is really subsumed and yet becomes 'invisible', the subjectivity of unemployment is still a barrier for the expansion of capital. This is not an economic problem, i.e. a result of technical imperfections in the labour market but a political problem based on the actual realisation of human life. In order to make the unemployed visible, I offer, first, the notion of subjectivity as a determinate abstraction, i.e. a transient and contradictory *form of being*, constituted in and through class struggle. I will suggest that the subjectivity of labour constitutes the site of conjunction of the concrete and abstract aspects of the capital relation within the subject. Secondly, as M – M′ is a disembodied representation of the capitalist transformation into its money form, I offer a equation based on Marx's formulae for the circuit of

capital reproduction which makes the production and transformation of the subjectivity of labour visible as an intrinsic aspect of capital. Finally, through that proposal, I attempt an interpretation of the new form of subjectivity of labour which emerged in and against the invisibility and virtual disappearance of labour produced by the neo-liberal recomposition of capitalist society in Argentina in the 1990s: *roadblocks*.

Real Subsumption

The framework from which to develop a critique against the notion of unemployment as the lack of work leading to social exclusion is real subsumption. In *Capital*, Marx highlighted the difference between formal and real subsumption of labour under capital. Under the formal subsumption of labour, capital 'has not yet succeeded in becoming the dominant force, capable of determining the form of society as a whole' (*Capital,* I: 1023), and, therefore, there is a 'direct subordination of the labour process to capital' (*Capital,* I: 1034). But in times of real subsumption, Marx argued, 'the entire development of *socialized labour*…in *the immediate process of production*, takes the form of the *productive power of capital.* It does not appear as the productive power of labour' (*Capital,* I: 1024; author's emphasis). This suggests that, whilst in the former case the labourers were *externally subjected or dominated* by capital, in the latter they have been integrated into the process of valorisation.

Whereas in the former situation subjectivity was still external to the economic process, in the latter subjectivity is constituted as an *integrated aspect* of the social world (Aragues, 1995). Under the real subsumption of workers by capital, concrete labour has no longer any autonomous existence from the social constitution of capitalist social relations. In other words, concrete labour is mediated by and becomes socially realised through its opposite: abstract labour (Dinerstein and Neary, 1998).

It was Italian autonomism in the 1970s which extended the notion of real subsumption from its narrow meaning, i.e. the real subsumption of labourers by capital, to a broader meaning, i.e. the real subsumption of society in capital (Negri, 1989). Valorisation was regarded as a political process of subordination. Thus, 'the theory of valorisation…is the theory of the way in which capital subordinates, transforms and utilises human productive activity for its own purposes: endless command over society' (Cleaver, 1992: 116). Inspired by diverse autonomous movements (see

Cleaver, 1992, 1993; Holloway, 1995), the theory contributed to the Marxist theory of subjectivity by introducing the notion of 'social factory' to consider those who were excluded from the process of production (Negri, 1989). Real subsumption implied not only that workers had become part of 'the machine' within the factory, which resulted in a complete subordination of workers to capital's command, but more importantly that 'the 'reserve army' was not really in reserve at all but actively put to work in the circulation and reproduction of capital' (Cleaver, 1992: 115; see also Cleaver, in this book).

However, the significance of real subsumption for a theory of subjectivity does not lie in the fact that the process of valorisation simply 'subordinates, transforms and utilises human productive activities for its own purpose' (Cleaver, 1992: 116), but that valorisation *produces forms of human existence* that allow capital to reproduce and expand, as well as push it into crisis. This difference is not just semantic. Whilst in the first case workers resist capital's imposition, in the second case they themselves are the product of the expansion of capital. The real subsumption 'of society in capital' (Negri, 1992: 72) eliminates externality between capital and labour and makes, instead, the production of subjectivity the most political (central) aspect of capitalist society. Subjectivity is permanently recreated as capital expands itself, as a social relation, through class struggle. Subjectivity is defined 'simultaneously and equally by its productivity and its producibility, its aptitudes to produce and to be produced' (Hardt and Negri, 1994: 12). In what follows I will explore the notion of social form and its ability to grasp the constitution of subjectivity, the human form of existence of labour.

Subjectivity: A Determinate Abstraction

The Marxist critique of the state developed within the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) in Britain in the 1970s constituted a turning point in the Marxist debate on the state and capitalist social relations (Clarke 1991b; Holloway and Picciotto, 1977) since it recovered the notion of *form* to capture the transformation of the state and the inner connection between the state and capital. It was argued that the state was not 'derived' from capital, but it constituted the political *form* of capital (see Clarke, 1991b). The CSE aimed to re-establish class struggle as the starting point to analyse

the constitution of the social, political and economic *forms* of capital historically produced through class struggle.[2]

The notion of *form* links abstraction with social practices. Unlike formal abstractions, which detach themselves from the phenomena concerned, 'determinate abstractions are abstractions in and through which phenomena obtain' (Gunn, 1992: 23). Marx's social forms are real abstractions, abstractions *in* reality (Gunn, 1992, my emphasis). Real abstractions embody, crystallise, contain and reproduce within themselves the contradictions of capitalist relations of production. The notion of *form* connotes the reality of historical determination, contradiction, impermanence and abstraction (Elson, 1979; Holloway, 1992). Marx was concerned with the real movement of constitution and transformation of these existing abstractions. Moreover, that movement was its object of analysis (Gunn, 1992).

The notion of *form* can be applied to understand the social constitution and transformation of human practice. The subjectivity of labour can be seen as a social form historically produced by conjuring the dimensions, social forms and antagonism of the capital relation, and thus becoming inseparable from the social processes which constitute it. I will argue that subjectivity conceived as a determinate abstraction offers the possibility to relocate human action at the core of capital, and, therefore, contributes to an empowering theory of subjectivity (praxis).[3]

The social relation of capital materialises in two forms: as 'labour' as such and as 'social forms' both historically produced by class struggle (Postone, 1996). Whilst the former refers to the human forms of existence of capitalist social relations, i.e. what we usually call 'labour', the later refers to the objectified forms of social relations, which mediate the impersonal domination of labour by capital (Postone, 1996: 59), i.e. what we usually call 'capital': the state, money, the law, the labour process. In order to understand a form of subjectivity, it is important to look at the interaction between the aspects which constitutes 'labour' and the social forms which constitute the capitalist powers insofar as they are *both* mediations of labour as value-creating social practice. On the one hand, 'labour' exists through at least three aspects: identities, organisation and strategies of resistance. These aspects constitute 'labour' as such and mediate labour. For example, the labour movement facilitates both the organisation of working class resistance and the institutionalisation of it. But, although these aspects can be approached separately, for example, in order to understand the recomposition of 'labour' it might be useful to look at the crisis of the national identity of the working class, or the breakdown of the power of

trade unions, neither of them alone can explain the form of 'labour' as they each in their own, express only an aspect of the totality of 'labour' of which they form a part. On the other hand, labour as social activity is also mediated by social forms which represent capital. Capital materialises through these forms: the state, money and the law allow capital to exercise its command over labour. The state and the law, for instance, are decisive in shaping the identity of the working class and class antagonism. However, each of these socially 'objectified' forms represent a partial aspect of capital domination. For instance, the analysis of the struggle of the working class in and against the state (see LEWRG, 1980) although decisive, is insufficient to grasp the constitution of the subjectivity of labour.

Following this, the subjectivity of labour should not be confused with any of the aspects and social forms which constitute it, but, rather, it is the *site of conjunction* of them. Subjectivity is then a historical and particular articulation of the aspects which constitute 'labour' vis-à-vis the social forms which constitute 'capital'. The subjectivity of labour is not the subjectivity of workers (the most common mistake), but the subjectivity of labour as a social mediated capitalist activity: a form of being which reveals itself as a hieroglyphic of the multiple forms, struggles and contradictions which emerged within the struggle to produce subjectivity. These *forms of being* are historical, transient, concrete and abstract.

Having said that, it can be inferred that class struggle is *ultimately* a struggle over the form of the subjectivity of labour. The struggle over the form of subjectivity does not take place directly, but is *transferred on to* (or asserts itself as a struggle over) the subjective, political, economic and legal forms which mediate labour. In other words, the struggle over subjectivity asserts itself as a struggle over workers' identity, over social imageries and ideologies, over the law, over the forms of the institutionalisation and regulation of class conflict and politics, the forms of control of the power of trade unions, the welfare state, the labour code, workers' or human rights, wages and so on. The understanding of class struggle as a struggle *over the form of subjectivity* is not only relevant to understanding the processes underpinning the production and transformation of identity, labour and social organisations and the forms of resistance. It also allows, first, a better comprehension of the recomposition of the state, money and the changes in the law insofar as the production of adequate subjectivity constitutes their *raison d'étre*, and secondly, it assists the understanding of the dynamic interaction between the concrete and abstract aspects of capital as a social relation, which are embodied in a particular form of being. In what follows

I explore the constitution and characteristics of the subjectivity of unemployment as a real abstraction.

M – M′: Unemployment, 'Exclusion' and Invisible Labour

According to Marx, two tendencies of capital stand in contradiction: the tendency 'to reduce as much as possible the number of workers employed' and the tendency 'to produce the greatest possible mass of surplus-value' (*Capital,* I: 420). The contradiction results in the permanent destruction and recreation of capitalist means of production. This is not only a feature of moments of crisis but 'also of the everyday reality of accumulation, as the pressure of competition leads to an intensification of class struggle, the devaluation of backward capitals, the destruction of productive capacity and the displacement of labour' (Clarke, 1992: 135). In terms of the money form, the crisis and recomposition of capital asserts itself in the form of M – M′ (*Capital*, III). M – M′, i.e. 'unoccupied capital equals unemployed labour' asserts itself as the impossibility for capital to exploit social labour-power (Bonefeld, 1996). Yet, while M – M′ appears to be capital's self-expansion, it is only a condensed form through which capital achieves temporarily the goal of avoiding labour, for in fact, as highlighted, M – M′ ultimately depends on the effective ability of capital to exploit labour:

> The dissociation of money from exploitation impresses itself upon the state through the money power of capital (M…M′), a power in which the precondition of its existence, i.e. the expansive reproduction of capitalist exploitation of labour (M…P…M′) is seemingly eliminated (Bonefeld, 1996: 199).

The notion of reserve army aims to grasp the temporary 'avoidance' of labourers by capital. Marx highlighted that the production of the reserve army was an intrinsic feature of capitalist social relations of production:

> …the capitalist mode of production…forms a disposable industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost…it creates a mass of human material always ready for exploitation by capital in the interest of capital's own changing valorisation requirements (*Capital,* I: 784).
>
> …there should be *a surplus population*, which does not work. (*Grundrisse*: 609)
>
> [that] relative surplus population exists in all kind of forms. Every worker belongs to it during the time when he is only partially employed or wholly

> unemployed [but] we can identify three forms which it always possesses: the floating, the latent and the stagnant [and a fourth form which] dwells in the sphere of pauperism. (*Capital,* I: 794, 797).

The destruction of capital's productive capacity during the change in its organic composition towards new forms of valorisation is suffered by the 'surplus population' as a barrier to physical and spiritual reproduction of its human life: '…hence he becomes a tramp and a pauper; because he no longer sustains himself through this necessary labour...he has fallen out of the conditions of the relation of apparent exchange and apparent independence' (*Grundrisse*: 608–609). As Marx suggested in the *Grundrisse,* the technical term 'surplus population' refers, in fact, to *surplus of labour capacity* still subordinated to the value-creating logic. The reserve army is not excluded from anywhere but is defined *by capital* as temporarily superfluous:

> This idle surplus population is not what the economists have in mind when they speak of surplus population. On the contrary…the expression, surplus population, concerns exclusively…surplus of 'labour capacities'. Labour capacity can perform its necessary labour only if its surplus labour has value for capital…if their realizability is blocked by one or another barrier, then (1) *labour capacity* itself *appears outside the conditions of the reproduction of its existence,* is therefore…needs without the means to satisfy them; (2) necessary labour *appears as superfluous*, because the superfluous is not necessary…the relation of necessary and surplus labour, as it is posited by capital, turns into its opposite, so that a part of necessary labour…is superfluous, and this labour capacity itself is therefore used as a surplus of the necessary working population(*Grundrisse*: 608–609; author's emphasis).

Marx's observations are confirmed by the concrete experience of the unemployed at the present time. According to research in this field, unemployment is experienced as a social epidemic whose symptoms are a feeling of *social helplessness*, of *abandonment*, of *exclusion*: the unemployed feel like they are in 'no man's land', neither in the productive process or *anywhere else* (Kessler, 1996: 119; my emphasis). In their everyday struggle for a job the unemployed do not simply suffer from the humiliation of lengthy queuing, excessive requirements, rejection because of their age, abuse of power by managers who interview them, reduction of their expectations regarding wages and working conditions. Most importantly, they experience the need to *recover the ability to sell themselves again*: 'One has to sell oneself all the time!'…'How does one sell what one

has got to offer, what one really *is*?' (Kessler, 1996: 135, interviews, my emphasis).

In short, the unemployed suffer from the *tension* between what they are and need, and whether what they are and need is *useful* for capitalist development, for the process of capitalist fetishisation entails the detachment of needs from capacities: '…needs are, in a general sense, 'abandoned' in the course of their objectivation…[but] needs are simultaneously passions and capacities and thus capacities are themselves needs' (Heller, 1976: 41). In so far as capital's requirements are *abstract* needs, or the needs of an abstraction, this usually provokes an introspective attitude, frustration and the consequent construction of *handicaps* as self-stigma. Consequently, being a parent, or a single mother, or the lack of new skills and qualifications, or some decisions in changing jobs taken in the past, or political participation in joining a trade union or a political party, or age, or any disabilities are considered by them as obstacles for their social *reinsertion* into the labour market, that is into the *community*: 'Producers become the unemployed and their entire lives *turn adrift*, as much in terms of adult identity as in terms of survival' (Grassi, in Hintze, 1996: 68; my emphasis; see Kessler, 1996; see also Battistini, 2000, Beccaria and López, 1996; Gershanik and Mercer, 1996; Klisberg, 1996; Schlemenson, 1996, among others).

As Marx highlighted, during the period of unemployment *life itself* is postponed:

> The worker has the misfortune to be a living capital, and hence a capital with needs.…As capital, the value of the worker rises or falls in accordance with supply and demand, and even in a physical sense his existence, his *life*, was and is treated as a supply of a commodity...as soon as it occurs to capital – whether from necessity or choice – not to exist any longer for the worker, he no longer exists for himself…the existence of capital is his existence, his life…political economy therefore does not recognise the unoccupied worker, the working man in so far as he is *outside* this work relationship. The swindler, the cheat, the beggar, the unemployed, the starving, the destitute and the criminal working man are figures which exist not for it, but only…for the eyes of doctors, judges, grave-diggers… (Marx , 1992b: 335).

The Subjectivity of Unemployment: Abstraction and the Unrealised

The most important characteristic of capitalist society is not the participation of workers in the process of production, but the transformation

(dematerialisation) of concrete labour into abstract labour, the substance of value. Value is not just an aspect of society, but it constitutes the form of society (Neary 2000; Postone, 1996). Real subsumption indicates that, since capital has become the form of society (Postone, 1996) both the production of the forms of existence of labour and capital as well as the forms of social antagonism are shaped by labour as a value-creating social activity. Value is a relation of struggle (Bonefeld, 1995; see De Angelis, 1995).

M – M′ crystallises a moment of non-materiality where capital seems to *jump* into the future *without* labour. This has been pictured as a 'growing inmateriality' wherein 'the abstract is more true than the concrete (Negri 1992: 73), as a world that is 'to a greater degree than ever before, driven by anonymous forces, dominated by the movement of money (Clarke, in this book), a world 'awash with liquidity, and perturbed by an indebtedness that has spiralled out of control' (Harvey, 1999: 163).

This 'jump' requires a greater exploitation of other sectors of the labour force aiming at an increase in productivity to obtain a quick rate of return to compensate for the risk of betting on the future:

> The condemnation of one part of the working class to enforce idleness by the over-work of the other part and *vice versa*, becomes a means of enriching the individual capitalists and accelerates at the same time the production of the industrial reserve army on a scale corresponding with the progress of social accumulation (*Capital,* I: 789–790).

Yet, for those who are un-employed, the struggle over subjectivity is intensified. The mobility and non – materiality entailed in the volatilisation of capital in its money form (M – M′) intensifies the struggle in and against the subordination of life to the imperative of an abstraction (Dinerstein, 1999c). Rather than excluding the subjects, unemployment intensifies the real subsumption of workers in capital. Whilst 'unemployed capital' means the *expansion* of capital through its most abstract form, 'unemployed labour' means the potential impossibility of the reproduction and expansion of life. As the abstraction of capital intensifies the process of immateriality of social relations, so labour too becomes more immaterial and invisible. Whilst money flows and capital restructures itself, concrete labourers suffer the unbearable present situation within which the future is cancelled: i.e. the 'jobless future' (Aronowitz and Difazio, 1996).[4]

The self-expansion of capital in its most abstract form, implies a moment of separation, of derecognition, of deconstruction. It entails a

experience of discontinuity, of abandonment: an abyss. Therefore, abstraction asserts itself as an ongoing process through which capital attempts to force labour to exist in detachment, in interruption, in denial. Paraphrasing Lacan when he refers to the unconscious:

> Discontinuity…is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us, as a phenomenon, discontinuity, in which something is manifested as vacillation…the dimension should be evoked in a register that has nothing unreal or dereistic…but is rather unrealised (Lacan, 1994: 25, 23).

Abstraction is then invisible and unrealised materiality. Unrealised materiality does not mean simply separation of subject from object, and an endless process of abstraction which is 'continually renewed in ever changing conditions and it is this that gives rise to the continuous elaboration of forms' (Kay and Mott, 1982: 23; also Holloway, in this book). Rather, it means that the subjective and the objective forms of existence of labour are produced through the same process as the separation itself i.e. the constitution and expansion of abstract labour. Abstract labour does not only mean that, 'as opposed to concrete labour', it is defined as 'abstracted from the concreteness of 'needs and aspirations''(De Angelis, 1995: 118). Rather, the expansion of abstract labour is the expansion of the unrealised which endlessly constitutes and redefines the concrete and the abstract aspects of labour and their interaction.

The notion of 'unemployment' relies very much on the idea of *non-use of the labour-power by capital* and, denies that capital is, in fact, abstract labour in motion. Whether or not capital exploits labour effectively, the commodified form of existence of the unemployed does not cease to exist. The unemployed become another form of *living capital*, who are forced to sell their labour-power yet are unable to do so, and where the *tension* between what we are and what we need, and whether what we are and what we need is *useful* for capital is dramatically intensified. The *form* unemployment implies the presence of an open contradiction which reveals the real subsumption of human existence to the logic of the commodity-form. The absolute poverty of the working class becomes apparent since the use-value of the commodity labour-power is denied, the transaction postponed, yet those who are not employed by capital are themselves a product of capital. The confrontation between workers' needs and capital's and the state's requirements, i.e. between C – M – C and M – C – M′ (Taylor, in this book) can be put in a different way: the inner contradiction between concrete and abstract labour respectively. The situation of the unemployed

as being *outside* the sphere of production does not explain the contradiction of the commodified form of existence of labour: the unemployed *might potentially be able* to experience the contradiction between being compelled to sell themselves and not being able to do it collectively. As the autonomy from capital is impossible (c.f. Gorz, 1982, 1999) the unemployed workers are simultaneously compelled to sell their labour-power and prevented from doing it. In this situation, there is a real possibility of the non-realisation of their own life. In those situations, the illusion of externality between money and the (un)employed, i.e. M – M′, collapses.

Although unemployment appears as a gap between subjects (workers) and structures and institutions (labour market, wage relation) it shows, in fact, that there is an impossibility of detachment and externality between 'subjects' and 'structures', insofar as both are expressions of the same relation of struggle. The sense of hopelessness, abandonment, helplessness, of being adrift, and excluded suffered by the unemployed is not simply the result of the lack of money or the lack of a job, or social exclusion, but rather the lack of money or the lack of a job or the imagery of exclusion are forms of expression of the virtual dematerialisation of labour caused by the disarrangement and rearrangement between the subjective and the objective aspects of labour under the form of unemployment. Rather than a *lack*, unemployment is an intensified form of capitalist work where the dematerialisation of labour becomes apparent. Although invisible, this dimension of dematerialisation is a dimension of struggle which is problematic for capital not because it separates subject from object, but because, and paraphrasing Lacan again, it asserts itself in the form of the *unrealised, the 'unborn'*. The subjectivity of labour emerges not as the means to unifying what has been separated, but as a *disruption* of the arrangement between the abstract and the concrete aspects of labour. Subjectivity recomposes and redefines the forms of the concrete and the abstract and thus opens the possibility for the unborn to be born, for the unrealised to be realised. The struggle over subjectivity is as much a struggle over the concrete and visible forms of domination-resistance as it is a struggle over the invisible aspects of that relation. In the condition of unemployment, the struggle over subjectivity appears to be a struggle over a non-relationship, therefore, it asserts itself mainly as a refusal to be made invisible.

The unemployed are not just 'externally' forced to exist in a unsustainable form, but rather produced as an unsustainable human form of existence. Unsustainability refers not only to the fact that under real subsumption neither autonomisation nor reproduction of labour are impossible.

Real subsumption means that there is *no outside*: the production of resistance lies at the core of its own reproduction. Thus, unsustainability points at the unhappiness, frustration and impotence of the reality of capitalist work, which is intensified in the case of massive unemployment and poverty. It is this unhappiness that makes the subjectivity of unemployment political. This is not an economic (i.e. capital accumulation), institutional (social order and governability), social (disintegration), cultural (identity) problem but eminently political: it is the crisis of capital as a social relation of exploitation and domination and the expansion of capital in its most abstract form which produces these non-recognised forms of labour (life) (Dinerstein, 1999b). This significant element is usually neglected in favour of more abstract (politicist, economistic and sociological) analysis of unemployment. As social sciences fail to grasp the content of this forms of labour, they merely classify them in different political (disenfranchised), economic (poverty), sociological (under class).

M – α; β; γ; δ – M′: Regaining Materiality

The formulae for the reproduction of capital C – M– C/M– C– M′ and its money form M – M′ (*Capital*) do not allow the visibility of the form of subjectivity of labour fostered during the process of restructuring and change in the forms of the valorisation of capital. Particularly M – M′, which asserts itself as a 'meaningless form of capital' (Marx, 1966, in Bonefeld, 1996: 191), where as previously mentioned, the exploitation of labour is temporarily suspended, makes the subjectivity *immaterial* and, therefore, *invisible*. In order to regain materiality and grasp subjectivity 'in terms of the social processes that animate the production of subjectivity' (Hardt and Negri, 1994:12), I offer an equation within which I suggest, it is possible to materialise graphically the production of subjectivity within the process of valorisation: M – α; β; γ; δ – M′. In this equation α; β; γ; δ picture the various *forms of existence* produced within the real subsumption of society in capital. This includes those who are not recognised as being part of the process of production of value, i.e. the unemployed, the homeless, criminals, women, children living on the streets, the 'socially excluded'. Whilst M – C – M′ and M – M′ are disembodied representations of the circuit of capital, where subjects are presented either as commodities (C) or have *virtually* disappeared (M – M′), M – α; β; γ; δ – M′ aims to make visible the production of forms of *life* as an intrinsic aspect of this

process. Unlike M – M′, which as a condensed form of expression of the avoidance of labour *by capital* (Bonefeld, 1996; my emphasis), excludes the question of the production of subjectivity from the process of valorisation, the formula M – α; β; γ; δ – M′ poses the question: which are the forms produced *within* capital?, particularly during the crisis and transformation of capital; and how and to what extent α, β, γ and δ became a barrier to the expansion of capital. M-M', otherwise as fictitious accumulation, does not mean the end of the struggle over subjectivity and yet the forms through which the struggle asserts itself, reshaped within the process of M – M′, are decisive to understand the power of resistance.

In M – α – M′ the unemployed come out as a real abstraction, i.e. an abstraction *in* reality (Gunn, 1992) which cannot be comprehended if it is separated from the real *movement* that produced it. Subjectivity must be grasped *in* the reality of its production. Labour and social conflicts assert themselves dramatically as critical moments whereby the aspects and forms which constitute subjectivity are put in motion with unexpected results. Social struggles are nodes of the process through which labour moves (see Neary, in this book). My argument is illustrated below by an interpretation of the *roadblocks*.

Fighting *Virtual* Disappearance

The 1970s marked the highest point of political, economic and social instability in Argentina. The radicalisation of the whole society and the expansion of guerrilla movements in the late 1960s and the 1970s led to a new form of capitalist repression: *physical disappearance*. The physical disappearance of 30,000 people (most of them workers), i.e. the most invisible and immaterial form of labour ever, coupled with imprisonment, torture, intimidation, economic, political and psychological repression, exile (see CONADEP, 1984) poverty and unemployment, facilitated the intensification of the more abstract and fantastic forms of capital, i.e. evacuation, external debt, financial speculation, boundless credit, and the bankruptcy of the state by means of the transference of resources from society to new economic groups linked to transnational corporations.

Nonetheless, state and economic terrorism did not prevent the emergence out of the dark period of new forms of resistance. In the 1980s, democracy made possible the expansion of new human rights' movements like the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*,[5] as well as the renewal of the labour

movement itself. Although during 1982–1989, the new democracy facilitated the materialisation and visibility of the political and economic horrors of the previous years, it simultaneously repressed resistance in favour of a progressive legitimisation of a new form of domination via uncertainty, instability and economic repression. The hyper-inflationary episodes of 1989 crystallised the climax of the struggle in and against the legalisation of the 'terrorism of money' (Marazzi 1996), under a new form: 'stability'. During the 1990s, stability was reified.

The halt of hyperinflation by means of the Convertibility plan agreed with the International Monetary Found (IMF) in 1991 was considered an economic 'miracle'. Stability became a social imagery, or meta-explanation, where money appeared to be under political control, and, thus, it was believed to be the starting point to benefit everyone in the short term. Yet, the Convertibility plan was the lynch-pin of a neo-liberal economic adjustment invigilated by the IMF based on privatisation, decentralisation, marketisation of health, social security and pensions, flexibilisation, casualisation of labour and redundancies in the public and private sectors. Ironically, stability produced the most unstable forms of labour: poverty, flexibilisation and casualisation of labour combined with an unprecedented 'double digit' unemployment rate. In August 1995, official statistics highlighted that since the beginning of the convertibility plan, unemployment had risen from 6% in 1991 to 18.5% in 1995. In July 2000, the rate of unemployment reached 15.4% and it is estimated to reach 17.1% in 2003 (INDEC, August 2000). The explosive combination of unemployment with underemployment affects around 7 out of 13 million workers (Dinerstein, 2001a, 2001b).

In response to this, *roadblocks* organised by people who are technically 'social excluded', i.e. the unemployed, public sector workers and the local communities have spread through several provinces of Argentina since 1993 and constitute a new form of resistance whose aim is to regain *materiality* by imposing a physical barrier to the self-expansion of capital.

For the purpose of this exposition, a *roadblock* can be presented as follows: the inhabitants of the community, severely affected by unemployment and poverty produced by privatisation of the main source of employment, the marketisation of life and governmental corruption and indifference, block the main motorway by means of barricades, pickets and a bonfire made of burning tyres. Those who block the roads are the unemployed, women and men, casual and state workers, self-employed, children, local trade unions and organisations of the unemployed. Initially, the road-

block presents a direct and physical barrier that serves three purposes: to prevent the circulation of the normal trading in goods and services, to make people's demands visible and to create a point of encounter.

The *roadblock* mobilises existing contradictions within the national and provincial administrations, capitalist financial institutions allowing the demonstration to evolve into a more sophisticated form of resistance. The demonstrators' demand the increase of employment programme allowances, payment of overdue wages for state workers, and government assistance in establishing and developing employment and industrial projects in the area. They also demand the guarantee that they would not be legally persecuted, as had been the case in the past, for their participation in the *roadblock*, which, according to the criminal code is considered a crime. The government usually responds by both sending hundreds of military policemen to the area and by trying to negotiate with demonstrators. Coercion does not change the demonstrators' minds. In general, the young unemployed, who call themselves the *Piqueteros* or *Fogoneros*, reject institutionalisation and subordination and take a leading role in the organisation of resistance. Resistance turns the motorway into a battlefield.

The first form in which the *roadblock* becomes material is by means of the physical resistance against direct repression. Rather than intimidating the demonstrators, police repression leads to anger and fury, and fosters a great sense of solid presence. The *roadblock* congregates a multitude. The physicality of the *roadblock* is not static but rather, develops its own dynamic. The road becomes not only the battlefield against the military police, but also the place for expressions of solidarity, connections, organisation, decision making, communication, negotiation and recomposition of identities. The *roadblock* mobilises a history of struggle against state violence, and transforms the present frustration, suffering, isolation and misery into a movement of enthusiastic resistance. State repression is a catalyst for the building up of resistance and solidarity. It makes real subsumption visible, institutions hollow, employment policies hopeless and corruption clear.

The second form in which the *roadblock* fights immateriality is through the development of its organisation and its dynamic expansion. After several hours of direct confrontation between the military police and the protesters, the local priests and provincial MPs intervene as 'mediators' between the government and the demonstrators. Trade unions are part of the *roadblock* and reshape their own strategies of resistance, together with other social organisations such as the *Multisectoriales*. During the struggle,

the old commissions for the unemployed are transformed into the *Comisión de Piqueteros* where young unemployed are the majority and, after that, into the *Coordinadora de Piqueteros* of the Province, with the ambition to become a national organisation.

The third form in which the *roadblock* achieves strength is through the accomplishment of institutional recognition without loosing their organisational autonomy. Whilst the organisation of the *roadblock* consolidates itself by the further co-ordination of diverse participants within the struggle, the government and the institutions engaged in controlling the *roadblock* move in the opposite direction. Although they characterise the *roadblock* as a subversive anarchy, the real anarchy develops within the state among the different institutional layers of the global, national, provincial and local administration with regards to how to repress, co-opt and find the financial resources to meet the demonstrators demands.

M – *Roadblocks* – M′

The subjectivity of the *roadblock* provides us with the material link for the understanding of the major subjective, political, social, economic and legal transformations that occurred during the 1990s in Argentina. It is a hieroglyphic of the multiple forms, struggles and contradictions which emerged within the struggle over the form of subjectivity under stability.

There is a significant difference between conceiving the *roadblock* as a product of stability (M – M'/*roadblock*) or as produced within stability (M – *roadblock* – M′). Whereas in the case of M – M'/*roadblock*, the capacity of those involved in the struggle to modify the objective 'external' situation is remote, and then their capacity for exercising an inner critique is eliminated, the case of M – *roadblock* – M′ allows the materialisation of the unemployed as a 'living critique' of *stability*. The paradox is that the roadblock is not an undesirable extraneous and unfortunate side effect of stability, but that stability is based on the existence of the most unstable forms of labour embodied by the roadblock.[6]

The roadblock is then the form (determinate abstraction) of the subjectivity of labour in Argentina in the 1900s-2000. The political power of the *roadblock* does not lie in the ability to obtain more employment programmes or even more jobs and capital investments for the impoverished areas of the country. By conjuring capital, the *roadblock* highlights how the more 'abstract' contradictions underpinning the production and reproduc-

tion of capitalist society as a totality, can articulate in a dramatic form of subjectivity. The *roadblocks* point at the violence of *stability.* Stability constitutes a new form of class antagonism which has become a social imagery of the basis for the amelioration of the future, and at the same time, it created the most unstable forms of existence with no future. This contradiction has made the search for stability an impossible project. It is possible to argue that the politics of resistance of the 1990s aim to *stabilise* the uncertainty entailed in the violence of stability by imposing physicality on the abstraction of global capital.

In conclusion, we can see that the *roadblocks* organised by workers, the unemployed and the marginalised in those economic depressed areas aimed at the control of the madness of capital, i.e. the pretension to dematerialise itself and exorcise labour, by counter-posing a physical resistance and by indicating that personal and collective life is becoming unsustainable in Argentina. Capital cannot exorcise labour. The reason lies in that 'labour is the presupposition of social existence as a whole, a presupposition from which capital cannot autonomise itself' (Bonefeld, 1996: 181). Therefore, the critique of unemployment as the lack of work can become the critique of capitalist work within which unemployment is one of the most unsustainable forms.

The experience of the *roadblock* is still mysterious but invaluable for its protagonists, and for what we as observers might learn. Through collective action, the unemployed and workers appropriated the power of labour in the *here and now*, towards a potentially broader renewed resistance, *vis-à-vis* state repression, the *lack* of money and the law, in a context of simultaneous economic growth and high rates of unemployment and poverty in Argentina. The roadblocks evolve from the very heart of unemployment to *fight for recognition against the virtual disappearance* of labour entailed in the self-expansion of capital.

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Notes

1. See also Iñigo Carreras and Cotarelo (1999), Klachko and Morelli (1999), Scribano (1998), Auyero (2000), Cotarelo (2000), and Dinerstein (1997b, 1998, 1999a,b, 2001a,b).
2. This theorisation emerged in the 1970s from the political preoccupation to understand the crisis of the state, and within it, the redefinition of the form of the state and its relation with global capital. Accordingly, it was important to replace the notion of 'economic crisis' with the idea of crisis as a crisis of the capital relation (see Clarke, 1991b, 1988, introduction; see interview with Holloway in Dinerstein and Thwaites Rey, 1994; and interview with Picciotto in Dinerstein, 1998a; Clarke, 1988, introduction).
3. See work on the issue in Bonefeld 1994, 1995; Neary and Taylor 1999; Neary 1999, 2000; De Angelis, 1995; Neary and Rikowski, 2000, Rikowski, 2000, McLaren, 1999, and the work presented in this volume.
4. Even when state policy making does work as a mediation to maintain labour-power as such, the problem of the unemployed is not technical or institutional but political, i.e. the constitution of subjectivity.
5. On the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, see Bellucci, 2000; Guzmán Bouvard, 1995; Kerber, 1986; Shanley and Ackelsberg, 1992 in Dinerstein 2001b and in www.madres.org.
6. In March 2001, Argentina has entered a political crisis. Neither democracy nor stability can be seen to be the most important achievements of the 1990s (see Dinerstein, 2001a).

9 Anti-Value-in-Motion: Labour, Real Subsumption and the Struggles against Capitalism

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Today is May Day. All over the planet demonstrators are protesting against global capitalism; and, everywhere, riot police – the representatives of the forces of reaction – are ready to resist the protests with rubber-bullets, water-cannon, biological weapons, shields, body armour, truncheons, snatch arrests, galloping horses, van charges, media-misrepresentation, photographic intimidation, unlawful detention and dodgy interpretations of the Criminal Law and Human Rights Legislation.

In Berlin, Anarchists – angry that the demonstration by the German neo-Nazi party is allowed to go ahead while their anti-capitalist march is banned – are fighting pitched street-battles with the police. In France, thousands of people are marching against global free trade which they blame for cultural and economic problems, including the loss of their jobs. Those who have been sacked by the retail clothing and food chain-store, 'Marks and Spencers', are wearing T-shirts proclaiming 'I was one of the 4,000 employees made redundant by e-mail'. In Australia, Green and Anti-Nuclear activists are targeting the Sydney Stock Exchange and other financial institutions in the big cities. In Japan, 450,000 workers took to the streets last Saturday to demand higher wages.

In London, the police have laid siege to the City district and the West-End shopping area. There is an uneasy quiet on the empty streets. The former Socialist leader of the Greater London Council and now Major of London, Ken Livingstone, has endorsed the police's strategy of 'zero-tolerance' against the demonstrators, who have been described by Michael

Todd, the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, as 'criminals', and by Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, as 'evil people'. The British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, has already accused the protestors of planning to wreak 'fear, terror and violence' on London.

To give coherence to the various demonstrations planned for London, the organisers have arranged the events to occur at landmark sites that are identified with the *Monopoly* board-game. The organisers of this Mayday Monopoly say the day will be a 'celebration of diversity, vitality, creativity and the imagination to oppose the monopoly that capitalism has over our lives'. For them capitalism is, 'the logic of an economy that produces war, famine, ecological destruction, fear and instability in its search to accumulate profit'. *Critical Mass*, a group protesting against the privatisation of public transport and the Government's environmental policy, will start their traffic-stopping bike ride from outside Marylebone and Liverpool Street Railway Stations. *Animal Action* are distributing free vegetarian burgers outside 'McDonald's' restaurant near Kings Cross railway station; the sound-track for this event is provided by the samba combo 'Rhythms of Resistance'. Embankment Park on the River Thames is hosting a pic-nic or peace-nik, an autonomous event with no proscribed agenda: 'just turn up, have fun and enjoy the freedom of the capital city…create your own entertainment free from capitalist oppression'. On the site of Speaker's Corner near Park Lane and the London Hilton, supporters of the homeless are building cardboard box 'hotels'. South of the River Thames, in front of the Elephant and Castle tube station, activists dressed as 'fat cat capitalists' are enacting an elaborate game about the dangers of privatising the London Underground. In the West-End other targets include the World Bank at Pall Mall and fur traders in the smart shopping district near Regent Street. In what is planned as the main set-piece demonstration of the day, 'the sale of the century' at Oxford Street, the demonstrators are denouncing those celebrity companies, i.e. Gap, Nike and Starbucks, who, they maintain, represent the worst aspects of globalisation.

Throughout the day the movement of the 5,000 demonstrators has been severely constrained by the 6,000 police. While the numbers of demonstrators is much lower than expected – for reasons that include the bad weather and much hyped media speculation about the possibility of terrorist violence – the show of police force is the biggest ever seen in the capital. Using provisions granted under Section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994, the police have blanket powers to stop and search anyone in a certain

area where they 'reasonably suspect' there will be incidents of serious violence. This does not allow the police to read anything in the demonstrators' possession, e.g. address books, pamphlets, bankcards, etc., nor do the protestors have to give their names or addresses. The police may also detain people if they suspect that a breach of the peace is imminent. The legality of all of this is questionable and at various times during the day, the police back off when legal observers, supplied by the organisers of the protest, advised that the police may be overstepping the law.

The most controversial implementation of these powers by the police is the indiscriminate entrapment of demonstrators. The most dramatic example of these entrapment manoeuvres is at Oxford Circus were people were corralled for seven hours against their wishes, during which time they were not even allowed to use the public toilets. Those who were there describe the experience as 'demoralising and debilitating'. The crowd was eventually allowed to leave, but only after being individually photographed. The use of photographic recording is technically only permitted when the police have strong grounds for suspecting a person of having been involved in criminal activity.

Although the police do not have it all their own way. On several occasions, a well-organised, non-violent group, who refer to themselves as *The Wombles* manage to breach police lines and liberate the crowd. They achieve this by wearing well-padded clothing designed to withstand truncheon beatings, and by showing a considerable amount of personal bravery. *The Wombles*, an acronym for 'White Overalls Movement Building Libertarian Effective Struggle', get their inspiration from by *Ya Basta*, a support group for the *Zapatistas* in Mexico, who were first seen in their all-white padded uniforms, the *Tute Bianche*, and gas masks on the anti-globalisation Prague demonstrations on 26th September 2000. And, even among the right wing press, there is a grudging recognition that the issues on which the protest is based are not marginal, and that at least, the demonstrators are getting these issues on the agenda. Even the *Daily Telegraph* was forced to concede: 'The anarchists are wrong but they are asking the right questions' (2.5.01).

By the end of the day in London, 28 protestors were injured, 3 police officers were hurt, including one woman police constable who collapsed after being crushed. Altogether there were 91 arrests and 150 people are planning collective legal action for unlawful imprisonment supported by

the civil liberties pressure group 'Liberty'. The cost to business is estimated at £20 million pounds.

The same day there were also protests motivated by a more traditional attachment to the May Day link with workers' struggles. May Day was originally designed to mark the execution of six workers killed for their part in organising a general strike in Chicago in 1886 and adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) three years later as international workers' day. In London, the Trade Union Council (TUC) march from Highbury Fields to Clerkenwell was reported to have passed off without incident. In Australia, unions have refused to endorse any attempt to shut the Stock Exchange and are going after Río Tinto and Nike who, they claim, have poor industrial relations records.

Globalisation

Making an Accommodation

The dependence of global society on capitalist work is the unavoidable reality of the modern world. The history of the modern world is the history of a struggle to transform the productive capacity of humans into 'human capital' (Rikowski, in this book). And yet, the avoidance of labour, reflected in the disappearance of the concept of labour from contemporary academic and political discourse, including traditional Marxism, has permeated the 20th Century. The current form of the avoidance is epitomised by the notion of globalisation. As we saw in the introduction of this book, the overwhelming characteristic of globalisation is that it has produced not only a political paralysis, but also a stalemate in the development of the historical critique of capitalist work. This is illustrated by the current process of intellectual accommodation to the apparently unstoppable forces of contemporary capitalism. The efforts to renew social democracy in the light of both globalisation and the death of socialism by Anthony Giddens (1998), is one of the most influential examples of this syndrome. To Giddens globalisation demands a political project – the Third Way – that is based on economic, social and political accommodation to the new world order that it has created.

In the controversial editorial of the new *New Left Review,* Perry Anderson matches a call for accommodation by arguing for a change in the historical role of the journal:

> What kind of stance should *New Left Review* adopt in the new situation? Its general approach, I believe, should be an uncompromising realism…the journal should always be in sympathy with strivings for a better life, no matter how modest their scope. But it can support any local movements or limited reforms, without pretending that they alter the nature of the system. What it cannot – or should not – do is either lend credence to illusions that the system is moving in a steady progressive direction, or sustain conformist myths that it urgently needs to be shielded from reactionary forces (Anderson 2000: 14).

Accommodation to the new era can also be found in more sophisticated sociological accounts on the crisis of modernity. For Alain Touraine, after the 1970s, economic forces have become autonomous and uncontrollable. He argued that the unifying principle of modernity is broken since there is a 'growing autonomy of the economic domain, as it becomes free from controlling and social institutions' (Touraine, 1997: 6). In his view, 'the weakening of the social and political order separates exchanges, networks, the circulation of information or goods, on the one hand, from cultural, individual or collective involvement, on the other' (*ibid*.: 8). For Touraine society has been divided into two distinct spheres, economic and cultural which it is his ambition to reconnect. The principle for this connection, he argues, has to be found in the individual itself, i.e. a suprasocial individual whose identity is no longer determined by society. He proposes that

> it is only thanks to the disappearance of what we called society or the social order that is possible to combine, albeit conflictually, a social life which tends now to be reduced to processes of exchange and to markets with cultural and psychological diversity, thanks to the principle of equality that rests…on the sole right of each individual to freely combine his or her participation in the instrumental world with the maintenance, reintegration or permanent reconstruction of his or her personal and collective identity (*ibid*.: 23).

Mind the Gap

An attempt to explain the increasing gap between subjects and structures, suggested by Touraine, is found in the work of Zygmunt Bauman. In *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and *Globalisation: The Human Consequences* (1999)

Bauman is concerned that 'one of the most seminal consequences of the new global freedom of movement is that it becomes increasingly difficult, perhaps altogether impossible, to re-forge social issues into effective collective action' (Bauman, 1999: 69). Bauman attempts to describe the concontemporary transformations of modern societies and the inability to influence them as the 'radical melting of the fetters and manacles rightly or wrongly suspected of limiting individual freedom to chose' (Bauman, 2000: 5). He provides an account of the transition from a heavy and solid modernity to a modernity that is characterised by lightness and liquidity. The result of this process of the melting of barriers is that the world and our identities within it have become unstable. The 'seductive lightness of being' lies in the 'volatility and unfixity of all or most identities' (*ibid.*: 83). Bauman claims that 'the present-day "liquidified", "flowing", dispersed, scattered and deregulated version of modernity may not portend divorce and final break of communication, but it does augur the advent of light, free floating capitalism, marked by *disengagement* and loosening of ties linking capital and labour' (*ibid.*: 147, author's emphasis).

Looking for Alternatives

There are more critical accounts of the present transformation of global society. For example, Bourdieu's critique of globalisation aims to contest what he calls the 'utopia of neo-liberalism', i.e. unlimited exploitation (Bourdieu, 1998: 94). To Bourdieu, globalisation is a myth (p. 34) characterised by a new class-based capitalist strategy, i.e. 'flexploitation' (p. 85), imposed by elites on society. His own project is to support critical movements that arise in response to this particular mode of domination. Similarly, Callinicos is concerned with the common assumption that there is no alternative to capitalism. He wants to respond to the accusation that Marxism has lost whatever 'organic' connection it once had to significant parties and movements (Isaac, 2000: 113). Like Bourdieu, Callinicos' critique emphasises the significance of the struggles that emerged in France in 1995 and the current anti-capitalist struggles against the WTO. He argues that neo-liberalism, whose hegemony he maintains is beginning to break up, has, through its structural injustices and economic instability, generated its own critique in the shape of an 'anti-capitalist mood', particularly in those countries like the United States where the revival of resistance has not been strong (Callinicos, 2000).

A critical voice that reflects the inevitability of anti-culturism is also found in the campaigning journalism of Naomi Klein. In her book *No Logo* she provides an attempt 'to analyze and document the forces opposing corporate rule, and to lay out the particular set of cultural and economic conditions that made the emergence of that opposition inevitable' (Klein, 2000: xxi). She does this through an analysis of the triumph of marketing over education and culture; the betrayal of consumer choice by corporate monopolisation, the casualisation of labour and the effect of all of this on civil liberties. Her ambition is to support social activism against corporate rule, which means citizens taking 'control of their own labour conditions and of the ecological impact of industrialization' (*ibid*.: 436). For her the movement must move towards the construction of a 'truly globally minded society, one that includes not just economics and capital, but global citizens, global rights and global responsibilities as well' (*ibid*.: 442).

Critical Limitations

All of these accounts on globalisation and its multi-various manifestations capture an essential truth: globalisation is a totalising and overwhelming reality. However, the accounts outlined above expressed this in two forms: either concretely as branded logos driven by political and economic elites using the strategy of neo-liberalism; or, abstractly, as a suprasocial and external phenomena beyond human control exemplified by globalisation itself. However, while these accounts capture the concrete and abstract nature of these phenomena, they deny the social content out of which the concrete and the abstract are derived.

This denial and its consequences are exemplified in the work of the authors previously discussed. Neither Giddens nor Anderson escape the abstract logic that appears to provide a reason and an excuse for globalisation. As a result, they provide an inevitabilistic account of capitalist development for whom the only response is accommodation to the imperative of the logic of capitalist expansion. In the same way, Touraine's interpretation reinforces the real illusion of the existence of a relation of externality between structure and subjects. By taking the separation between the subject and structure as his starting point, he is forced to find the new organising principle of society in an abstract interpretation of subjectivity which is not grounded in anything other than the abstract process of social interaction: economic and cultural exchange. Similarly, Bauman's

notion of liquidity captures the fluidity of capitalist social relations but only in a phenomenological form. He provides no substantial explanation for the viscosity of the liquid which he invents in order to make his categories flow; and so, rather than deconstruct the phenomena of globalisation, he simply reinforces its abstract logic. In the end, his work is another example of tautology: the substance of his metaphorical liquid is metaphor itself.

Callinicos and Bourdieu have the opposite problem. Both replace the abstract logic of the other accounts with a focus on what they regard as the concrete reality of capitalisation. For both Bourdieu and Callinicos there are two worlds: the world of capital and the world of labour, and they want to support the latter. For Bourdieu and Callinicos globalisation and neo-liberalism are new strategies through which the elites continue dominating and exploiting the working class. Trapped in a theory of worker victimisation each author is only able to provide a moralistic critique (Bourdieu) or a dogmatic concreteness (Callinicos) neither of which is able to provide the theoretical energy with which to do anything other than give support to whichever campaign is currently in fashion.

And finally, the negation implied by the big No in *No Logo* is replaced by an affirmative big Yes in Klein's proposal to escape neo-liberalism, through an affirmation of the basic principles of liberalism itself: citizenship, people' s control of corporate power and participation.

What all these accounts have in common is that they are based on some sort of disconnection between subjects and structures of global society, either by reifying the gap or by denying it. The purpose of the next section is to discuss the basis for disconnection by providing the social substance out of which this apparent disconnection is invented.

Anti-Globalisation: Critique

The Content

In the introduction to this book we noted that labour was the most important discovery of the modern world. More's *Utopia* was the recognition of the significance of labour. His ambition was to put forward the possibility of a new society reinvented from within another organisation of work. This discovery of labour formed the framework not only for an understanding of the way in which modern society was organised (…Locke, Smith,

Petty, Mandeville…), but also the basis for a radical critique (…More, Ricardo, Marx – see the introduction to this book). As we argued, both the understanding and the critique have been undermined to such an extent that labour has been abandoned as an object of critical analysis or a subject on which to reconsider the project for social emancipation. In this final section of the book, we wish to re-establish the concept and reality of labour by attaching it to the major critical issue of our time, i.e. rethinking the theoretical basis of anti-capitalist protest that have emerged around the world.

The labour debate aims to recover Utopia, i.e. critique, by locating labour as the focal point of any enquiry into capitalist social relations. In this sense, labour is not a sociological or economistic category but a political fact. By political we mean that labour is not simply a factor of production, but the social activity which creates and organises capitalist society: 'the analysis of labour is an analysis of the politics, or more precisely of the constitution of a determinate society' (Negri, 1992: 70). None of this means that we are identifying ourselves either with any fetishised political category, i.e. the left, or position ourselves on the side of labour, or even that we privilege labour against capital. Our intention is more fundamental: what we intend to do is to expose the connection between global indifference and anti-capitalist struggles through a theory against the *accommodation* proposed by Anderson and Giddens, against the *gap* identified by Touraine, against the *corporate greediness* outlined by Klein, against the *liquidity* described by Bauman, beyond the *moralistic criticism* of Bourdieu and the *dogmatic concreteness* of Callinicos.

In the following section we will do this by a reinterpretation of Karl Marx's value theory of labour (Elson, 1979). This allows us to present a critique of the reality and concept of capitalist work that transcends dichotomies such as subjective-objective, theory-practice, abstract-concrete, and demystifies 'structures', 'empirical facts', 'ideologies' and 'categories' as fetishised forms of intellectual work (see *Open Marxism* II: xv).

Value

The key to the problem of (dis)connection in a post-modern globalised world is the same as it was at the origin of the modern world: value. As we saw in the introduction to this book, the question of what constitutes value was not answered by political economists who were unable to reconcile the contradiction between the concrete and abstract character of social life. It

was not until the mature work of Karl Marx in *Capital* and the *Grundrisse* that the solution to this problem was exposed. The key to the solution was that for Marx value is the substance of capital. In this formulation, value is not a thing is itself, as it was for political economy, but rather, value is the dominant form taken by the capital social relation (Bonefeld, 1996); or, to put it more dynamically, capital is value-in-motion (Negri, 1992, 1991). If capitalism is value-in-motion, then anti-capitalism is *anti-value-in-motion.*

This fantastic idea of value-in-motion destroys the illusion of fetishism. What fetishism means is that, while things appear to have their own logic or reason for existing and their own intrinsic powers, they are, in fact, derived from social processes that are not apparent to bourgeois social theory which, as a reified form of academic activity, is itself a fetishised form of intellectual work (Clarke and Holloway, in this book). Like Ricardo, Marx argued that value was not obtained by the addition of independent fetishised factors of production, but that what appeared to be independent fetishised factors were produced out of the totality of value. This point marks the moment in which the possibility of the basis for a theory against *disconnection–accommodation–gap–rootlesness–liquidity–moralising the demoralised–dogmatic concreteness,* emerged.

Marx's difference from Ricardo was that value was not a material thing in itself but a determinate social process which, as value-in-motion, forms the basis of capital. In order to explain this and its political significance, Marx returned to the problem of labour where he made his most important formulation: that labour exists in a form of concrete and abstract labour. This peculiar form of social interdependence when generalised, became the determinant characteristic of capitalist society. The basis of this formulation is that, within capitalist society, workers do not consume what they produce; but, rather, work in order that they may consume what has been produced by others. Workers, therefore, are involved in two forms of labour: the production of use-values and the production of exchange-value. The quality of the use-value is specific to the kind of work they are engaged in, while exchange-value is abstracted from any specific content or, rather, its content is the social relation that it constitutes. What this means is that there is a real ground to labour, but the ground to labour is not material: the ground is a social relation. In such a situation, labour is not recognised, validated or rendered equivalent as a result of any intrinsic capacity or social need, but only to the extent that it forms a part of this social generality: 'as an individuated moment of a qualitatively homogene-

ous, general social mediation constituting a social totality' (Postone, 1993: 152).

Capitalist social relations are, therefore both material, in the sense that they are tangible, and immaterial, in the sense that they are constituted by the social relations out of which they are formed. In other words, capitalist social relations constitute a non-empirical reality (Sohn Rethel, 1978; Taylor, in this book). This formulation avoids tautology by insisting that the basis of the social relation is not the social relation itself, understood in the usual way as a matrix or series of discrete interconnections between what is tangible; but, rather, the social relation is itself derived out of the reconstituting social totality, i.e. the dynamic relationship between the abstract and the concrete expressed in commodity labour as concrete labour (tangible) and abstract labour (intangible). Domination then is not simply by other people but by abstract social structures that people constitute (Postone, 1993). This is a real process of abstraction in which 'labour grounds its own social character in capitalism by virtue of its historically specific function as a social mediating activity. Labour in capitalism becomes its own social ground' (Postone, 1993: 151). It is this process of abstract social mediation that Marx refers to as abstract labour which, as the ground of it own social relation, constitutes a unique form of social totality.

Therefore the contradictory basis of class struggle is not capital against labour, but, rather, the fact that labour materialises itself both as commodified forms of human existence (labour-power) and structures which constitute and enforce this process of generalised social mediation: money (economics) and the state (politics) against the workers who indirectly constituted them. In this arrangement, materialised forms of 'human capital' (Rikowski, in this book) are also constituted as determinate abstractions (Dinerstein, in this book; Neary, in this book). This strange relationship between what is concrete-material, and what is abstract-immaterial expresses itself in human forms of existence. Our point is that the materialisation of the concrete and abstract aspects of labour is not external but occurs within the human form itself. In the social world, this peculiar arrangement – generated by the dual logic of capitalist work within which workers are dominated by their own labour – takes the human form of subject and object (Holloway and Clarke, in this book), class consciousness and false consciousness (Taylor, in this book), class antagonism (Bonefeld, in this book) and class conformity which are imposed by the institutional

panoptical forms (De Angelis, in this book) which are themselves derived from within the same social relation (Cleaver and Clarke, in this book).

This is an historical, as well as a logical process of constitution of social existence. Indeed, the historical dynamic for this process is to be found within the relation between the concrete and abstract character of labour as a non-identical unity. The existence of abstract labour presupposes the expansive logic of capital, understood as value-in-motion. Motion is derived from the increases in productivity that are required to maintain capitalist expansion. In the drive for surplus-value, the abstract social dimension of labour in capitalism formally rearranges the concrete organisation of work, so that the maximum amount of human energy can be extracted as absolute surplus-value. This results in, among other things, the social division of work, the organisation of the working day, which includes the invention of machine-time (clock). When the limit of this process has been reached the abstract social dimension of labour in capitalism, can only increase the production of surplus-value by enhancing the general productivity of labour as relative surplus-value. The production of relative surplus-value takes the form of large scale industry within which the worker becomes a part of the machine, and is forced to change her nature and become something other than human. In this process, the concrete material character of labour is no longer recognisable or feasible as an independent form of existence and is completely overwhelmed by capital's abstract-social dimension. Marx refers to this as the process of real subsumption. This process of real subsumption does not simply revolutionise the organisation of work in the factory, but becomes the organising principle of society. This is more than simply extending the exploitative relations of the factory into society: 'the social factory' (Negri, 1988), but is the reconstitution of all social relations in the form of society. Marx provides the theoretical framework which enable us to consider the process of real subsumption as a real qualitative social change in which not only capital became totalising and the process intrinsically capitalist, but labour became the constituent source of its own domination (Postone, 1993). It is at this point when the logic of production escaped human control, that the capitalist abstract-concrete machine (large scale industry) took over not only human powers but also the institutions through which human life is dominated.

Intensification of the Abstraction/Critique

In the condition of real subsumption, a critique (Utopia) cannot be derived ontologically or normatively or metaphysically or romantically from the standpoint of labour (…Callinicos, Bourdieu, Klein…) because labour does not exist as a thing in itself. In order to uncover the basis of critique, it is necessary to go back to the structuring principle from we began. Our argument is that a logic of emancipation is discovered within the non-contradictory unity of capitalist work. The non-identity of the two dimensions of capital is the basis of the fundamental contradiction that underlies its dynamic development. The content of this critical standpoint constitutes the possible overcoming of this contradiction. As this totality is essentially contradictory, the non-identical cannot be completely assimilated, concrete labour (use-value) and abstract labour (value) are not identical and so give rise to the possibility of the future separation of these two dimensions (see Taylor, in this book). However, the issue is not only about separation, but also, and most fundamentally, the intensification of the dynamic relation between the abstract and the concrete which, in capitalist society, means that the concrete is overwhelmed by the logic of abstraction: value-in-motion. As capital seeks to restructure itself, the concrete world is becoming increasingly untenable. This takes the form of the crisis of categorisation (post-modernism), the destruction of the material world (environmental disaster), the dematerialisation of labour (unemployment, poverty) and the most fundamental attempt by capital to avoid its own content (globalisation).

The production of surplus-value is the production of real abstraction. The expansion of this process – through the imposition of socially necessary labour time (Neary, 2000; Neary and Rikowski, 2001) amounts to an intensification of the abstraction. Struggles against the intensification of the abstraction counter-pose physicality, i.e. seek visibility, in attempts to make themselves concrete against the overwhelming contradictory logic of the abstraction (see Dinerstein, 1999; Neary, 1999). This reinvention of the concrete takes the forms, for example, of workers fighting for their jobs or working conditions, or anarchists fighting for an unspecified alternative defined only by its otherness, or anti-globalisation protestors demanding inclusive democracy and citizenship. However, as the basis of their critique is that capital violates something that should not be violated, they are thinking themselves outside capitalist social relations. However, by claim-

ing an autonomist political position they are, in fact, disconnecting themselves from the very real struggle they claim to be representing. Our argument, based on the immanent critique derived from the principle of real subsumption, is that capital is not against human society but it constitutes an impossible human society. Therefore, the only connection is an inner connection. The only critique is a critique not of capitalism but in and against capital: anti-value-in-motion.

AND THIS HAPPENS NOWHERE…

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