

reference and ontology, and why they call forth in him a spirit so heavily burdened, these are considerable and very interesting questions. Ones not to be taken up here.¹⁷

Derrida calls attention to his constatives, the way the performative calls attention to itself. But he cannot help himself, he must utter them, he points to their deconstructibility but leaves them undeconstructed. Weary and diffident though his gesture may be, it is nonetheless forceful. It leaves us with a particular set of tasks and problems, whether political or deconstructive (not to say that these are necessarily two different things). I wish to take advantage of this diffident constative, this quasiconstative, and the force that it cannot not possess, to point to the creation here – in this chapter and indeed in this book – of a blackboard image of something other than capitalism existing and thriving on the contemporary economic scene. It's provisional and unassuming, it's clunky and unrefined – the image of noncapitalist forms of production and exchange, of noncapitalist modes of surplus labor appropriation and distribution, of those unfleshed out feudalisms, slaveries, household economic practices, intrafirm relations. But a ready option afforded by language (though undermined by deconstruction) is the possibility of ontologizing the specter. Here we do it not because we have to ("the metaphysics of presence cannot be fully evaded/expunged") or because we need to ("politics requires strategic essentialism") but perhaps because we have to let the opportunity pass. What is provisional is nevertheless powerful, that's about as ontological as I want to get for now.

¹⁷ In one who has unflinchingly taken on the task of destabilizing western metaphysics and philosophy, the tiredness evident in the blackboard chapter seems particularly uncharacteristic. It is interesting to think about why Derrida might have the energy to take on all of western thinking but might evince such world-weariness and lassitude in thinking about the world; one is tempted to adduce a "reality" effect, a sense of betting the weight of the ontological, that is different from the massive but feather-light project of deconstructing philosophy. Marxism and world political economy have long been associated with, and cannot be divested of without deconstructing, the weight and gravity of "reality."

11

Waiting for the Revolution . . .

This chapter has a surplus of titles. The grand title is "Rethinking Capitalism," affirming a connection with contemporary projects to rethink received concepts and, indeed, to question the entire epistemic foundation that has rendered them prevalent and effective. The tantalizing title is "How to smash capitalism while working at home in your spare time" (this one was used at a conference hosted by *Rethinking Marxism*).¹ Last but not least there's the querulous title: "Why can feminists have revolution now, while Marxists have to wait?" This title has drawn the most criticism (since it tends to obscure the diversity within feminism and Marxism as well as the commonalities between them) but it has also provoked the greatest recognition and alignment. Despite its flippancy and falsifications, the question points to the proximity of social transformation for certain feminisms – the image of gender as something always under (re)construction, of social transformation taking place at the interpersonal level as well as the level of society as a whole. By contrast with these feminist visions, Marxism seems quite distant from both personal and social transformation.

As a Marxist I often feel envious of the feminists within and around me. My feminism reshapes the terrain of my social existence on a daily basis. Why can't my Marxism have as its object something that I am involved in (re)constructing every day? Where is my lived project of socialist construction? Certainly my sense of a socialist absence is not just a sign that Marxism is moribund while feminism, by contrast, is full of vitality. On the contrary, in academia where I am situated, Marxism appears to be thriving. It has to do, I believe, with some-

¹ Where the first version of the chapter was presented. This may explain why the chapter reads as a Marxist speaking to an audience of Marxists.

thing else – with the fact that what Marxism has been called upon to transform is something that cannot be transformed – something I will call Capitalism.²

Let me say this again slightly differently. Marxism has produced a discourse of Capitalism that ostensibly delineates an object of transformative class politics but that operates more powerfully to discourage and marginalize projects of class transformation.³ In a sense, Marxism has contributed to the socialist absence through the very way in which it has theorized the capitalist presence.

Without defining Capitalism at this point, I wish to identify some of the special characteristics that give it the power to deflect socialist (and other progressive) transformations. Unlike many concepts associated with radical politics today, most prominently perhaps race, gender, and sexuality, the concept of capitalism (and by extension the concept of class, for which it is a sign in places where the term “class” cannot be used)⁴ is not at the moment subject to general contestation and redefinition. Indeed there seems to be a silent consensus – within Marxism at least – that a single meaning can be associated with the word. Thus when we call the United States a capitalist country, we do so without fear of contradiction. This is not because we all have the same understanding of what capitalism is (for there may be as many capitalisms in the Marxist community as there are Marxists) but because the meaning of capitalism is not a focus of widespread rethinking and reformulation. Instead the word often functions as a touchstone, a discursive moment at which we invoke a common Marxist heritage, creating a sense of shared world views and signaling that at least *we* haven’t forgotten the existence of class.

In the context of poststructuralist theory both the political subject and the social totality have been rent apart and retheorized

² For those who have read the chapters of this book in sequence it will by now have become clear that I am referring not to “actually existing capitalism” but to prominent ways of representing capitalism within Marxist (and some non-Marxist) discourses of economy and society. To emphasize the discursive nature of my object I will, in this concluding chapter, give capitalism the respect it deserves and refer to it as Capitalism.

³ Certainly Marxism has produced many different representations of capitalism, some of which owe a substantial debt to non-Marxist theory. In this book I have constituted Capitalism as a distillation of these or, perhaps more accurately, as the residue of a filtration process that has captured certain salient elements of various Marxist theories and analyses. It is this specific residue, rather than a set of attributes common to all Marxist representations of capitalism, that I am concerned with here.

⁴ In certain realms of feminist thought, for example, “class is definitely non grata as a topic” but one “may credibly speak of ‘proletarianization’ in the context of global capitalism” (Barrett 1992: 216).

as open, continually under construction, decentered, constituted by antagonisms, fragmented, plural, multivocal, discursively as well as socially constructed. But Capitalism has been relatively immune to radical reconceptualization. Its recent development has been duly charted and tracked within the confines of traditional modernist conceptions (for example, regulation theory)⁵ that have remained largely unchallenged by postmodern critical thought. Indeed, rather than being subjected to destabilization and deconstruction, Capitalism is more likely to be addressed with honorifics that evoke its powerful and entrenched position. It appears unnamed but nevertheless unmistakable as a “societal macrostructure” (Fraser and Nicholson 1990: 34), a “large-scale structure of domination” (Deutsche 1991: 19), “the global economy” or “flexible accumulation” (Harvey 1989), “post-Fordism” or even “consumer society.” Often associated with an adjective that evokes its protean capacities, it emerges as “monopoly capitalism,” “global capitalism,” “postindustrial capitalism,” “late capitalism.” Like other terms of respect, these terms are seldom defined by their immediate users. Rather they function to express and constitute a shared state of admiration and subjection. For no matter how diverse we might be, how Marxist or post-Marxist, how essentialist or antessentialist, how modernist or postmodernist, most of us somewhere acknowledge that we live within something large that shows us to be small – a Capitalism, whether global or national, in the face of which all our transformative acts are ultimately inconsequential.⁶

In the representations of capitalism developed by economic theorists such as Michel Aglietta, David Harvey, Ernest Mandel, and Immanuel Wallerstein and drawn upon by a wide range of social and cultural analysts, we may see that Capitalism has a number of prominent discursive forms of appearance. I call these discursive features of Capitalism “unity,” “singularity,” and “totality.” These features can be distinguished from each other (though none of them ever truly exists alone) and taken together (as they seldom are in particular textual settings) they constitute Capitalism as “an object of transformation that cannot be transformed.” I want now to consider each of these dimensions of Capitalism in turn.

Unity

The birth of the concept of Capitalism as we know it coincided in

⁵ See chapter 7.

⁶ At least where capitalism is concerned.

time with the birth of "the economy" as an autonomous social sphere (Callari 1983; Poovey 1994). Not surprisingly, then, Capitalism shares with its more abstract sibling the qualities of an integrated system and the capability of reproducing itself (or of being reproduced). Like the economy, Capitalism is more often portrayed as a unified entity than as a "system" through which flows of social labor circulate in various forms, it regulates itself according to logics or laws,⁷ propelled by the life force of capital accumulation along a preordained (though not untroubled) trajectory of growth.⁸

In company with and sometimes as an alternative to organicist conceptions, the unity of Capitalism is often represented in architectural terms. Capitalism (or capitalist society) becomes a structure in which

⁷ For theorists who do not wish to accord the economy the capacity to author its own causation, recognizing in this theoretical move one of the major buttresses of economic determinism (Amariglio and Callari 1989: 43) and of essentialist social theory in general (see chapter 2), the regulatory mechanisms allowing for the reproduction of capitalism may be transported outside the economy itself, so that social conditions and institutions external and contingent, rather than internal and necessary, to the capitalist economy are responsible for its maintenance and stability (see, for example, the work of the French regulation school, including Aglietta 1979, Lipietz 1987, or et al. 1982). Despite the expulsion of the regulatory mechanism from the economy itself, its function is unchanged, so that capitalism remains a society-wide system that has a propensity to be reproduced. Such reproductionism may characterize even hegemonic (in the Gramscian sense) conceptions of capitalism that attempt to theorize rather than presume capitalist dominance.

⁸ See chapter 5. Within the organicist economy, a variety of processes may be seen as regulating capitalist reproduction and development and/or producing the integration that allows the economy to function as a unified system. The capitalist economy is seen as integrated and disciplined by the processes of the market, by competition, by the profit rate and its conditions, by the law of value or the laws of capital accumulation, all of which can be theorized as generating unity of form and movement in the economic totality. Donna Haraway notes that the functionalism inherent in organicist social conceptions has been a brake upon conceptions of the future. We are not only constrained in the present, by what the economy (here capitalism) permits and requires, but in the future, by the way its drive toward survival and self-maintenance crowds out alternative possibilities. Even when regulatory functions are externalized to dispel functionalism and attenuate economic determinism in Marxist economic discourse, the totality is still capable of being regulated (see note 7) and of being integrated and bounded in the process of regulation. Its telos is reproduction whether the mechanism guaranteeing reproduction is internal or external. Many Marxists have sidestepped the charge of functionalism by focusing on the contradictions of capitalism, but often their theories of capitalist crisis and breakdown have been imbued with an organicist conception of capitalism as a unified body/subject to life-threatening illnesses or even to death (the ultimate confirmation of organic wholeness as a form of existence).

parts are related to one another, linked to functions, and arranged "in accordance with an architecture that is internal as well as external, and no less invisible than visible" (Foucault 1973: 231).⁹ The architectural/structural metaphor confers upon Capitalism qualities of durability, stability and persistence, giving it greater purchase on social reality than more ephemeral phenomena.

While Marxist conceptions usually emphasize the contradictory and crisis-ridden nature of capitalist development, capitalist crisis may itself be seen as a unifying process. Crises are often presented as originating at the organic center of a capitalist society – the relationship between capital and labor, for example, or the process of capital accumulation – and as radiating outward to destabilize the entire economic and social formation. Reconsolidation or recovery is also a process of the whole. So, for many observers of the post-World War II period, when the "long boom" ended in the crisis of Fordism, an entire Fordist "model of development" was swept aside. After a time of instability and turmoil, this society-wide structure was replaced with its post-Fordist analogue, consummating a grand economic, cultural and political realignment (see Harvey 1989; Grossberg 1992: 325–58).¹⁰

What is important here, for my purposes, are not the different metaphors and images of economy and society but the fact that they all confer integrity upon Capitalism. Through its architectural or organicist depiction as an edifice or body, Capitalism becomes not an uncentered aggregate of practices but a structural and systemic unity, potentially

⁹ Regulation theory and social structures of accumulation (SSA) theory (see note 7 above) represent two recent attempts to understand capitalism in terms of a structural model of development. Though both theoretical traditions attempt to theorize capitalist economies as the product of history and contingency rather than of logic and necessity, their analyses of particular capitalist formations conceal a structural essence of the social. This a priori and unified structure is laid bare during times of crisis and becomes particularly visible in the process of theorizing a new "model of development" or SSA, when theorists step forward to identify the new regime of accumulation, the new mode of regulation, the new labor accord, the new industrial paradigm, the new form of the state, putting flesh on society's bare bones. With the consolidation of a new model of development or SSA, the abstract and skeletal structure is once more clothed in a mantle of regulatory social practices and institutions. In this way, history is framed as a succession of analogous social structures rather than as a dynamic, contradictory and openended process that has no telos or prespecified form (see chapter 7 and Foucault 1973).

¹⁰ Interestingly, even Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 160–2) use the language of social structures of accumulation theory and regulation theory – including the term Fordism – to describe the hegemonic formation they see as structuring economic and social space in the postwar period. In doing so, they uncharacteristically fail to dissociate themselves from the a priori conceptions of social structure and totality that have accompanied these theories from their inception.

co-extensive with the national or global economy as a whole.¹¹ As a large, durable, and self-sustaining formation, it is relatively impervious to ordinary political and cultural interventions. It can be resisted and reformed but it cannot be replaced, except through some herculean and coordinated struggle.

Understood as a unified system or structure, Capitalism is not ultimately vulnerable to local and partial efforts at transformation. Any such efforts can always be subverted by Capitalism at another scale or in another dimension. Attempts to transform production may be seen as hopeless without control of the financial system. Socialisms in one city or in one country may be seen as undermined by Capitalism at the international scale. Capitalism cannot be chipped away at, gradually replaced or removed piecemeal. It must be transformed in its entirety or not at all. Thus one of the effects of the unity of Capitalism is to present the left with the task of systemic transformation.

Singularity

If the unity of Capitalism confronts us with the mammoth task of systemic transformation, it is the singularity and totality of Capitalism that make the task so hopeless. Capitalism presents itself as a singularity in the sense of having no peer or equivalent, of existing in a category by itself, and also in the sense that when it appears fully realized within a particular social formation, it tends to be dominant or alone.

As a *sui generis* economic form, Capitalism has no true analogues. Slavery, independent commodity production, feudalism, socialism, primitive communism and other forms of economy all lack the systemic properties of Capitalism and the ability to reproduce and expand themselves according to internal laws.¹² Unlike socialism, for example, which is always

¹¹ These formulations, especially the vision of the economy as co-extensive with the nation state, attest to the overdetermination of Marxism by classical political economy and its descendants.

¹² This does not mean that these other forms have not been implicated in images of organic unity and reproducibility, for "pre-capitalist" modes of production have often been viewed as organic, stable and self-reproducing and also as revitalized by internally generated crises. But these images of organic societies have not for the most part been associated with conceptions of the economy as a special and autonomous social sphere, one that not only determines itself but by virtue of that capability tends to exert a disproportionate influence on other social locations. Moreover, when theorists of noncapitalist modes of production have attempted to conceptualize them as functioning according to laws of motion, crisis and breakdown, they have had difficulty specifying a regulatory logic with the same degree of closure as that associated with Capitalism. Theories of patriarchy as capitalism's dual have floundered on the difficulty of generating systemic laws (see chapters 2 and 3).

struggling to be born, which needs the protection and fostering of the state, which is fragile and easily deformed, Capitalism takes on its full form as a natural outcome of an internally driven growth process.

Its organic unity gives capitalism the peculiar power to regenerate itself, and even to subsume its moments of crisis as requirements of its continued growth and development. Socialism has never been endowed with that mythic capability of feeding on its own crises; its reproduction was never driven from within by a life force but always from without; it could never reproduce itself but always had to be reproduced, often an arduous if not impossible process.¹³

Other modes of production that lack the organic unity of Capitalism are more capable of being instituted or replaced incrementally and more likely to coexist with other economic forms. Capitalism, by contrast, tends to appear by itself. Thus, in the United States, if feudal or ancient classes exist, they exist as residual forms; if slavery exists, it exists as a marginal form; if socialism or communism exists, it exists as a prefigurative form. None of these forms truly and fully coexists with Capitalism. Where Capitalism does coexist with other forms, those places (the so-called Third World, for example, or backward regions in what are known as the "advanced capitalist" nations) are seen as not fully "developed." Rather than signaling the real possibility of Capitalism coexisting with noncapitalist economic forms, the coexistence of capitalism with noncapitalism marks the Third World as insufficient and incomplete. Subsumed to the hegemonic discourse of Development, it identifies a diverse array of countries as the shadowy Other of the advanced capitalist nations.

One effect of the notion of capitalist exclusivity is a monolithic conception of class, at least in the context of "advanced capitalist" countries. The term "class" usually refers to a social cleavage along the axis of capital and labor since capitalism cannot coexist with any but residual or prefigurative noncapitalist relations. The presence and fullness of the capitalist monolith not only denies the possibility of economic or class diversity in the present but prefigures a monolithic and modernist socialism – one in which everyone is a comrade and class diversity does not exist.

Capitalism's singularity operates to discourage projects to create alternative economic institutions and class relations, since these will neces-

¹³ Of course, as the only true successor and worthy opponent of Capitalism, socialism is often imbued with some of Capitalism's characteristics. In order to be a suitable and commensurable replacement, for example, socialism has sometimes been theorized as having laws of motion, or a disciplinary and regulatory logic analogous to those of the market, competition, profitability and accumulation that are attributed to capitalism. But these conceptions have never become part of the dominant vision of socialism.

sarily be marginal in the context of Capitalism's exclusivity. The inability of Capitalism to coexist thus produces not only the present impossibility of alternatives but their future unlikelihood – pushing socialist projects to the distant and unrealizable future.¹⁴

Totality

The third characteristic of Capitalism, and perhaps its best known, is its tendency to present itself as the social totality. This is most obvious in metaphors of containment and subsumption. People who are not themselves involved in capitalist exploitation nevertheless may be seen to live "in the pores" of capitalism (Spivak 1988: 135) or within capitalism (Wallerstein 1992: 8, Grossberg 1992: 337) or under capitalism. Capitalism is presented as the embrace, the container, something large and full. Noncapitalist forms of production, such as commodity production by self-employed workers or the production of household goods and services, are seen as somehow taking place *within* capitalism. Household production becomes subsumed to capitalism as capitalist "reproduction." Even oppressions experienced along entirely different lines of social antagonism are often convened within "the plenary geography of capitalism."¹⁵

Capitalism not only casts a wider net than other things, it also constitutes us more fully, in a process that is more like a saturation than like a process of overdetermination. Our lives are dripping with Capitalism. We cannot get outside Capitalism; it has no outside.¹⁶ It becomes that which has no outside by swallowing up its conditions of existence. The banking system, the national state, domestic production, the built environment, nature as product, media culture – all are conditions of Capitalism's totalizing existence that seem to lose their autonomy, their contradictory capability to be read as conditions of its nonexistence. We laboriously pry each piece loose – theorizing the legal "system," for example, as a fragmented and diverse collection of practices and institutions that is constituted by a whole host of things in addition to capitalism – but Capitalism nevertheless exerts its massive gravitational pull.

Even socialism functions as the dual or placeholder of Capitalism

¹⁴ Those who have attempted to theorize social democracy as a transitional or mixed form of economy have encountered serious resistance from a Marxism which sees the welfare state as ultimately subsumed to or necessarily hegemonized by capitalism.

¹⁵ Derek Gregory (1990: 81–2) commenting on Soja's (1989) treatment of "new social movements."

¹⁶ As Gregory notes, even Laclau and Mouffe (1985) "have no difficulty recognizing that 'there is practically no domain of individual or collective life which [now] escapes capitalist relations'" (1990: 82).

rather than as its active and contradictory constituent. Socialism is just Capitalism's opposite, a great emptiness on the other side of a membrane, a social space where the fullness of Capitalism is negated. When the socialist bubble in eastern Europe burst, Capitalism flooded in like a miasma. We are all capitalist now.

It seems we have banished economic determinism and the economic conception of class as the major axis of social transformation, only to have enshrined the economy once again – this time in a vast metonymic emplacement (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Capitalism which is a name for a form of economy is invoked in every social dimension. The wealthy industrial societies are summarily characterized as capitalist social formations. On the one hand, we have taken back social life from the economy while, on the other, we have allowed it – under the name of Capitalism – to colonize the entire social space.¹⁷

This means that the left is not only presented with the revolutionary task of transforming the whole economy, it must replace the entire society as well. It is not surprising that there seems to be no room for a thriving and powerful noncapitalist economy, politics and culture, though it is heartening to consider that these nevertheless may exist.

Alternatives to Capitalism

I have characterized Marxism as producing a discourse of Capitalism that represents capitalism as unified, singular and total rather than as uncentered, dispersed, plural, and partial in relation to the economy and society as a whole.¹⁸ I do not mean to present Marxism itself as a noncontradictory tradition – clearly Marxism has produced discourses with different and, in fact, opposite characteristics. But I detect the presence and potency of the discourse I call Capitalism in what it makes unimaginable: a contemporary socialism in places like the United States. What strikes me as an inability among Marxists to view our own activities as "socialist construction" is produced in part by a Marxist discourse, one in which capitalism is constituted as necessarily hegemonic by virtue of its own characteristics (in other words, not by virtue of historical processes or contingencies).

¹⁷ So that while things that are associated with economism like class have become distinctly underprivileged, the economy is permitted to reassert itself in a new and more virulent form.

¹⁸ Of course, this characterization presents as a single "discourse" something that could also be seen as scattered instances, tendencies, or remnants. Certainly the features of Capitalism that I have identified are prevalent but are not universal or uncontested. They may be recognizable to us all though none of them may characterize our own conceptions.

As Marxists we often struggle to define the discursive features of Capitalism as illusions or errors. We undermine images of Capitalism's structural or systemic unity. We criticize the ways in which Capitalism is allowed to spill over into noneconomic social domains. Yet even so the hegemony of Capitalism reasserts itself. It is visible, for example, in each new analysis that presents an economy as predominantly or monolithically capitalist. We may deprive Capitalism of self-generating capacities and structural integrity; we may rob it of the power to confer a fictional and fantastic wholeness upon our societies; but Capitalism still appears essentially alone. As the ultimate container within which we live, Capitalism is unable to coexist.

For all its variety, the discourse of Capitalism is so pervasive that it leaves us "embarrassingly empty-handed when trying to come up with a different view of things."¹⁹ Perhaps under these circumstances the way to begin to break free of Capitalism is to turn its prevalent representations on their heads. What if we theorized capitalism not as something large and embracing but as something partial, as one social constituent among many? What if we expelled those conditions of existence – for example, property law – that have become absorbed within the conception of capitalism and allowed them their contradictory autonomy, to become conditions of existence not only of capitalism but of noncapitalism, to become conditions of capitalism's nonexistence? What if capitalism were not an entire system of economy or a macrostructure or a mode of production but simply one form of exploitation among many? What if the economy were not single but plural, not homogeneous but heterogeneous, not unified but fragmented? What if capitalism were a set of different practices scattered over the landscape that are (for convenience and in violation of difference) often seen as the same? If categories like subjectivity and society can undergo a radical rethinking, producing a crisis of individual and social identity where a presumed fixity previously existed, can't we give Capitalism an identity crisis as well? If we did, how might the "socialist project" itself be transformed?

The question is, how do we begin to see this monolithic and homogeneous Capitalism not as our "reality" but as a fantasy of wholeness, one that operates to obscure diversity and disunity in the economy and society alike?²⁰ In order to begin to do this we may need to get closer to redefining capitalism for ourselves. Yet this is a very difficult thing to do.²¹

If we divorce Capitalism from unity, from singularity, from totality, we are left with "capitalism" – and what might that be? Let us start where

¹⁹ Arturo Escobar (1992: 414) speaking of the attempt to generate alternatives to the dominant discourse of Development.

most people are starting today. One of the things that has produced the sense of capitalism's ubiquity is its identification with the market, a prevalent identification outside Marxism and within Marxism one that is surprisingly not uncommon. And yet of course so many economic transactions are nonmarket transactions, so many goods and services are not produced as commodities, that it is apparent once we begin to think about it that to define capitalism as coextensive with the market is to define much economic activity as noncapitalist.

In this regard, what has for me cast the greatest light upon the discourse of Capitalism (and on the ways in which I have been confined within it without seeing its confines) have been studies of the household "economy" produced by Nancy Folbre (1993), Harriet Fraad et al. (1994), and others. These theorists represent the household in so-called advanced capitalist societies as a major locus of production and make the case that, in terms of both the value of output and the numbers of people involved, the household sector can hardly be called marginal. In fact, it can arguably be seen as equivalent to or more important than the capitalist sector. (Certainly more people are involved in household production than are involved in capitalist production.) We must therefore seek to understand the discursive marginalization of the household sector as a complex effect, one that is not produced as a simple reflection of the marginal and residual status of the household economy itself.

If we can grant that nonmarket transactions (both within and outside the household) account for a substantial portion of transactions and that therefore what we have blithely called a capitalist economy in the United States is certainly not wholly or even predominantly a market economy, perhaps we can also look within and behind the market to see the differences concealed there. The market, which has existed throughout time and over vast geographies, can hardly be invoked in any but the most general economic characterization. If we pull back this blanket term, it would not be surprising to see a variety of things wriggling beneath it. The question then becomes not whether "the market" obscures differences but how we want to characterize the differences under the blanket. As Marxists we might be interested in something other than the ways in which goods and services are transacted, though there is likely to be a

²⁰ I do not mean to suggest that questions about the ways in which we theorize the economy and society are simply a matter of willful preference, but rather that they are matters of consequence. And the fact that we are not bound by some "objective reality" to represent the economy in a specified way does not mean that it is a simple or trivial matter to reconceptualize it, or that the economy and its processes are not themselves constitutive of their representations.

²¹ Fortunately I am not the only one trying to do it. See, for example, Resnick and Wolff (1987) and McNayre (1996).

wide variety of those. We might instead consider Marx's delineation of economic difference in terms of forms of exploitation, in other words, the specific forms in which surplus labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed – which indeed was what Marx was concerned to know and transform.

In any particular society we may find a great variety of forms of exploitation associated with production for a market – independent forms in which a self-employed producer appropriates her own surplus labor,²² capitalist forms in which surplus value is appropriated from wage labor, collective or communal forms in which producers jointly appropriate surplus labor, slave forms in which surplus labor is appropriated from workers who do not have freedom of contract. None of these forms of class exploitation can be presumed to be marginal before we have even looked under the blanket.

Calling the economy "capitalist" denies the existence of these diverse economic and class processes, precluding economic diversity in the present and thus making it unlikely in the proximate future. But what if we could force Capitalism to withdraw from defining the economy as a *whole*? We might then see feudalisms, primitive communisms, socialisms, as well as hitherto unspecified forms of exploitation. Defined in terms of the ways in which surplus labor is produced and appropriated, these diverse exploitations introduce diversity in the dimension of class – and at the same time they make thinkable (that is, apparently reasonable and realistic) the possibility of socialist class transformation.

None of this is to deny the power or even the prevalence of capitalism but to question the presumption of both. It is legitimate to theorize capitalist hegemony only if such hegemony is delineated in a theoretical field that allows for the possibility of the full coexistence of noncapitalist economic forms. Otherwise capitalist hegemony is a presumption, and one that is politically quite consequential.

²² Ric McInyre describes in a recent paper (1993: 231–3) the private economy of the state of Rhode Island, where the median establishment size is five. It is unlikely that all of these hire wage labor and participate in capitalist class relations, and highly likely that many of them are the locus of self-employment. What purpose is served by obscuring difference and calling these establishments capitalist, other than to affirm the hegemony of capitalism and the unlikely or marginal existence of anything else?

Conclusion

One of our goals as Marxists has been to produce a knowledge of capitalism. Yet as "that which is known," Capitalism has become the intimate enemy. We have unloaked the ideologically-clad, obscure monster, but we have installed a naked and visible monster in its place. In return for our labors of creation, the monster has robbed us of all force. We hear – and find it easy to believe – that the left is in disarray.

Part of what produces the disarray of the left is the vision of what the left is arrayed against. When capitalism is represented as a unified system coextensive with the nation or even the world, when it is portrayed as crowding out all other economic forms, when it is allowed to define entire societies, it becomes something that can only be defeated and replaced by a mass collective movement (or by a process of systemic dissolution that such a movement might assist). The revolutionary task of replacing capitalism now seems outmoded and unrealistic, yet we do not seem to have an alternative conception of class transformation to take its place. The old political economic "systems" and "structures" that call forth a vision of revolution as systemic replacement still seem to be dominant in the Marxist political imagination.

The New World Order is often represented as political fragmentation founded upon economic unification. In this vision the economy appears as the last stronghold of unity and singularity in a world of diversity and plurality. But why can't the economy be fragmented too? If we theorized it as fragmented in the United States, we could begin to see a huge state sector (incorporating a variety of forms of appropriation of surplus labor), a very large sector of self-employed and family-based producers (most noncapitalist), a huge household sector (again, quite various in terms of forms of exploitation, with some households moving towards communal or collective appropriation and others operating in a traditional mode in which one adult appropriates surplus labor from another). None of these things is easy to see or to theorize as consequential in so-called capitalist social formations.

If capitalism takes up the available social space, there's no room for anything else. If capitalism cannot coexist, there's no possibility of anything else. If capitalism is large, other things appear small and inconsequential. If capitalism functions as a unity, it cannot be partially or locally replaced. My intent is to help create the discursive conditions under which socialist or other noncapitalist construction becomes a "realistic" present activity rather than a ludicrous or utopian future goal. To achieve this I must smash Capitalism and see it in a thousand

pieces, I must make its unity a fantasy, visible as a denial of diversity and change.

In the absence of Capitalism, I might suggest a different object of socialist politics. Perhaps we might be able to focus some of our transformative energies on the exploitation and surplus distribution that go on around us in so many forms and in which we participate in various ways. In the household, in the so-called workplace, in the community, surplus labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed every day by ourselves and by others. Marx made these processes visible but they have been obscured by the discourse of Capitalism, with its vision of two great classes locked in millennial struggle. Compelling and powerful though it might be, this discourse does not allow for a variety of forms of exploitation and distribution or for the diversity of class positions and consciousnesses that such processes might participate in creating.

If we can divorce our ideas of class from systemic social conceptions, and simultaneously divorce our ideas of class transformation from projects of systemic transformation, we may be able to envision local and proximate socialisms. Defining socialism as the communal production, appropriation and distribution of surplus labor, we could encounter and construct it at home, at work, at large. These "thinly defined" socialisms wouldn't remake our societies overnight in some total and millennial fashion (Cullenberg 1992) but they could participate in constituting and reconstituting them on a daily basis. They wouldn't be a panacea for all the ills that we love to heap on the doorstep of Capitalism, but they could be visible and replicable now.²³

To step outside the discourse of Capitalism, to abjure its powers and transcend the limits it has placed on socialist activity, is not to step outside Marxism as I understand it. Rather it is to divorce Marxism from one of its many and problematic marriages – the marriage to "the economy" in its holistic and self-sustaining form. This marriage has spawned a healthy lineage within the Marxist tradition and has contributed to a wide range of political movements and successes. Now I am suggesting that the marriage is no longer fruitful or, more precisely, that its recent offspring are monstrous and frail. Without delineating the innumerable grounds for bringing the marriage to an end, I would

²³ It is interesting to think about what the conditions promoting such socialisms might be, including forms of communal and collective subjectivity. Ruccio (1992) invokes notions of "community without unity" and "a community at loose ends" as well as decentralized and complex ideas of collectivity emerging within various left discourses of the 1990s.

like to mark its passing,²⁴ and to ask myself and others not to confuse its passing with the passing of Marxism itself. For Marxism directs us to consider exploitation, and that is something that has not passed away.

²⁴ Many Marxists will argue, rightly, that reports of the demise of Capitalism are greatly exaggerated. Likewise, Marxists, postMarxists and nonMarxists may argue that Marxism cannot be divorced from Capitalism, so many and fruitful are the progeny of this marriage and so entrenched its position and descendants. Understanding Marxism as a complex and contradictory tradition, I would say that it has room for all these positions and indeed that it always has. But I also think that space for the vision I am articulating is growing, in part because conditions external to Marxism – including certain trends within feminist thought – have allowed the anti-essentialist strain that has always existed within Marxism to gain both credibility and adherents.