THE POSTMODERNISM-POST-MARXISM NEXUS:
LACLAU, MOUFFE, LYOTARD AND FOUCAULT'S DISCOURSES ON
DISCOURSE

DAVID VAL BERNANS

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfullment on the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Programme in Political Science
York University
North York, Ontario

June 1998

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-33520-8

Canada

The Post–Modernism–Post–Marxism Nexus:
Laclau, Mouffe, Lyotard and Foucault's
Discourses on Discourse

by **David Bernans**

a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

©

The Postmodernism-Post-Marxism Nexus: Laclau, Mouffe, Lyotard and Foucault's Discourses on Discourse

Abstract

This work is a marxist engagement with the theoretical tendencies of post-marxism and postmodernism as they are represented by Ernesto Laclau, Chantale Mouffe, Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault respectively. There are three main tasks to by achieved by this engagement; first, to deal with the representation and misrepresentation of marxist theory in post-marxist and postmodern thought; second, to evaluate the usefulness of post-marxist and postmodern approaches to problems in marxist thought in particular and modern thought in general; third, to absorb the most useful elements contained in the "posts" while avoiding their excesses.

I argue that post-marxism, as a theoretical project that defines itself against marxism, incorporates the most anti-marxist excesses of postmodern thought while missing some of its most useful theoretical insights. Where Laclau and Mouffe view marxism as a form of vulgar economic-determinism which has fettered the brilliant superstructural analyses of Luxemburg, Gramsci and Althusser by tying their symbolic readings of politics to the predetermined categories of the base (Chapter 2), I view marxism as a critique of the categories of bourgeois political economy that allows the polyphonic voices of the proletariat to disrupt surplus extraction (Chapters 3 and 4). Here my reading of Marx draws upon the neo-Wittgensteinian interpretation of the "differend" between capital and labour that is developed by Lyotard. Where Laclau and Mouffe view social struggles as the result of the articulation of symbolic elements in a system of mutually related signs - a social ensemble - with no necessary class character (Chapter 3), I view social struggles as the result of the more or less authoritarian organization of our everyday lives in (hetero)sexist and racist matrices (Chapters 3 and 4), and in the micro-technologies of prison, asylum and workplace (Chapter 5) whose continual reproduction also means the reproduction of a proletariat with interests that are fundamentally opposed to the authoritarian organization of our quotidian discursive and non-discursive practices. This marxist alternative to post-marxism is influenced by Foucault's theorization of micro-technologies of power.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

The Postmodernism-Post-Marxism Nexus:

Laclau, Mouffe, Foucault and Lyotard's Discourses on

Discourse

by David Bernans

Chapter 1

Introduction

The first one [asteroid] was inhabited by a king. Clad in purple and ermine, he was seated on a throne, both simple and majestic.

"Ah! Here comes a subject," exclaimed the king when he spied the little prince.

And the little prince wondered to himself: "How can he recognize me since he has never seen me before?"

He did not know that for kings the world is greatly simplified. To them, all men are subjects....

The little prince looked around to find a place to sit down; but the entire planet was covered by the magnificent ermine robe. So he remained standing and, since he was tired, he yawned.

"It is contrary to etiquette to yawn in the presence of a king," said the monarch. "I forbid it."

"I cannot help it," replied the little prince in confusion. "I have come on a long journey and I haven't slept at all..."

"In which case," said the king, "I order you to yawn. I have not seen anybody yawning for years. Yawns are a curiosity to me. Come now! Yawn again. It is an order."

"You are frightening me... I cannot yawn any more..." said the little prince, blushing.

"Hum! Hum!" replied the king. "Then I order you sometimes to yawn and sometimes to..."

He spluttered a bit and seemed vexed.

For the king attached no considerable importance to his authority being respected. He tolerated no

disobedience. He was an absolute monarch. But as he was very kind, he gave reasonable orders....

[Asked the prince,] "I should like to see a sunset... Please, do me that kindness... Order the sun to set...."....

"You shall have your sunset. I shall demand it. But, in accordance with scientific government, I shall wait until conditions are favourable."

"And when will that be?" asked the little prince.

"Hum! Hum!" replied the king, consulting his big calender. "Hum! Hum! it will be around... around... it will be this evening about twenty minutes to eight. And you shall see how I am obeyed."

The little prince yawned...[1]

The fourth planet belonged to a businessman. He was so busy that he didn't even look up when the little prince arrived.

"Good morning," the little prince said to him. "Your cigarette has gone out."

"Three plus two make five. Five plus seven make twelve. Twelve plus three make fifteen. Good-morning. Fifteen plus seven make twenty-two. Twenty-two plus six make twenty-eight. No time to light it again. Twenty-six plus five make thirty-one. Phew! Then that makes five hundred and one million, six hundred and twenty-two thousand, seven hundred and thirty-one."

"Five hundred million of what?"

"Eh? Are you still there? Five hundred and one million of... I don't remember... I have so much work! I am a serious man, I don't amuse myself with balderdash! Two and five make seven...."

"Five hundred and one million of what?" repeated the little prince, who never in his life let go of a question once he had asked it....

The businessman... realised that there was no hope

---

[1] Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, The Little Prince, trans. Irene Testat-Ferry (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995) 42-45.

of being left in peace.

"[T]hose small objects one sometimes sees in the sky."

"Flies?"

"Oh no. Small glittering objects."

"Bees?"

"Oh no. Small golden objects that set lazy men to idle dreaming. But I am a serious man! I have no time for idle dreaming."

"Ah! You mean the stars?"

"Yes, that's it. The stars."

"And what do you do with five hundred million stars?"....

"Nothing. I own them."

"You own the stars?"

"Yes."

"But I have already seen a king who..."

"Kings own nothing. They reign over. It is quite different."

"And what use is it to you to own the stars?"

"It makes me rich."

"And what is the point of being rich?"

"It enables me to buy other stars"...[2]

The fifth planet was very strange... There was just enough room for a lamp-post and a lamplighter. The little prince wondered what could be the use of a lamp-post and a lamplighter somewhere in the sky, on a planet without houses or people.

None the less, he said to himself, "Perhaps, the lamplighter is absurd. However, he is not as absurd as the king, the conceited man, the businessman and the drunkard. For at least his work has some meaning"....

When he arrived on the planet, he saluted the lamplighter respectfully.

"Good-morning, sir. Why have you just put out your lamp?"

"Those are the orders," replied the lamplighter.

---

[2] Ibid., 52-54.

"Good-morning."....

"I don't understand," said the little prince.

"There is nothing to understand," said the lamplighter. "Orders are orders."....

"My calling is a terrible one [continued the lamplighter]. In the old days it was reasonable. I put out the lamp in the morning and lit it again in the evening. For the rest of the day, I could relax and for the rest of the night I could sleep..."

"And have the orders changed since that time?"

"The orders have not been changed" said the lamplighter. And that is the tragedy! From year to year, the speed of the planet's rotation has increased considerably and the orders have not been changed!"

"And so?" asked the prince.

"Well, now that the speed has reached one rotation per minute, I do not have a second's rest. I have to light up and put out my lamp once a minute."[3]

Despite the "royal absolutism" encountered by the little prince on the king's planet, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's cosmic odyssey exemplifies a very modern view of power. There is a strict division between political and economic power - kings reign and businessmen own - and yet the effects of reigning and owning appear remarkably similar. We can equally imagine the king or the businessman giving the orders to the lamplighter. However, the king and the businessman see their respective vocations as completely distinct and autonomous activities. The king gives orders that are obeyed because his

---

[3] Ibid., 57-58.

4

subjects recognize his legitimate royal authority. The businessman gives orders that are obeyed because he has purchased the time of those who serve under him. For both the lamplighter and the little prince, however, it makes little difference where the orders come from. The little prince finds the whole business of giving orders that do not make sense very confusing, whereas the lamplighter grimly accepts his "terrible calling" without question. "Orders," after all, "are orders." The little prince admires the hard work and the loyalty of the lamplighter, but he is forced to conclude that the lamplighter's acceptance of the ridiculous orders he is given, puts him in the same category as the king and the businessman who give the ridiculous orders. King, businessman and lamplighter are all grown-ups, and as such, are necessarily silly. They are unable to appreciate the beauty of a sunset or a flower, or dream idly about cosmic adventure the way that the little prince does.

De Saint-Exupéry's is a very important message. Grown-ups are silly. But it must be added that grown-ups are silly for a reason, or rather, for numerous systematically reproduced

reasons. Understanding the reasons that we grown-ups engage in ridiculous order-giving and order-following helps us to overcome our systematically reproduced silliness. In the following five chapters, I will argue that the currently hegemonic system of order-giving and order-following is best understood as a capitalist system, and that this understanding, combined with social struggle, can help us develop a democratic socialist challenge to capitalism.

My perspective must, therefore, be defined as "marxist".

I accept the fundamental marxist precepts that:

1. The central organizing principle of contemporary social hierarchies is the extraction of surplus value from the working class by the capitalist class.

2. The necessity of systematically reproducing a working class with interests fundamentally opposed to those of capital constitutes an irresolvable contradiction at the heart of the capitalist system.

3. Although there are numerous contradictions produced by capitalism, the class contradiction is strategically central to the project of socialist transformation.

I would like my marxism to be defined by these precepts rather than by a perceived religious observance of the writings of a fellow philosopher, socialist, and as I read him (since he too accepts the above mentioned precepts) fellow marxist, by the

name of Karl Marx. I therefore use the lower case "m" to name my marxism.

I will engage with other perspectives that also conceive themselves as attempts to understand and challenge established hierarchies, even if these other perspectives do not always admit that there are subjects engaged in order-giving and order-following. These perspectives do not accept all of the precepts that define marxism. These philosophical tendencies are often defined by the fact that they come after marxism and other "modern" forms of thought, and by a perceived fundamental difference between them and what proceeded them. They therefore, for better or for worse, bear the prefix "post". The perspective of Laclau and Mouffe defines itself by its break with what Laclau and Mouffe perceive to be marxism. Therefore, they call their mode of thinking "post-marxism" (Chapter 2).[4] On the other hand, the respective analyses of Lyotard (Chapter 4) and Foucault (Chapter 5) do not so define themselves. They are generally labelled "postmodern" or

---

[4] See Chapter 2 of this work. See also Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Society (hereafter H & SS) (London: Verso, 1985).

"post-structuralist".[5] The fact that the various "posts" make

sense of and attempt to challenge established hierarchies

without accepting the precepts that define marxism does not

make dialogue between the "posts" and marxism impossible. In

fact, marxism can profit by absorbing the most useful elements

of postmodern thought. I undertake this task in Chapters 4, 5

and 6. Furthermore, by showing how marxism makes very good

sense of the currently hegemonic system of order-giving and

order-following while showing how that system might

realistically be challenged, it is possible to see the

fundamental mistake made by post-marxism in its rejection of

the marxist tradition. I undertake this task in Chapters 2 and

3.

But before moving on to our dialogue between marxism,

post-marxism and postmodernism, we must return to de Saint-

Exupéry's tale. It should be clear that neither the king, nor

---

[5] Although he has been designated by others as a "post-structuralist" and/or "postmodernist", Foucault does not use these words to describe his thought, whereas Lyotard enthusiastically accepts the "postmodern" label. See Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minneasota Press 1984).

the businessman, nor the lamplighter, nor even our protagonist, the little prince, fully understands what is going on. The spacial separation of their respective worlds mirrors a fundamental discontinuity between their respective discourses. There is no way for the partial understanding of one character to be translated into the terms of another. There is no way to create a discourse that allows the various perspectives to all make sense at the same time. The king only finds meaning in ruling, the businessman in owning, the lamplighter in following orders, and the little prince in the enjoyment of life's simple pleasures.

Part of the problem is that the characters lack the information that is available to rulers, capitalists, workers and explorers in our world. De Saint-Exupéry purposely leaves these lacunae to highlight the distance between the perspectives of adult and child, and the distance between various adult perspectives. Adults are consumed by ruling, owning and following orders to such an extent that they isolate themselves from the rest of humanity and the sensual world. This isolation should be fought against by children.

They should hold on to their capacity to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Adult isolation is exaggerated by the absence of civil society for the king's one-man state to rule over, by the absence of enterprises for the businessman to manage in a competitive market, and by the absence of other workers and bosses in the daily routine of the lamplighter. But there is a sense in which this isolation is endemic to (post)modern life, which includes the social context that is missing for our characters. There is a separation of economic and political and a separation of work and play in our society that is, in fact, the _inspiration_ for the isolation in de Saint-Exupéry's _Little Prince_. These same divisions, and others of a similar nature, form the crux of this work's problematic.

Social life is composed of many distinct "language games"[6] or "discursive genres"[7] or "discursive formations"

---

[6] I deal with this Wittgensteinian concept in Chapters 3 and 4. See also Ludwig Wittgenstein, _Philosophical Investigations_ (hereafter _PI_), trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968).

[7] I treat Voloshinov's use of this concept in Chapter 3, and Lyotard's use of this concept in Chapter 4. See also V.N. Voloshinov, _Marxism and the Philosophy of Language_ (hereafter

which elude translation into a social whole. Yet we know that things like work and play, the economic and the political, cannot exist in isolation. They are interdependent on some level, but whenever we try to identify precisely how they are all interdependent we run into problems:

> ...if someone wished to say: "There is something common to all these constructions - namely the disjunction of all their common properties" - I should reply: Now you are only playing with words. One might as well say: "Something runs through the whole thread - namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres."[9]

There is a tendency in postmodern thought to accept the disjunction between the various discursive genres that we participate in at work, play, in front of the television, in the shopping mall, etc. as fundamentally unbridgeable. All these fibres come together to form the thread of the social whole but there can be no systematic understanding of how they all come together. The tendency to accept the chaotic

---

M & PL), trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986). See also Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition.

[8] See Chapter 5 of this work. See also Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (Pantheon Books: New York, 1972) 31-39.

[9] PI, Part I, Sect. 67, 32e.

disjunction of human activities as a surface appearance that
hides no underlying common essence does say something
important about the times that we live in. I must, however,
agree with F. Jameson[10] and D. Harvey who argue that the
fetishistic forms assumed by capital have increasingly blinded
us to the common element of social labour underlying these
appearances, producing a disjunction that is both real (in the
sense that we "live it") and apparent (in the sense that it is
self-contradictory and we can therefore see beyond it).
Lyotard's is a form of postmodernism that accepts the
contradictions of "discursive genres" without trying to see
beyond them. These contradictions take the form of
"differends."[12] The differend should be recognized or
"witnessed,"[13] but one cannot take the side of one discursive

---

[10] Frederic Jameson, Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

[11] David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990).

[12] Jean-François Lyotard, The Differend, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988) xi.

[13] Lyotard, The Differend, 181. The Postmodern Condition, 82.

genre over another without producing injustice.

Lyotard's position is that of the little prince. All genres of discourse that produce phrases that situate speakers and addressees as order-givers and/or order-followers are ethically suspect because they limit our capacity to think about and talk about social existence in interesting, creative, and democratic ways. But king, businessman and lamplighter are all equally implicated in these forms of behaviour. While Lyotard has a vague idea that the businessman's relentless drive to accumulate renders him more dangerous than the king or the lamplighter, there is no attempt to understand reigning, owning and order-following as mutually related in a systemic whole. Lyotard has very little to say about what kind of strategy ought to be followed by those who wish to combat the hegemony of various order-givers in our society beyond bearing witness to the differends between them, order-followers, and those (like Lyotard himself and the little prince) who find order-giving and order-following ridiculous.

I will argue against Lyotard that one can accept the

ridiculous nature of order-giving and order-following, while recognizing that certain discursive and material barriers prevent lamplighters from adopting the attitude of the little prince. Overcoming these barriers requires finding the strategic points of their production and reproduction and requires a solidaristic effort of would-be order-followers to attack these points.

Foucault takes the side of the lamplighter - or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he takes the side of _a_ lamplighter. He shows in exhaustive detail, the discursive and extra-discursive conditions that allow for the production and reproduction of _certain_ types of order-followers along with _certain_ types of order-givers. Foucault shows a particular interest in the _worst_ order-followers - those who irrationally and criminally _fail_ to follow orders - the lamplighters who fail to adopt the grim resignation of de Saint-Exupéry's over-worked proletarian figure. Foucault's lamplighters inhabit the marginal planets of prison and asylum - planets that are not visited by little princes. Foucault tells us a great deal

about "micro-technologies" of power[14] in the prison and asylum (he tells us both how they work and how certain dysfunctional contradictions in their apparatuses might be exploited in order to release the liberatory potential within them), but he does not explain how these technologies are related at a macro-level - he does not explain what prison and asylum have to do with the social whole. Unlike Lyotard, Foucault does not even recognize the overshadowing strategic risk posed by the businessman's relentless drive to accumulate. Foucault tells us a great deal about the strategic terrain of the worlds of prison and asylum, but I will argue that he fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of their strategic relation to the rest of the social whole.

Laclau and Mouffe refuse to take the side of lamplighter, little prince, businessman or king, but they do claim to be saying something about the social whole. Laclau and Mouffe find the common property of the diverse constructions in the disjunction of all their common properties. This, I will argue, is "playing with words." The words that Laclau and

---

[14] Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in _Power/Knowledge_, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 96.

Mouffe play with are "equality" and "liberty."[15] Various people on diverse planets will recognize that they share certain commonalities that are systematically opposed to a set of commonalities shared by others in a way that can be characterized as a relation of "oppression" between these two groups.[16] This relation can be found between men and women, White and Black, straight and gay, etc. Oppressed groups will band together to demand equality, but this demand must be tempered with a respect for liberty. Respect for liberty means recognizing that demands for equality must be limited by legitimate inequalities that are called "differences."[17] Laclau and Mouffe never say what constitute legitimate differences and what constitutes oppression. They do say, however, that identifying capital accumulation via exploitation of workers as the strategically central form of oppression in our society that demands a working class project to challenge all forms of

---

[15] H & SS, 175.

[16] Ibid., 153-154.

[17] Ibid., 175.

oppression _is itself_ a form of oppression.[18] Here, workers fail to show the proper respect for legitimate differences. Where Laclau and Mouffe claim that they are offering a strategy to combat order-givers with their call for oppressed groups to demand equality, I will argue that by failing to challenge currently hegemonic bourgeois liberal-democratic notions of "liberty" ("private property" is never explicitly mentioned but is obviously an implied legitimate difference) revolutionary social transformation is rejected, and Laclau and Mouffe end up _defending_ the _status quo_.

For Laclau and Mouffe, relations between kings, businessmen, lamplighters, little princes and others form a complex discursive totality - a semiological system of equivalence and difference. What matters here, are not _social processes_ that involve order-giving and order-following, but the equivalential/differential _symbolic relations_ that constitute the semiological system. For instance, what matters is not the _material relation_ of exploitation between lamplighter and businessman, but the _discursive relations_ by

---

[18] Ibid., 137.

which the "identities" of lamplighter and businessman are "constituted." Thus, Laclau and Mouffe are able to argue that progressive politics has "no necessary class character."[19] Order-giving exploiters can be part of Laclau and Mouffe's "radical democratic project" as long as they fit into the system of equivalents and differences in the proper way. This should lead us to ask the following question; what is "radical" or "democratic" about Laclau and Mouffe's project?

I will argue that Laclau and Mouffe's attempt to create a social totality out of symbolic relations is fundamentally misguided. If we are to find a common link between all the diverse (post)modern discursive genres, it will not be found in the common linguistic "clothing"[20] that they all wear. This integument is notoriously difficult to get hold of. As Laclau and Mouffe themselves point out, skilful discursive moves can change symbolic relations such that old symbols can be given new discursive contexts and thus new meanings - even new meanings that directly oppose what these same symbols used to

---

[19] Ibid., 137.

[20] PI, Part II, Sect. xi, 224e.

mean. To say that it is not the linguistic integument but rather the equivalential and differential relations between linguistic elements that form the common thread that runs through all of the discursive genres is just another way of restating our problem - and an obfuscating restatement at that! The thesis I will offer is that the common element in all of the diverse discursive genres that make up (post)modern life is the humanity that the speakers and addressees, order-givers and order-followers all share.

No doubt I will be charged by my postmodern critics with the crime of "humanist essentialism." But one ought to consider whether one really wants to deny that all people in every society share "distinctively human and social ways of doing a variety of different sorts of things (eg. eating, sleeping, playing, etc.)."[21] Of course the way that we do these things varies from one society to the next, but in every case these activities are recognizably human. Wittgenstein, who certainly cannot be accused of insensitivity to the diversity

---

[21] Len Doyal and Roger Harris, "The Practical Foundations of Human Understanding," New Left Review, No. 139 (May-June, 1983) 65.

19

of contextually-dependent "language games," observed that "[t]he common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language."[22]

Once we recognize our humanity as the common thread that unites all of the diverse discursive genres that we engage in, we must ask ourselves what this tells us about the interdependence of all the various discursive genres. In itself, our common humanity tells us very little about the interdependence of discursive genres. We do not take our energy directly from the sun through photosynthesis, but instead we eat plants and sometimes other animals. We do not reproduce through mitosis, but through sexual intercourse. Children do not have all the skills they need for survival in the form of instinct, but must learn them from adults. All these things are true, but so what? Without any social/historical context these facts tell us very little. However, I will argue that in the context of class divided societies access to the very activities that constitute us as human beings requires that we engage in very particular

---

[22] PI, Part I, Sect. 206, 82e.

discursive practices. Many different discursive practices must be engaged in here, but universal to every class-divided society are processes of class exploitation and class struggle. In fact, I will argue that in the case of capitalist societies, class exploitation and class struggle are strategically central to the production and reproduction of discursive genres that involve order-giving and order-following.

My critique of order-giving and order-following will not stop, as Lyotard's does, with the witnessing of the unbridgeable "differend" between the businessman and the lamplighter or the king and the lamplighter. I will argue that democratic social organization demands social struggle on the bases of race, gender, and other bases of struggle, united in a common working class project. This unification of diverse struggles means being explicit about the links between Foucault's localized micro-struggles in the prison and asylum and struggles of a more general nature. The language games that subordinate lamplighters to kings and businessmen, that make the little prince seem to be an idle dreamer, that make

prisoners and psychiatric patients isolated objects of scientific control, and that make women and men into gendered subjects are all inter-related. In capitalist societies these language games are all produced and reproduced in ways that make their general transformation possible - it is this possibility that I call the working class project of democratic socialism.

The Postmodernism-Post-Marxism Nexus:

Laclau, Mouffe, Foucault and Lyotard's Discourses on

Discourse

Chapter 2

The Post-Marxist History of Marxism

Post-marxism, precisely because it is post-marxist in orientation, approaches the history of marxism from outside (beyond marxism). But unlike straight-forward non-marxist approaches to the history of marxism, post-marxism also sees itself nascent within a marxism whose history is a trajectory towards its own transcendence (in the form of post-marxism). The history of marxism is thus presented by Laclau and Mouffe, as a series of attempts to resolve one fundamental problem - a problem that is only finally resolved by Laclau and Mouffe themselves. They overcome marxism's internal contradictions by abandoning what they see as the marxist theoretical framework, in favour of what they call a post-marxist one. The problem that marxism cannot resolve is the discontinuity between the political project of working class self-construction and self-

emancipation on the one hand, and an economic-determinist ontology on the other. Laclau and Mouffe link this problem to the problem of nominalism in the philosophy of language. Nominalism reads language "literally" rather than "symbolically". Words represent things. A symbolic (post-structuralist) approach to language, recognizes words as parts in a relational ensemble that structures the very objects that nominalists claim are "represented". Marxism has a "literal" reading of politics. Political movements represent economic (class) categories. Post-marxism develops the nascent "symbolic" reading of politics which it finds in the thought of Luxemburg, Gramsci, and Althusser, where politics is a relational ensemble, not reducible to an underlying economic structure. But Laclau and Mouffe develop the symbolic reading of politics to such an extent, that they must break with the marxist tradition, fettered as it is by an ultimate class literality.

Laclau and Mouffe argue that the base-superstructure metaphor produces an "irreducible dualism" between "a logic of

the literal" and "a logic of the symbol".[1] The logic of the literal is more commonly called "economic determinism", where base determines superstructure. Karl Kautsky's so called "Orthodox Marxism" is the most blatant example of the workings of the logic of the literal without impediment. It is contrasted with Rosa Luxemburg's "spontaneism". The "logic of spontaneism" is, for Laclau and Mouffe, "a logic of the symbol".[2] It operates, within the superstructure, on principles entirely alien to the economistic logic of the literal. And yet, because Luxemburg still operates within the marxist tradition, which is defined, for Laclau and Mouffe, by the base-superstructure metaphor itself, the logic of the symbol is ultimately constrained by the logic of the literal. Superstructure is, in the last instance, determined by the base. Marxism, by its very nature, is unable to break out of this "irreducible dualism".

For Kautsky, oppositional struggle means organizing the

---

[1] Ernesto Laclau and Chantale Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Society, (hereafter H & SS), (London; Verso, 1985), 12.

[2] Ibid., 12.

25

proletariat, which already exists as a historic subject. The proletariat needs to be organized for the day that the internal contradictions of the capitalist system bring its own collapse. When this occurs, the objective interests of the proletariat, which are integral to its existence as a part of the economic base, will be represented in the political superstructure in the form of socialist revolution, replacing the representation of capitalist economic interests - the bourgeois state. Laclau and Mouffe draw specific attention to the "unicity of meaning"[3] in Kautsky's model, which takes it beyond economic-determinism into the realm of the absolutely "literal". All political phenomena can be assigned unambiguous economic meanings. Thus, the superstructure is not merely determined by the base but constitutes its representation. There is a correspondence between base and superstructure not unlike the nominalist correspondence between a name and its bearer. Laclau and Mouffe see the possibility of transcending the logic of the literal, in Rosa Luxemburg's logic of the symbol.

---

[3] Ibid., 15.

"Unicity of meaning" is absent in Luxemburg's text on the mass strike.[4] The working class does not exist as a historic subject in the realm of the economy, which simply awaits political expression in the form of social revolution: "...the working class is necessarily fragmented and the recomposition of its unity only occurs through the very process of revolution."[5] Political struggles are not the representation of the economic interests of the working class. Political struggles themselves are what construct the meaning of the "proletariat" by uniting the specific demands of various proletarian fractions in a more general form.[6] This is a logic of the symbol because the meanings of political struggles are

[4] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions," in Rosa Luxemburg Speaks, ed. Mary-Alice Waters (New York; Pathfinder Press, 1970) 153-218.

[5] H & SS., 10.

[6] I will argue in Chapter 4 that the "referent" of the proletariat is simultaneously represented and constructed. The capitalist organization of society gives us the "referent" of the proletariat only as a contradiction between the category of "wage labour" and those who are constrained in such a way that they have very little choice but to perform it. How precisely this contradiction is expressed, depends entirely on the agonistic discursive and extra-discursive struggles of everyday life.

never simply "literal":

> ...the meaning of every mobilization appears, so to speak, as split: aside from its specific literal demands, each mobilization represents the revolutionary process as a whole; and these totalizing effects are visible in the overdetermination of some struggles by others. This is, however, nothing other than the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifier by the signified. The unity of the class is therefore a symbolic unity.[7]

This leads Laclau and Mouffe to the question of why this "symbolic unity" is a "class unity".[8] The working class, after all, is a category of the economic base. If the revolutionary subject is a construction of the revolution itself, and not a political representation of a subject already existing at the level of the economic base, then why should the political subject appear as a mirror image of an economic category? The only answer Laclau and Mouffe can find, is that the logic of the symbol is ultimately subordinated to the logic of the literal. Despite the absence of a simple "unicity of meaning", symbolic construction is limited by literal representation:

> ...if the unity of the working class were an infrastructural datum constituted outside the process of

---

[7] H & SS., 11.

[8] Ibid., 11.

28

revolutionary overdetermination, the question concerning the class character of the revolutionary subject would be symmetrical expressions of a class subject constituted prior to the struggles themselves. But if the unity is this process of overdetermination, an independent explanation has to be offered as to why there should be a necessary overlap between political subjectivity and class positions. Although Rosa Luxemburg does not offer such an explanation... the background of her thought makes clear what this would have been: namely, an affirmation of the necessary character of the objective laws of capitalist development, which lead to... a straightforward confrontation between bourgeoisie and proletariat. Consequently the innovatory effects of the logic of spontaneism appear to be strictly limited from the beginning.[9]

Affirming "the necessary character of the objective laws of capitalist development" is an affirmation of the logic of the literal since this logic "operates through fixations which, precisely because they are necessary, establish a meaning that eliminates any contingent variation".[10] So what looks like a break with the logic of the literal ends up being an "irreducible dualism", where the contingent superstructural logic of the symbol is arbitrarily blocked from full expression by literal infrastructural necessity.

Norman Geras argues that Laclau and Mouffe's

---

[9] Ibid., 12.

[10] Ibid., 12.

29

interpretation of Rosa Luxemburg, depends on "an inflation of the symbolic".[11] In response to Laclau and Mouffe, he has assembled a list of "causal and experiential" factors, present in Luxemburg's analysis, whose mutual interaction produce a "global revolutionary assault" that culminates in the mass strike.[12] Luxemburg's mass strike involves political education in struggle, multiplication of individual powers through mass assembly, the drawing in of hitherto unorganized elements in the revolutionary process, the strengthening of grass-roots trade union organization, and the interaction, intersection, and running together of a multitude of economic and political factors.[13] Geras claims that all of these factors come together in a working class political project, because of Luxemburg's fairly conventional marxist ideas about class and class interest. To claim that the revolutionary unity is created "symbolically", through "the overflowing of the signifier by the signified" is reductive. Furthermore, Laclau and Mouffe's

---

[11] Norman Geras, "Post-Marxism?" New Left Review, No. 163 (May/June 1987) 61.

[12] Ibid., 60.

[13] Ibid., 160.

analysis, illegitimately imports its own conceptual categories into Luxemburg's text.[14]

Laclau and Mouffe respond to Geras' criticisms, not by taking issue with his representation of Luxemburg's arguments, but by arguing that "through all these examples a specific social logic manifests itself, which is the logic of the symbol."[15] Geras just does not get it. A specific demand becomes a general (and, therefore, revolutionary) demand through a "second meaning, added to the primary one".[16] In a repressive context, wage demands can symbolize more global opposition. Thus, "an increasing relation of overdetermination and equivalence is created among multiple isolated demands."[17] This is how Geras' "causal and experiential" factors come together in a "global revolutionary assault".

But what Laclau and Mouffe ignore, is that the

---

[14] Ibid., 61.

[15] Ernesto Laclau and Chantale Mouffe, "Post-Marxism without Apologies," New Left Review, No. 166 (Nov/Dec 1987) 100.

[16] Ibid., 100.

[17] Ibid., 101.

revolutionary assault is not _first_ unified, and then _subsequently_ constructed as a _class_ unity. Perhaps, there is a sense in which Luxemburg's unity is "symbolic", but its symbolic character cannot simply be separated from its class character. Luxemburg emphasizes that particular "economic" wage demands of militant workers and more general "political" demands presented by social democrats are unifiable precisely because they are part of "one class struggle aiming at the abolition of the bourgeois social order."[18] Politics and business are conducted by their own respective sets of rules. But they are all _bourgeois_ rules. Politics and business both involve class power. This is what makes the "symbols" of different working class struggles "translatable". It is Laclau and Mouffe's failure to take into consideration the class context of the various struggles in Luxemburg's analysis, that makes their "logic of the symbol" an empty category. The consequences of this emptiness will become apparent when we examine how post-marxism constructs sets of oppositional demands as "chains of equivalence" in chapter 3.

----

[18] Rosa Luxemburg, 209.

The Kautsky-Luxemburg opposition is merely one example of the symbolic-literal or contingency-necessity dualism of the Second International. For Laclau and Mouffe, just as marxism is defined by the opposition between base and superstructure, so the Second International is defined by the opposition between contingency and necessity:

The most creative tendencies within orthodoxy attempted to limit the effects of the "logic of necessity", but the inevitable outcome was that they placed their discourse in a permanent dualism between a "logic of necessity", producing ever fewer effects in terms of political practice, and a "logic of contingency" which, by not determining its specificity, was incapable of theorizing itself.[19]

This story is repeated three more times before the logic of contingency is finally able to burst the fetters of the logic of necessity in the form of Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxism.

A new twist is introduced into the second attempt to break from the literal-symbolic dualism. In Third International Communism, there emerges a discourse of popular-democratic struggles that goes beyond the notion of class alliance. Relations of "equivalence" are established between

---

[19] H & SS., 25.

various social agents "in the common confrontation with the dominant pole."[20] The "working class, the peasantry, the petty bourgeoisie, progressive fractions of the national bourgeoisie, etc."[21] constitute the "popular" pole in opposition to the dominant pole of international capital. This would have been impossible within the Second International, even for "spontaneists" like Luxemburg whose "attribution of a necessary class character to the resulting social agent places a rigid limit on the expansive logic of equivalences."[22] Nevertheless, the symbolic "expansive logic of equivalences" is limited here, by the "model of representation" which fixes an ultimate, literal, class meaning to symbolic representations in popular-democratic struggles: "Each instance is the representation of another, until a final class core is reached which supposedly gives meaning to the whole series."[23]

----

[20] Ibid., 63.

[21] Ibid., 63.

[22] Ibid., 64-65.

[23] Ibid., 65.

34

The third attempt to break with the symbolic-literal dualism, initiated by Antonio Gramsci, advances beyond the "principle of representation" by replacing it "with that of articulation".[24] The "hegemonic subject" that results from articulations from various points within society "is a class subject only in the sense that, on the basis of class positions, a certain hegemonic formation is practically articulated".[25] This means that counter-hegemony does not derive its meaning from "a final class core" that is found ready-made at the level of the economic base. Counter-hegemony is constructed with articulations from diverse elements. The elements themselves are constructed by their articulation in this ensemble which is greater than the sum of its parts. Since it is not the "equivalence" established between social actors, but the process of articulation itself which is the principle of unity, there is no chain of representation to follow back to the economic base.

Laclau and Mouffe explain that the key to Gramsci's

---

[24] Ibid., 64.

[25] Ibid., 64.

advance beyond representation is his "movement, from the `political' to the `intellectual and moral' plane".[26] Agents that are merely "political" can be the representatives of the economic categories of the base, but a "collective will" on the "intellectual and moral" plane requires a certain cross-fertilization of ideas and values that "traverse a number of class sectors."[27] So it appears that Gramsci makes a complete break with economism via ideology:

> The analysis conceptually defines a new series of relations among groups which baffles their structural location within the revolutionary and relational schema of economism. At the same time, ideology is signalled as the precise terrain on which these relations are constituted.[28]

The constitution of relations on the terrain of ideology wreaks havoc on the relational schema that orthodoxy had established at the level of the economic base. Infrastructural relations had been conceived as somehow more material and, therefore, more basic than superstructural ones, and ideology had been part of the superstructure. Nevertheless, Gramsci

---

[26] Ibid., 66.

[27] Ibid., 67.

[28] Ibid., 67.

does not fall into the trap of idealism because of "his

conception of the materiality of ideology":

Ideology is not identified with a `system of ideas' or
with the `false consciousness' of social agents; it is
instead an organic relational whole, embodied in
institutions and apparatuses, which welds together a
historical bloc around a number of basic articulatory
principles. This precludes the possibility of a
`superstructuralist' reading of the ideological.[29]

So, in this sense, Gramsci "takes us beyond the old

base/superstructure distinction."[30]

But in another sense, Gramsci's is an "ultimately

incoherent conception... unable fully to overcome the dualism

of classical Marxism."[31] The opposition of base and

superstructure is reproduced despite the materiality of

ideology. The economy is still determining in the last

instance. Even though a hegemonic formation is composed of

"diverse social elements" which "have a merely relational

identity - achieved through articulatory practices", it

remains the case that this formation can only be held together

---

[29] Ibid., 67.

[30] Ibid., 67.

[31] Ibid., 69.

37

by "a *single* unifying principle... and this can only be a fundamental class."[32] Gramsci retains the centrality of class. Since, for Laclau and Mouffe, the "economic" category of class can be central to an analysis only by virtue of its privileged status within the economic base which is determining in the last instance, this makes Gramsci an economic determinist. Contingent hegemonic struggle is still fettered by "the necessary structural framework within which every struggle occurs."[33] So it seems that Gramsci's ideology, however "material", is still superstructural insofar as articulations are conceived as occurring in an environment whose fundamental opposition is a class opposition. Articulation is therefore not genuine articulation. It is still limited by representation. The symbolic is limited by the literal. Constructed identities are subordinated to the representation of the categories of the economic base.

The problem with Laclau and Mouffe's economic determinist interpretation of Gramsci, however, is that it demands

---

[32] Ibid., 69.

[33] Ibid., 69.

something of Gramsci, Laclau and Mouffe themselves argue that he does not deliver. Gramsci certainly does propose that a hegemonic formation can only be held together by a fundamental social class, but, as Laclau and Mouffe themselves argue, this class is not "constituted" on the terrain of the "economic" base. Gramsci's "distinction between [ideologies] form and [material forces] content has purely didactic value".[34] The centrality of class, therefore, cannot be based on the ontological privilege of the economic base.[35] The very

---

[34] Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 377. This controversy over the status of the base-superstructure distinction is rehearsed in greater detail in Norberto Bobbio, "Gramsci and the conception of civil society" and Jacques Texier, "Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures" in Chantale Mouffe (ed.), Gramsci and Marxist Theory (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) 21-47, 48-79.

[35] This does not absolve marxists of explaining the centrality of class in different terms. This question will be dealt with in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3, the centrality of class in capitalist societies is explained by showing how access to "constitutive activities" (activities that human beings must engage in simply because they are human) can only be gained by entering into relations of exploitation which mean that one is automatically implicated in a whole range of social activities that involve implicit or explicit class struggle. In this conceptualization, class is not "constituted" at the "economic" level, but rather, is always simultaneously a political, economic and ideological

categories of base and superstructure are metaphorical. To give them the status of an ontological distinction is to annul their "didactic value".

The fourth attempt to burst the fetters of literality is a step closer to genuine articulation. Since Althusser's concept of "overdetermination" is "constituted in the field of the symbolic, and has no meaning whatsoever outside it... the most profound potential meaning of Althusser's statement that everything existing in the social is overdetermined, is the assertion that the social constitutes itself as a symbolic order."[36] If the social is constituted symbolically, then it is not the representation of a "pre-constituted" literality, but rather, genuine articulation.

The concept of overdetermination is a corrective to

---

relation between exploiter and exploited. In Chapter 4, the strategic implications of this conception of class centrality for anti-capitalist struggle are brought to the fore. In Chapter 5, penal and psychiatric disciplinary technologies are examined as specific cases of bourgeois institutions whose respective bi-polar organizations are inextricably linked to the bi-polar opposition between workers and capitalists. The concrete links between anti-capitalist working class struggle and the struggles of prisoners and psychiatric patients are shown.

[36] H & SS., 97-98.

Hegelian conceptions of historical totality. It is a way of

understanding historical totality that is not "a plurality of

moments in a single process of self-unfolding."[37] With Hegelian

totality, history is contained by the literal. History is the

unfolding of a "pre-constituted" literal essence which is

represented in various historical moments. This is the case

whether one is dealing with the Hegelian essence of Geist, or

the Marxist-Hegelian essence of dis-alienated species-being.

Overdetermination opens up the symbolic dimension and allows

for genuine articulation by removing the literal essence that

fixes historical meaning:

There are not two planes, one of essences and the other
of appearances, since there is no possibility of fixing
an ultimate literal sense for which the symbolic would be
a second and derived plane of signification. Society and
social agents lack any essence, and their regularities
merely consist of the relative and precarious forms of
fixation which accompany the establishment of a certain
order. This analysis seemed to open up the possibility of
elaborating a new concept of articulation, which would
start from the overdetermined character of social
relations.[38]

But, once again, the symbolic dimension is not able to

---

[37] Ibid., 97.

[38] Ibid., 98.

break through the integument of the literal. In this case, overdetermination is subordinated to the principle of "determination in the last instance by the economy". And there is a genuine incompatibility between these concepts:

If the economy is an object which can determine any type of society in the last instance, this means that, at least with reference to that instance, we are faced with simple determination and not overdetermination. If society has a last instance which determines its laws of motion, then the relations between the overdetermined instances and the last instance must be conceived in terms of simple, one-directional determination by the latter.[39]

This is, in fact, Laclau and Mouffe's paradigm case of the base/superstructure dualism that stands for marxism as a whole. Laclau and Mouffe accept the marxist "problematic" as it is presented by Althusser. He argues that the marxist dialectic is more than a simple "materialization" or a "reversal" of the Hegelian idealist dialectic. Rather than locating the determining instance at the economic level as Hegel had located it at the ideological level, the originality of Marx's reconceptualization of totality lay in the latter's status as a "complex whole" with "the unity of a structure

_____

[39] Ibid., 99.

articulated in dominance."[40] Thus, Althusser gives us the following abstract formula, to be elaborated by further study: "on the one hand, determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production; on the other, the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity."[41] Althusser thus attempts to overcome economic determinism by displacing the instances of determination (except, of course, the "last" one).

Simple economic determinism is not the only alternative, however, to Althusser's complex economic determinism. We can find an alternative route of non-economic marxism by following Marx in his critique of bourgeois political economy. It is precisely this possibility that I explore in subsequent chapters. In Chapter 3 I give particular attention to class contradiction and class struggle in "dialogical" processes, showing how these processes are not mere representations of a more basic "economic" base, but in fact are simultaneously

---

[40] Louis Althusser, "On the Marxist Dialectic" in For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1990), 202.

[41] Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in For Marx, 111.

economic, political and ideological. In Chapter 4 I explain how it is bourgeois political economy that has buried political questions under "economic" relations of exchange, and how these political questions find expression as social contradictions. In Chapter 5 I explain how supposedly "extra-economic" power relations in the prison and the asylum are nevertheless integrated into the capitalist system of surplus extraction. Marx argues that it is bourgeois political economy which establishes a clear division between economics and politics; equal exchange on the one hand, and relations of subordination and authority on the other.[42] Marx questions this distinction by pointing to the class struggle that runs through all the various "levels". It is the class struggle that he identifies as the motor of history. A marxism centred on economic, political and ideological class struggle, rather than the complex determination of a "structure articulated in dominance" offers the possibility of overcoming the problem of economic determinism by questioning the very possibility of

---

[42] See Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The separation of the `economic' and the `political' in capitalism", in Democracy Against Capitalism, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19-48.

identifying a distinct sphere that we can call the "economy".

Laclau and Mouffe share Althusser's blindness with respect to alternative approaches to economic determinism. They project Althusser's model backwards to explain previous developments in marxist theory. When Laclau and Mouffe pose the question as to why the unity of Luxemburg's revolutionary movement is conceived as a class unity, they ask why the revolutionary "process of overdetermination" should find its principle of unity in a class subject constituted in the sphere of the economy. It is, therefore, not surprising that they find determination in the last instance by the economy as the only basis for conceiving the revolutionary subject as a class subject. And while the "objective laws of economic development" enjoy a privileged status for the Third International as a whole, it is entirely illegitimate for Laclau and Mouffe to impute this principle to Gramsci. Before examining Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxist alternative to the base/superstructure model, it must be noted that Gramsci and Luxemburg, like Marx himself, have reasons for putting class at the centre of their respective analyses that do not involve

45

the privileging of the economic base over the political/ideological superstructure, or literal over symbolic, or necessity over contingency. In subsequent chapters, I will be proposing an anti-economistic conception of class centrality, as an alternative to post-marxist "dispersion".

Nevertheless, Laclau and Mouffe insist on shoe-horning the entire marxist tradition into the base/superstructure model. They do this so that the history of marxism can be presented as a history of the development of the logic of the symbol within the confines of the superstructure which is, by definition, subordinate to the base. The symbolic, therefore, continually rails against the fetters of the economic base:

> ...the picture we have presented is of a process of splits and fragmentations through which the disaggregation of the orthodox paradigm took place.... the same process can be seen as the emergence and expansion of the new articulatory and recomposing logic of hegemony. We saw, however, that this expansion met a limit. Whether the working class is considered as the political leader in a class alliance (Lenin) or as the articulatory core of a historical bloc (Gramsci), its fundamental identity is constituted in a terrain different from that in which the hegemonic practices operate. Thus, there is a threshold which none of the strategic-hegemonic conceptions manages to cross. If the validity of the economist paradigm is maintained in a

certain instance - last though decisive, as it is the rational substratum of history - it is accorded a necessity such that hegemonic articulations can be conceived only as mere contingency. This final rational stratum, which gives a tendential sense to all historical processes, has a specific location in the topography of the social: at the economic level.[43]

Laclau and Mouffe, however, do courageously go beyond the final "threshold which none of the strategic-hegemonic conceptions manages to cross". In post-marxism, the fetters of the literal economic base are finally burst asunder by the expansive logic of the symbol. The post-marxist "key to the specific logic of social articulation" is to be found in "the radicalization of the concept of `overdetermination'",[44] the most advanced expression of the logic of the symbol.

In Chapter 3 I will examine Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxist radicalization of Althusserian overdetermination. I will show how their liberation of the symbolic and the superstructural from the confines of literal and economic determinism produces a linguistic pluralism that is at once fully compatible with the currently hegemonic liberal

---

[43] H & SS, 75-76.

[44] Ibid., 87.

democratic form of capitalism, and blind to the harsh material

realities of class exploitation and class struggle.

Chapter 3

Historical Materialism and Ordinary Language: Grammatical Peculiarities of the Class Struggle "Language Game"

Laclau and Mouffe see their project of freeing the logic of the symbol from the literal constraints of the economic base as the political counter-part to an anti-nominalist move in the philosophy of language. Just as Wittgenstein liberates the name from its bearer, so Laclau and Mouffe liberate discourse from the fetters of economic determinism. Drawing on post-structuralism, they argue that social totality is constructed as a system of mutually related symbolic elements. In an effort to avoid the charge of idealism, Laclau and Mouffe try to weld their symbolic totality to Wittgenstein's concept of "language-game". But there is a fundamental disjunction between Wittgenstein's language-game and post-marxist discourse. The latter is a total semiological system,

49

while the former is a profoundly untotalizable anti-model of social practices. Post-marxist discourse only tells us how signs are related to each other. Wittgenstein tells us how we use words and actions to do things. In other words, post-marxism can only tell us about social totality in a very abstract way, while Wittgenstein tells us about very specific social processes. Wittgenstein's observations do give us insight into the discursive construction of social life, but they cannot, without violence to the very concept of the language-game, be transformed into a semiological system. Wittgenstein's focus on the use of language in social processes, in the context of a marxist theoretical framework, can help us develop a practical understanding of the symbolic. From this perspective, language will not be a mere ideological representation of a more basic "material reality", but will be part of the social processes that constitute social existence. The first steps in this direction, without the benefit of an acquaintance with Wittgenstein's language-games, have already been taken by Voloshinov. His marxist philosophy of language provides the starting point for a historical-materialist

exploration of the generative powers of discourse.

The first step in the post-marxist liberation of discourse from its economic fetters is a radicalization of Althusserian "overdetermination". First and foremost, this concept is radicalized by removing the principle of determination in the last instance by the economy. Thus, "the most profound _potential_ meaning of Althusser's statement that everything existing in the social is overdetermined"[1] is finally realized. The "social" must now constitute itself as a "symbolic order". With the disappearance of the "last instance", there follows the disappearance of any ultimate literality to fix the symbolic. Laclau and Mouffe themselves point out that their argument against the last instance in Althusser parallels Jacques Derrida's argument against the "transcendental signified" in structuralism. Just as, for Derrida, "the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences,"[2] similarly, for Laclau and Mouffe, "the social only exists...

---

[1] _H & SS._, 97-98.

[2] Jacques Derrida, _Writing and Difference_, trans. Alan Bass. (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1978) 280.

as an effort to construct that impossible object [society]"[3] out of a system of differences. And it is because society is "impossible" that there is no last instance to provide a "meaning" or a "centre" to its existence. Or, in Derridian terms: "The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely."[4]

Laclau and Mouffe's Discursive Totality

What, in Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxism, is left from marxism once the symbolic subverts all literality? There is the category of articulation. But now it "acquires a different theoretical status".[5] Articulation is now genuine articulation - "a discursive practice which does not have a plane of constitution prior to, or outside, the dispersion of the articulated elements."[6] Everything is articulated and everything is constituted in that articulation. The category

---

[3] H & SS, 112.

[4] Derrida, 280.

[5] H & SS, 109.

[6] Ibid., 109.

of representation is completely transcended. Representation is now understood as a moment within the process of articulation.

Representation can only be a moment within the process of articulation because it is articulation which now constitutes "totality". In Laclau and Mouffe's terminology, a synonym for totality is "discourse". There is nothing outside this totality to be represented. Although Laclau and Mouffe might object to the label of "totality" for their "discourse", they assert that everything socially relevant is somehow implicated in articulation, and articulation is "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice."[7] Therefore, the ensemble of articulatory practices must constitute nothing less than "totality", or as Laclau and Mouffe call it, a "structured totality" or a "discourse".[8]

---

[7] Ibid., 105.

[8] Laclau and Mouffe explain that, insofar as the establishment of a relation among elements modifies their identity, a "structured totality" results (H & SS., 105). This never "fully constituted" structured totality is a discourse. And even though "the social" is never fully constituted either, the various ensembles of articulated practices come together to form one big discourse of "the impossible object" - society (H & SS., 112). Even though there are elements that

This totality can also be understood as an ensemble of "differential positions" which are articulated by articulatory practices. These differential positions are referred to as "moments".[9] Moments are contrasted with "elements" - differential positions which are not articulated.[10] Once some kind of relationship is established between elements, they are brought into discourse. They therefore become moments - but not "fully".[11] An element is a kind of "floating signifier"[12] which acquires meaning (identity) through articulation in a relational ensemble (difference). But the identity thus acquired can never be exhaustive. There is an elemental capacity left over (so the transition from element to moment is never complete). This elemental left-over can be appropriated by yet another articulatory practice, thus

---

will eventually disturb and reconfigure this structured totality, they are meaningless until they too are brought into relation with the totality through articulatory practice.

[9] Ibid., 105.

[10] Ibid., 105.

[11] Ibid., 110-111.

[12] Ibid., 113.

changing the meaning by re-arranging the relational ensemble. A new system of difference, and therefore new identities, are thus created. But these are just as incomplete as they ever were. The process continues _ad infinitum_. So totality, or discourse, is necessarily incomplete - continually in flux.[13]

Nevertheless, the whole point of articulatory practice, in this model, is to aim at a sort of completion. The closed totality of "society" has been abandoned for the open totality of the "social", but "the social only exists,... as an effort to construct that impossible object [society]." Articulatory practices are thus _attempts_ at closure of the totality, but they are attempts that _must fail_. Articulatory practices fix meaning, but never absolutely. There are always elemental left-overs in articulated moments. Totality itself, discourse, "is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre."[14] But there _is_ no centre. The centre was abandoned, by Laclau and Mouffe, in the form of Althusser's last

_____

[13] Ibid., 111.

[14] Ibid., 112.

55

instance.[15] Everything is now overdetermined. The last instance is thus _relativized_. It was one failed attempt to construct a centre. Centres are now multiple. They are "privileged discursive points" or "nodal points".[16] Laclau and Mouffe thus summarize articulation as follows:

The practice of articulation... consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity.[17]

Representation is, therefore, a moment of articulation

---

[15] Of course, Althusser argues that his dual principles of "determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production" and "the relative autonomy of the superstructures and their specific effectivity" constitute a _decentring_ of the Hegelian dialectic. Hegelian consciousness, to avoid idealism, would require "circles _with another centre than itself - decentred circles_ - for it to be affected at its centre by their effectivity, in short for its essence to be over-determined by them." See Louis Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination," in _For Marx_, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso, 1990) 102. Nevertheless, Laclau and Mouffe would argue that Althusser only manages to decentre totality up until the "last instance" where a final recentring takes place. Laclau and Mouffe see themselves as carrying Althusser's operation of decentring through to the conclusion that, because of his commitments to marxism, he could not accept.

[16] _H & SS._, 112.

[17] Ibid., 113.

since it is one instance of an attempt to fix the meaning of a differential totality. It does this by attributing an ultimate literality[18] to a central category - the last instance of the economy, the working class as historic subject, etc. For Laclau and Mouffe, marxism as a whole constitutes a series of attempts to construct a centre around various conceptions of the economic base. The economic base is supposed to be represented in the superstructure, but, Laclau and Mouffe argue, this representation itself is one articulatory practice among many. Its differential elements can be worked upon to produce an alternative totality, whose validity cannot be challenged by its failure to represent the "centre" of the economic base since it was a <u>constructed</u> centre to begin with. Unlike marxism, post-marxism is able to fully elaborate how "...the so-called `representation' modifies the nature of what is represented."[19]

Thus, the dichotomy between represented and

---

[18] For Laclau and Mouffe, "all discourse of fixation" is "metaphorical" and "literality is... the first of metaphors." Ibid., 111.

[19] Ibid., 58.

representation is, like everything else "discursively constructed". But Laclau and Mouffe are careful here, to disassociate themselves from idealism. They argue that "[t]he fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with the realism/idealism opposition."[20] The post-marxist position does not deny that "objects exist externally to thought".[21] There is a material reality that exists whether or not we think about it. Nevertheless, it is impossible for this reality to constitute itself "outside any discursive conditions of emergence."[22] We cannot know material reality "in itself", outside of discourse, because we can only look at it in the context of a totality of differential positions. Actual material objects themselves occupy some of these differential positions.

Therefore, Laclau and Mouffe claim to be affirming "the

---

[20] Ibid., 108.

[21] Ibid., 108.

[22] Ibid., 108.

58

<u>material</u> character of every discursive structure".[23] It is the model of representation that posits "an objective field constituted outside of any discursive intervention, and a discourse consisting of the pure expression of thought."[24] With the representation model, material reality is represented in a discourse consisting of thoughts, ideas, concepts, language, etc. But Laclau and Mouffe reject the "assumption of the <u>mental</u> character of discourse."[25] In lieu of the representation model, they propose their own articulation model, where "linguistic and non-linguistic elements... constitute a differential and structured system of positions - that is a discourse."[26] And, since these "differential positions include... a dispersion of very diverse material elements,"[27] the charge of idealism is more properly levelled at so-called materialists who think that discourse is a ghostly, imperfect,

---

[23] Ibid., 108.

[24] Ibid., 108.

[25] Ibid., 108.

[26] Ibid., 108.

[27] Ibid., 108.

subjective representation of objective, material reality that exists "outside of any discursive intervention".[28]

Is Discourse a "Language Game" or are Post-marxists just "Playing with Words"?

This is where Laclau and Mouffe invoke the post-Tractatus Wittgenstein. His argument against nominalism seems to parallel the post-marxist argument against representation. Like the post-marxists, Wittgenstein recognizes the capacity of social agents to construct themselves and their environment with their words and their actions. He does not accept the notion that words are simply a way to represent material objects that have an "ultimate literality". Although Wittgenstein starts out with this nominalist picture of language in his Tractatus, he later comes to the conclusion that it ignores the way that our words actually function in their ordinary social contexts. This is why Wittgenstein becomes a philosopher of "ordinary language". Unlike his approach in the Tractatus, Wittgenstein's Philosophical

---

[28] Ibid., 108.

<u>Investigations</u>, does not start from the abstract, constructing a model of how language ought to work in order to apply that model to actual cases. Instead, he does numerous case studies in order to clarify how language actually functions when it is used to get things done. In doing so, he reveals the lacunae of his past nominalism.

Wittgenstein calls these case studies in ordinary language use "language-games". Laclau and Mouffe see an adumbration of their discursive totality in the Wittgensteinian language-game: "Language games, in Wittgenstein, include within an indissoluble totality both language and the actions interconnected with it..."[29] Since Wittgenstein is trying to show how ordinary language is actually used in particular social circumstances, his language-games involve people using words combined with actions to get things done. Thus, in the language-game cited by Laclau and Mouffe, there are two builders that use blocks, pillars, slabs, and beams along with the words "block", "pillar", "slab", and "beam" in cooperative work to build a

---

[29] Ibid., 108.

structure.[30] It is the combination of the actual building stones, the actions of the workers and the words that they utter that give meaning to any one of these elements. This whole structure of meaning is the language-game. To take the word "slab", in isolation, and define it by attaching it to the object that it designates, does not exhaust the meaning of "slab". When A gives B the order to bring him a slab by uttering the one word sentence "Slab", A is not merely re-naming the object. He is doing something. He is giving an order. That order is, in the context of this language-game, part of the meaning of the word "slab". Thus, Wittgenstein's analysis of this language-game, underlines the "performative character" of speech acts.[31] He does not accept the notion that the words simply represent the material objects of the language-game. The words "play a part" in the language-game. They are elements in the construction of the language-game.

---

[30] Ibid., 108. The example is from Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (hereafter PI), trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968) Part I, Sect. 2, 3e.

[31] This aspect of the building language-game is emphasized by Laclau and Mouffe. H & SS, 108.

Speaking a word is an _action_ on par with moving a building stone. These two types of action, and the material objects involved, in post-marxist terms, "constitute a differential and structured system of positions - that is, a discourse."[32]

The key difference, however, between post-marxist "discursive totality" and the Wittgensteinian "language-game", is that the former is a model of how human beings construct the "social", while the latter is an _anti_-model designed to bring out the difficulties encountered when applying a pre-conceived model of language to particular social contexts where language is actually used. To call language-games a "totality", discursive or otherwise, is profoundly unWittgensteinian. Wittgenstein finds the game metaphor to be useful precisely because it is impossible to specify _in general_ how the different elements of _all_ games perform their respective functions. One can understand the function of a game "piece" or a game "word" only by looking at the concrete situation that it is imbedded in. One cannot define what games are _as a whole_, or as a totality. Each game must be understood

_____

[32] Ibid., 108.

in its own terms in order to understand its relationship to

other games:

Consider for example the proceedings that we call
"games". I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games,
Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? -
Don't say "There must be something common, or they would
not be called `games'" - but look and see whether there
is anything common to all. - For if you look at them you
will not see something common to all, but similarities,
relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To
repeat: don't think, but look! - Look for example at
board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now
pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences
with the first group, but many common features drop out,
and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much
that is common is retained, but much is lost. - Are they
all "amusing"? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or
is there always winning and losing, or competition
between players? Think of patience. In ball games there
is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball
at the wall and catches it again, this feature has
disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck;
and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in
tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here
is the element of amusement, but how many other
characteristic features have disappeared!...
    And the result of this examination is: we see a
complicated network of similarities overlapping and
criss-crossing; sometimes overall similarities, sometimes
similarities of detail.[33]

Just as games must be understood in their own terms in

order to specify their "complicated network of similarities

overlapping and criss-crossing", so too must language-games be

---

[33] PI, Part I, Sect. 66, 31e-32e.

examined in their particular social contexts in order to see what relates them to other language-games in other social contexts. So even though Wittgenstein sometimes "call[s] the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the `language-game',"[34] at this level, all that can be said is that there are many different sorts of games being played. There are "family resemblances" like "the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc." that "overlap and criss-cross" but none are common to the whole family, or set of games.[35] Wittgenstein warns against being misled by the uniform "clothing of our language"[36] into the view that there is a uniformity to the "whole" language-game. He emphasises, instead, the "prodigious diversity of all the every-day language-games".[37]

---

[34] Ibid., Part I, Sect. 7, 5e. Laclau and Mouffe quote this passage in support of their conflation of "discursive totality" and "language-game". H & SS, 108.

[35] PI, Part I, Sect. 67, 32e.

[36] PI., Part II, Section xi, 224e.

[37] PI., Part II, Section xi, 224e.

Laclau and Mouffe's totalization of Wittgenstein's concept of "language-game" is entirely at cross-purposes with the reasoning behind the game metaphor. The construction of a totality out of a "differential and structured system of positions" is an instance of what Wittgenstein calls "playing with words":

...if someone wished to say: "There is something common to all these constructions - namely the disjunction of all their common properties" - I should reply: Now you are only playing with words. One might as well say: "Something runs through the whole thread - namely the continuous overlapping of those fibres".[38]

Laclau and Mouffe are following Michel Foucault's word play. They take, as the "type of coherence" proper to the discursive totality, Foucault's principle of "regularity in dispersion".[39] To understate, this type of coherence is completely alien to the functioning of ordinary language to which Wittgensteinian language-games are directed. Furthermore, this entirely abstract principle does not bring them any closer to understanding how the discursive totality

---

[38] PI, Part I, Sect. 67, 32e.

[39] H & SS, 105. For Foucault's treatment of the dispersed character of the discursive formation see Michel Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge (New York; Pantheon, 1972) 31-39.

66

works, or how the totalized language-game is played. Foucault himself does not advance one step in this direction. Foucauldian dispersion is, more or less, a justification for not taking social theory beyond "micro-power" and "technologies of the self". As I will argue in Chapter 5, Foucault's analyses of penal and psychiatric technologies of social control help us understand how each regime functions on a micro-level, but the dispersion of these regimes leaves us ignorant as to their interconnection. I will also make concrete proposals about the relations between "language games" in the prison, the asylum, the factory, and other areas of social life.

Post-marxism does not accept the untheorized autonomy of Foucault's micro-technological power regimes, emphasizing instead the regularity side of Foucault's "regularity in dispersion" formulation. To see the "discursive formation... from the perspective of the regularity in dispersion" is to recognize "a configuration, which in certain contexts of exteriority can be signified as a totality."[40]

---

[40] H & SS, 106.

But if the word play of regularity in dispersion does not take us beyond the entirely unremarkable observation of the commonality of disjunction of the common properties of the multifarious language-games, how does the post-marxist model produce a _functioning_ totality? The answer is, it makes the discursive construction of the social consist of the "articulation" of regularity and dispersion, commonality and disjunction, or, in Laclau and Mouffe's terms, "equivalence and difference". And since equivalence and difference are mapped onto the liberal-democratic principles of equality and liberty, this amounts to making the liberal-democratic language-game what constitutes the social totality. It is a social totality that functions as liberal-democracy.

As we have already observed, the elements are worked upon and partially fixed as moments around nodal points. The partial fixation of meaning works according to two opposed, but mutually reinforcing, "logics" of equivalence and difference. The establishment of relations of equivalence among elements is the basis for the "antagonisms" that make society impossible. The establishment of relations of

difference among elements is a tendency towards the construction of the impossibility of society.

How do relations of equivalence constitute the basis for social antagonisms, and how do differences tend towards the construction of the impossible object of society?

Conceptually, the moment of difference, is the founding moment of the post-marxist totality. Equivalence is a continual subversion that is coterminous with the totality it subverts. Nevertheless, equivalential meaning is a "second" meaning, "parasitic on the first [differential meaning]".[41] So "society", insofar as it is able to constitute itself as this impossible object, is a system of differences. This is, essentially, a model of the social totality based on the Saussurean model of the linguistic totality. In fact, despite their previously stated intention to include non-linguistic elements in their social totality, Laclau and Mouffe slip back and forth quite easily between the respective totalities of "language" and "society".[42] It is clear, that social totality

---

[41] Ibid., 127.

[42] Ibid., 125-126.

69

is conceived as a semiological system, and, like Saussure, Laclau and Mouffe find the "master pattern" for all semiology in language.[43]

Although, a society of purely constituted difference is, strictly speaking, impossible, Laclau and Mouffe draw examples of this tendency from the "one nation" ideology of Disraeli, and the "positivist illusion" of Welfare State ideology.[44] In these cases, there is a more or less stable system of differences, where the meaning of each element is transformed into a moment in the social ensemble. The examples are taken from narrative pleas for social peace rather than concrete case studies, because the social totality is always penetrated by antagonisms. Social totality, as such, can only take on illusory forms. So just as Derrida shows that the Saussurean linguistic totality must necessarily subvert itself (due to the necessary failure of the "transcendental signified" to achieve absolute presence), Laclau and Mouffe extend the same

---

[43] Ferdinand de Saussure, "From Course in General Linguistics," in The Structuralists From Marx to Lévi-Strauss, Richard and Fernande DeGeorge (eds.), (New York; Anchor Books, 1972) 73.

[44] H & SS, 130.

principle to their social totality:

If language is a system of differences, antagonism is the
failure of difference: in that sense, it situates itself
within the limits of language and can only exist as the
disruption of it - that is, as metaphor.... for every
language and every society are constituted as a
repression of the consciousness of the impossibility that
penetrates them.[45]

How do relations of equivalence subvert the social

totality, and thus constitute the basis for social

antagonisms? Laclau and Mouffe suggest the example of a

colonized country to demonstrate a society that is

particularly "impossible" due to its division by a very clear

antagonism - the antagonism of the colonizer and the

colonized. This antagonism is "made evident through a variety

of contents: differences of dress, of language, of skin

colour, of customs."[46] But these "differences", insofar as they

constitute a social antagonism, are only strictly

differentiated in a bi-polar way. They are differences that

have equivalent social meanings: "Thus equivalence creates a

second social meaning which, though parasitic on the first,

---

[45] Ibid., 125.

[46] Ibid., 127.

subverts it: the differences cancel one other out insofar as they are used to express something identical underlying them all."[47] The bi-polar organization of social space is not, however, capable of completely dissolving social totality:

For if we could differentiate the chain of equivalences with regard to something other than that which it opposes, its terms could not be exclusively defined in a negative manner [bi-polar opposition].... If society is not totally possible, neither is it totally impossible. This allows us to formulate the following conclusion: if society is never transparent to itself because it is unable to constitute itself as an objective field, neither is antagonism entirely transparent, as it does not manage totally to dissolve the objectivity of the social.[48]

Laclau and Mouffe argue that this post-marxist position develops the Gramscian concepts of articulation and hegemony, beyond the "essentialism" that was blocking them in the marxist framework. For post-marxism, the bi-polar antagonism of class is no longer the central antagonism, around which other antagonisms are articulated in a fundamentally bi-polar hegemonic formation. The configuration of antagonisms in the post-marxist hegemonic formation, can be articulated in a

---

[47] Ibid., 127.

[48] Ibid., 129.

completely unpredictable variety of patterns, some of which will tend towards bi-polarity, but the bi-polar hegemonic formation will be the exception to the rule. Gramsci argued that oppositional struggle, insofar as its goal was fundamental social transformation, would have to develop the working class end of this bi-polar formation, welding together the diverse groups into a counter-hegemonic force with a class project. The post-marxist position is that oppositional struggle involves articulating many diverse bi-polar antagonisms, none of which are central, while allowing each particular struggle its autonomy within the counter-hegemonic force. Whatever counter-hegemonic project develops from this situation, will have no necessary class character.[49]

The tendentially bi-polar hegemonic formation, whether divided between capital and labour, or colonizer and colonized, is characterized as a situation productive to "popular" struggle. This situation is more typical to the Third World than to Western societies. Western societies, since the French revolution, have tended to develop more

---

[49] Ibid., 137.

73

complex configurations of antagonisms. Popular struggles have petered out over the past 200 years, being replaced by "democratic" struggles. "Democratic" struggles involve a multiplicity of antagonistic relationships. Since the central antagonism of popular struggles is now recognized as a constructed centre that only partially fixes social meaning, "...it is clear that the fundamental concept is that of `democratic struggle', and that popular struggles are merely specific conjunctures resulting from the multiplication of equivalence effects among the democratic struggles."[50]

Democratic struggles operate within the framework provided by liberal-democracy, while taking as their goal, the deepening of the latter's social meaning. Thus, it is argued, "[t]he task of the Left... cannot be to renounce liberal-democratic ideology, but on the contrary, to deepen and expand it in the direction of a radical and plural democracy."[51] Both the "liberal" and the "democratic" sides of liberal-democracy are integral to post-marxist democratic struggles. Liberty, so

---

[50] Ibid., 137.

[51] Ibid., 176.

valued within liberal discourse, is the principle that protects the autonomy, or the "difference" of the multifarious democratic struggles. Equality, a principle that must be given its due for any system to call itself democratic, allows the demands brought out by "equivalences" of antagonisms a degree of legitimacy. There is, in other words, a mapping of difference onto liberalism and liberty on the one hand, and a mapping of equivalence onto democracy and equality on the other. Paradoxically, any struggle that looks beyond liberal-democracy, thus, appears as an attempt at "closure" - an attempt to fix a system of differences, or a bi-polar antagonism, with an absolute meaning.

Democracy came to us in the form of the "democratic revolution". The French revolution is post-marxism's paradigm case. For post-marxism, the democratic revolution is understood as the emergence of a "democratic discourse". The founding text of this discourse is the <u>Declaration of the Rights of Man</u>. Whereas the ancien régime's legitimacy depended on the acceptance of the natural superiority of rulers, democratic legitimacy was founded, in this document, on a body

of natural equals - the "people". But, once the genie was out of the bottle, it became impossible to limit this equality to its original definition - the juridical equality of male citizens. Laclau and Mouffe follow de Tocqueville in arguing that, "This break with the ancien régime... would provide the discursive conditions which made it possible to propose the different forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural, and thus make them equivalent as forms of oppression."[52] The extension of equality between citizens to equality between the sexes, is made possible by democratic discourse.[53] Socialist demands for economic equality are also "seen as a moment internal to the democratic revolution, and only intelligible on the basis of the equivalential logic which the latter establishes."[54] There are many more of these chains of equivalence constructed around antagonisms of race, sexual orientation, the environment, and so on.

Yet, as we have already witnessed, these chains of

---

[52] Ibid., 155.

[53] Ibid., 154.

[54] Ibid., 156.

equivalence are only a partial limitation on the system of differences that constitute the social totality. They are a "second meaning" that subverts differential meaning. Equivalence is "parasitic" on this totality, even while antagonisms constitute the limits of society, thus making it "impossible".[55] The equivalent terms of the various antagonisms must have some relations with the discursive terrain around them, including other antagonisms. These relations, in the "democratic imaginary", are built on the principle of "liberty".

Liberalism, however, "despite its articulation with the democratic imaginary,... has continued to retain as a matrix of production of the individual what Macpherson called `possessive individualism'."[56] Nevertheless, there is a "subversive potential" in liberalism and liberty, that has been made evident with the extension of individual rights through the construction of chains of equivalence. As more

---

[55] Ibid., 127.

[56] Ibid., 175. See C.B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, (Toronto; Oxford University Press, 1962).

oppressed groups gain access to the status of naturally equal subjects, it becomes obvious that the "liberty" of the possessive individual imposes unfair restrictions on the liberty of others. For example, the possessive individual's freedom is freedom to pollute the environment where his or her natural equals live. The challenges to possessive individual liberty thus provoked, have forced the defenders of possessive individualism to draw upon conservative anti-democratic justifications of inequality.[57] It is argued that an over-emphasis on egalitarianism erases the natural differences that are functional for the social whole. Neo-conservatives thus defend a natural hierarchy of differences against the onslaught of democratic equality. Natural differences are protected by possessive individual liberty.[58]

Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, see the potential for an authentically _democratic_-liberalism, where liberalism would be the means of protecting the autonomy of the various democratic struggles. The problem with Gramsci's counter-

---

[57] _H & SS_, 175.

[58] Ibid., 174.

hegemony was its necessary class character. Laclau and Mouffe see this as fundamentally anti-democratic because it is anti-pluralist. A counter-hegemony organized around a working-class project, is "incompatible with the plurality and the opening which a radical democracy requires."[59] Democratic struggles must be conducted on their own terrain. Workers' democratic struggle will be anti-capitalist. Women's democratic struggle will be anti-sexist. Since anti-sexism is not automatically produced by anti-capitalism, or vice versa, the two struggles must keep their chains of equivalence from completely overlapping. Since antagonisms are bi-polar, this could only mean that fusing the two antagonisms would subordinate one of the struggles on the democratic end:

> There are not,... necessary links between anti-sexism and anti-capitalism, and a unity between the two can only be the result of a hegemonic articulation. It follows that it is only possible to construct this articulation on the basis of separate struggles, which only exercise their equivalential and overdetermining effects in certain spheres of the social. This requires the autonomization of the spheres of struggle and the multiplication of political spaces...[60]

---

[59] Ibid., 178.

[60] Ibid., 178.

So the "left" is not really a discrete entity with a unified political project: "...there is not one politics of the Left whose contents can be determined in isolation from all contextual reference."[61] This is not, of course, what it means to argue for a working class left, even from the most dogmatic, mechanistic, economic-determinist marxist perspective. The claim has never been made by marxists that all the progressive movements of history have been working class ones. This claim has only been made (and not by marxism as a whole, but only by certain marxist tendencies) for the capitalist era. The claim has never been made "in isolation from all contextual reference". Nevertheless, the post-marxist position goes further than this anti-a priori-ism in its argument for the autonomy of democratic struggles. Even within the context of the capitalist epoch, "[w]e are exactly in the field of Wittgenstein's language games: the closest we can get is to find `family resemblances'"[62] between the dispersion of elements that we recognize as the regularity of the left. The

---

[61] Ibid., 179.

[62] Ibid., 179.

80

autonomy of the various democratic language-games is, therefore, built on a liberal basis:

> ...total equivalence never exists; every equivalence is penetrated by a constitutive precariousness, derived from the unevenness of the social. To this extent, the precariousness of every equivalence demands that it be complemented/limited by the logic of autonomy. It is for this reason that the demand for equality is not sufficient, but needs to be balanced by the demand for liberty, which leads us to speak of a radical and plural democracy.... [L]iberalism... as an ethical principle which defends the liberty of the individual to fulfil his or her human capacities,... is more valid today than ever.[63]

Democracy requires both the democratic equality of the democratic revolution, and the liberal liberty that has been articulated with it. Democracy without the ethical principle of liberalism is not really democracy at all. Thus, Laclau and Mouffe conflate democracy and liberal-democracy. Their decentred, pluralist, counter-hegemonic project is therefore, not only "internal to the democratic revolution", it is also internal to the current liberal-democratic system. And however "radical" it is claimed to be, it does not look beyond liberal-democracy. Liberal-democracy is the meta-language-game that makes all the democratic struggle language games-

---

[63] Ibid., 184.

possible.

Ironically, this means that any fundamental challenge to the current liberal-democratic system is, by definition, an attempt to institute an anti-democratic "closure". Such a challenge would either present one democratic set of equivalences as constitutive of counter-hegemony as such, or it would present the "nation" as a stable system of differences. The equivalential challenge would mean a subordination of all difference to one equivalential opposition. Laclau and Mouffe seem to have as their model, here, a centralized state-socialist alternative to liberal-democracy, where all difference is labelled "bourgeois" and purged by violent means. The differential challenge would mean an active valuation of the differences that make up the "nation", while chains of equivalence are labelled "unpatriotic" allegiances, and are broken up by violent means. The fascist state best represents this alternative. Despite the language of "equivalence" and "difference", we can see that this is a very old and familiar argument for liberal-democracy. It is the same argument that Karl Popper made in

the 1940s, for the liberal-democratic "open" society, and against the fascist and communist "closed" societies.[64] And if the choice is between liberal-democracy, fascism and Stalinism, it is obvious which alternative is most "open".

Against Laclau and Mouffe, it will be argued that the liberal-democratic system is inextricably bound to capitalism, and that democratic-socialism constitutes the only really "radical" (ie. anti-capitalist) alternative - and it is a radical alternative without "closure". But first, we must deal with the post-marxist derivation of social totality from the Wittgensteinian language-game.

The disjunction between the Wittgensteinian language-game and the post-marxist social totality is that the former is an "anti-model", while the latter is a "meta-model". The language-game anti-model allows for the greatest possible variance in its application to particular contexts. The meaning of any word or action is <u>entirely dependent on its particular social context</u> - how it is used in "ordinary language". There are language-games that have <u>nothing</u> in

---

[64] K.R. Popper, <u>The Open Society and Its Enemies</u>, Vol. 2, (London; Routledge and Kegen Paul, 1962), 63, 162.

common, save their linguistic "clothing". The social totality meta-model starts from this universal linguistic integument and thus derives a _functioning semiological system_. As I have argued, Laclau and Mouffe conceive social totality on the Saussurean linguistic model of mutually related _signs_ (even though signs include non-linguistic elements, this does not change the fact that language is the master pattern). The words and actions that make up language-games find their ultimate social meaning in the semiological system. Their meaning depends on their articulation as differential and equivalential moments, which both constitute and dissolve social totality, or "discourse". It may appear on the face of it that Laclau and Mouffe, like Wittgenstein, are not positing something common to all the various language games, but merely that they are all mutually related in ways similar to the various games in Wittgenstein's list. But Laclau and Mouffe do not merely say that language games are related in a variety of unpredictable patterns. They claim that language games are all _symbolically_ related[65] on the model of commonality and

---

[65] This is the significance of Laclau and Mouffe's claim that "Every social practice is... - in one of its dimensions -

disjunction or equivalence and difference. This claim is then reified when equivalence and difference are mapped onto equality and liberty respectively. With the first move Laclau and Mouffe are playing with words - they are constructing a false common element that runs through the thread. With the second move they are saying that this word play is real - they are saying that the common element that runs through the thread is a very important property of the thread that tells us what we can do with it. Since liberty and equality are what constitute the thread, we can only do liberal-democratic things with it (unless we want to live in a "closed" social totality).

Even though "actions" are part of Laclau and Mouffe's semiological system, neither actions nor words are actually doing anything here, the way that they do things in ordinary language-games. The only thing that "gets done" in post-marxist discourse, is the establishment of new differential and equivalential relations through the rearticulation of elements. Signs are mutually related, but things only get done

_____

articulatory". H & SS, 113.

at the level of speech (_parole_). This is where signs are _used_ for particular purposes.

Laclau and Mouffe use Wittgenstein's example of two workers building a wall to illustrate their concept of discourse. Here, something gets done; a wall is built. The actions and the words of the builders are _used_ and _meant_ in this context of _doing something_. When Laclau and Mouffe go on to discuss the differential and equivalential relations of words and actions that constitute discourse, one is given the impression that they are suggesting that equivalence and difference somehow render the building of the wall possible, in the way that Saussurean language (_langue_) renders speech (_parole_) possible. But they never come back to explain the _doing_ of anything else.

Laclau and Mouffe go on, in their fourth and final chapter, to explain 200 years of history as the play of differential and equivalential logics. The democratic equivalence of the "people" disrupts the difference of the "ancien régime". The "democratic imaginary", thus established, makes possible new chains of equivalence along lines of class,

gender, race, etc. The logic of difference finds expression in the liberal ideology that is articulated with the democratic imaginary. This allows the various democratic struggles to maintain their autonomy, and develop a "plural radicalism" within liberal-democracy. History happens, but nothing gets done. Workers recognize certain commonalities amongst themselves that put them in opposition to the bourgeoisie, but the fact that they recognize these commonalities while building walls, or doing other things for their bosses, seems incidental.[66] Gender equivalences are established in a similar way. The fact that things in the home and workplace are done in a gendered way seems unimportant.[67] Furthermore, these struggles are autonomous, not because workers and women do different things, but because liberal ideology allows the distinct oppositions of class and gender to be autonomously articulated.

---

[66] "Socialist" issues are put on the agenda because relations of political equality between the ensemble of the citizenry can be seen as inconsistent with relations of economic inequality. H & SS, 156.

[67] Political equality is revealed to be inconsistent with gender inequality, and voilà, feminism is born. H & SS, 154.

By contrast, Wittgensteinian language-games explain precisely how words and actions are used to get things done; how A and B use words and actions to build a wall, how one uses words and actions to make boilers according to calculations so that boiler explosions will be less likely, how the words and actions of student and teacher allow the former to become adept at applying a mathematical formula.[68] And the relations between the elements of these diverse language-games are not sign to sign relations on the Saussurean model. Words and actions do not form a system of differences. They are functioning components of social processes, both of which are constantly undergoing change.

This is why Wittgenstein draws parallels between the words used by the workers A and B, and their tools. Tools are parts of the social process of building. Through constant use tools undergo change, and as the social process of building develops, their functions in that process change as well. When tool N breaks, it is no longer serviceable in its function. Even if the tool never gets replaced, however, the word "N"

_____

[68] PI, Part I, Sect. 2, 3e, Sect. 466, 133e, Sect. 151, 59e.

can still have a function in the overall social process:
"...we could... imagine a convention whereby B has to shake
his head in reply if A gives him the sign belonging to a tool
that is broken."[69] A less "functional" word would be a name
that does not correspond to any past or present tool, but even
this word "could be given a place in the language-game".[70] B
could shake his head just as he did with the broken "N", and
the part played by this nexus of words and actions could be
imagined as "a sort of joke" between the two workers.[71]
Although this joke does have a function in a social process
(humour can be very useful in breaking up the monotony of
work), it does not find its meaning in its use in the same
sense as the words and actions that are part of the "normal"
language-game of A and B. The joke is an exception to the
rule. It has a dysfunctional aspect, even though there are
ways in which it is functional as well. Thus Wittgenstein
concludes: "For a large class of cases - though not for all -

---

[69] Ibid., Part I, Sect. 41, 20e.

[70] Ibid., Part I, Sect. 42, 20e.

[71] Ibid., Part I, Sect. 42, 20e.

in which we employ the word `meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[72]

While this approach allows Wittgenstein to point out the problems with attempts to assign meanings to words outside of the particular social processes in which they are used, it limits his ability to generalize beyond particular instances of use-in-social-process. Thus, the modesty of his claim: meaning is use for a "large class of cases - though not for all..." There is nothing more that can be said about this large class of cases, or the cases that are outside it. How do we know whether the meaning of a particular word is found in its use or not? By looking at the place the word occupies in its particular ordinary language-game. Social processes are not fully historical social processes, because they appear unrelated to the history of societies generally. Social processes are language-games. That is to say, that social processes have no one thing in common. The "language-game" is an anti-model.

Does this mean that history can only be understood behind

---

[72] Ibid., Part I, Sect. 43, 20e.

the back of social process? Must we establish a system of differences out of the disjunction of the common properties of social processes à la Laclau and Mouffe? Is the positing of a semiological meta-model the only way out?

The Politics of Language Games

In the course of developing a marxist alternative to Saussurean approaches to language, V.N. Voloshinov gives us a response that we can oppose to post-marxism's semiological meta-model. Until quite recently, Voloshinov was an obscure figure, both within the marxist tradition, and among philosophers of language.[73] His unorthodox approach to his object of study made him a target of Stalinist censorship and repression, and his principle work was only translated into

---

[73] It is well known that Voloshinov was part of the 1920s Russian intellectual milieu that influenced M.M. Bakhtin. Voloshinov participated in what later became known as the "Bakhtin circle", whose work, until recently, was thought to be entirely the product of M.M. Bakhtin. Among the philosophers profoundly influenced by Voloshinov after his publication in English, is Raymond Williams, who countered the "system" approach to language found in some forms of structuralist marxism with Voloshinov's "social process" approach. See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 35-38.

English more than 40 years after its publication in Russian.[74]
A Russian marxist writing during the 1920s, Voloshinov was
ignorant of Wittgenstein's post-_Tractatus_ writings. His work,
nevertheless, can be read as an extension of Wittgensteinian
philosophy into social and political domains. Voloshinov
experimented with approaches that start with words and actions
engaged in particular social processes. The mutual interaction
of these processes produces a history that cannot be reduced
to the play of equivalential and differential logics. It is a
history of people _doing things_ with words and actions. The
basic tools for a historical-materialist exploration and
systematization of the "prodigious diversity" of
Wittgensteinian language-games are to be found here.

Voloshinov takes as his starting point for a marxist
philosophy of language, the "utterance".[75] The utterance, in
Wittgensteinian terms, might be called a "move" in a language-

_____

[74] V.N. Voloshinov, _Marxism and the Philosophy of
Language_, (hereafter _M & PL_) trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R.
Titunik (Cambridge Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1973).

[75] "Marxist philosophy of language should and must stand
squarely on the utterance as the real phenomenon of language-
speech and as a socioideological structure." _M & PL_, 97.

game. It is an act that is part of a social process. Just as a move has a purpose in a language-game, an utterance has a purpose in a dialogue.[76] There are many different social contexts in which dialogue occurs. The various dialogical forms associated with different social contexts are called "genres". Like Wittgenstein's language-games, genres are social processes where people do things with words and actions. And just as the language-game concept is used to show how ordinary language actually works, so Voloshinov's concept of the "behavioral genre" is used to show the generative power of "real-life utterances".[77] There are distinctly effective ways of dialoguing within various social processes:

> ...casual causerie of the drawing room where everyone `feels at home'... Here we find devised special forms of insinuation, half-sayings, allusions to little tales of an intentionally nonserious character, and so on.... conversation between husband and wife, brother and sister, etc.... a random assortment of people... waiting in a line or conducting some business.... Village sewing circles, urban carouses, workers' lunchtime chats, etc.,... The behavioral genre fits everywhere into the channel of social intercourse assigned to it....
> The production processes of labour and the processes of commerce know different forms for constructing

---

[76] M & PL, 110-112.

[77] Ibid., 96.

utterances.[78]

It is clear that the forms of effective dialogue, appropriate to their respective genres, are as diverse and untotalizable as Wittgenstein's language-games. They do not have any one thing in common, save their linguistic clothing. They share a series of partially overlapping "family resemblances". Nevertheless, according to Voloshinov, they do form a "unified whole".[79]

Voloshinov is not saying that the various genres are unified by "the disjunction of all their common properties". He is not "playing with words" in the Wittgensteinian sense. He is not saying that the common element running through the thread is the continuous overlapping of fibres, but rather, is pointing to an actual thread that connects all the diverse elements. Speech genres form a unified whole because their diverse contexts are all formed by interactions between "socially organized persons".[80] The basis for this claim is

---

[78] Ibid., 97.

[79] Ibid., 18.

[80] Ibid., 21.

actually implicit in Wittgenstein. As Anthony Kenny has shown, the post-_Tractatus_ Wittgenstein came "to believe that the datum on which language rests, the framework into which it fits, is given... by a shifting pattern of forms of life grafted on to a basic common human nature."[81] For philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard, Wittgenstein's "anthropological assumption" constitutes a "humanist obstacle" to be overcome,[82] but it is precisely this humanist perspective that allows Voloshinov to claim that speech genres "are entirely determined by production relations and the sociopolitical order."[83] As I will argue in Chapter 4, Lyotard's bracketing of extra-linguistic elements does a disservice to his stated objective - the promotion of linguistic polyphony - because it

---

[81] Anthony Kenny, _Wittgenstein_, (England: Penguin Books, 1973) 224.

[82] By replacing Wittgenstein's "anthropological assumption" that "people make use of language", with the anti-humanist assumption that language makes use of people, Lyotard effectively removes all extra-linguistic elements from his Wittgensteinian and Bahktinian influenced analysis of language-games. See Jean-François Lyotard, "Wittgenstein's `After'," in _Political Writings_, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 21. See also chapter 4 of this work.

[83] Ibid., p. 21.

means that Lyotard must ignore the extra-linguistic conditions that either promote or retard polyphonic discourse. Voloshinov, on the other hand, directs our attention to the material forces that structure the terrain of dialogical practices.

The thesis that our common human nature unites all of the diverse language games contradicts Wittgenstein's assertion that there is no one thing common to all the diverse activities that we call "games," but it does not do so by playing with words. Rather than pointing to the disjunction of all the common properties of the various games, Voloshinov points to the common humanity of those people (speakers and addressees) who are implicated in the various games. Wittgenstein also contradicts himself this way.[84] This contradiction can, of course, be resolved in an anti-humanist fashion. We find the postmodern form of this resolution in Lyotard, and the "postmodern materialist" form in Diskin and

---

[84] "The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (PI, Part I, Sect. 206, 82e). One kind of common behaviour is "pain behaviour." Our pain behaviour sets grammatical limits on how we use the word "pain" (PI, Part I, Sect. 293, 295, 303, 304, 100e-2e).

Sandler.[85] Diskin and Sandler's resolution is of particular

interest, since they offer criticisms of Laclau and Mouffe

that problematize the post-marxists' failure to apply

Wittgensteinian method to the economic sphere. Diskin and

Sandler's critique is similar to my own insofar as it implies

that the reification of equivalence and difference as equality

and liberty creates blind spots in post-marxism that are

endemic to bourgeois political economy, but the postmodern

materialist perspective differs from my own in its rejection

of the humanist elements of Wittgenstein. For postmodern

materialism, Wittgenstein is right to argue that games have no

one thing in common. Laclau and Mouffe are therefore

criticized for their failure to include class as one of the

many fibres that come together to form the thread of the

---

[85] Jonathan Diskin and Blair Sandler, "Essentialism and
the Economy in the Post-Marxist Imaginary," Rethinking
Marxism, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall, 1993) 28-48.The term "postmodern
materialism" comes from Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio,
"Introduction: Postmodern Materialism and the Future of
Marxist Theory," in Postmodern Materialism, Antonio Callari
and David F. Ruccio (eds.) (London: Wesleyan University Press,
1996). The broader epistemological implications of postmodern
materialist anti-humanist Wittgensteinianism are developed in
Stephan A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff Knowledge and Class,
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

social totality.[86] I, however, will go further, arguing that in capitalist societies class exploitation occupies a strategic centrality in the organization of the very activities that make us human. Thus, in the present context, class constitutes a common element that runs through the thread of the social whole.

This form of class centrality is inspired by Voloshinov. Utterances are made by various speakers and are received by various addressees within a "sign community".[87] Sign communities are a series of overlapping networks with no one thing in common. There are only family resemblances. Nevertheless, the speakers and addressees that make up the various sign communities are all <u>socially organized persons</u>. They are all, somehow, imbricated in <u>production relations and the sociopolitical order</u>. Their respective places in these social relations make up their respective "orientations" in terms of "social interest". The cacophony of dialogue within the diverse speech genres is where "differently oriented

---

[86] Diskin and Sandler, 38-39.

[87] <u>M & PL</u>, 23.

social interests" intersect.[88] Differently oriented social interests are thought, primarily (but not exclusively), in terms of class opposition. Within the various sign communities, utterances will be spoken and heard differently, with differing "accents", depending on the social orientation of the speaker or addressee. It is this "multiaccentuality" that makes the sign itself into "an arena of the class struggle."[89]

This raises two fundamental questions. First, why must orientation of social interest be thought primarily in terms of class opposition? Second, what is the relation between the effectivity or functionality of an utterance, within a given social process, and its multiaccentuality? A different formulation of the second question is the following: How is the function of an utterance invaded by the class struggle?

Neither Voloshinov, nor any other member of the so-called "Bakhtin school", have answered the first question with any clarity. Voloshinov argues that the hierarchical organization

---

[88] Ibid., 23.

[89] Ibid., 23.

99

of speakers and addressees is of paramount importance in the shaping of dialogical processes: "Language etiquette, speech tact, and other forms of adjusting an utterance to the hierarchical organization of society have tremendous importance in the process of devising the basic behavioral genres."[90] But, however pervasive, class is only one form of social hierarchy. The fact that dialogical processes involve people with more or less power in social hierarchies, does not speak to the primacy of class hierarchy. Voloshinov also makes vague, and fleeting references to the "material basis" which determines the "ideological superstructures".[91] But if relations of class are somehow more "material" or "basic" than other sorts of relations, then we need an explanation of why this is so, and we need an explanation of the determination of the "superstructures" by the "basis" that goes beyond the "reflection" and "refraction" of class contradictions in multiaccentuality.[92]

---

[90] Ibid., 21.

[91] Ibid., 17-23, 106.

[92] Ibid., 23.

Voloshinov does not say _why_ he thinks of orientation to social interest primarily in terms of class, but he does single out the behavioral genres found in "production processes of labour and the processes of commerce".[93] These behavioural genres are central to the organization of other dialogical forms. It is in production and commerce that _surplus extraction_ occurs. With Voloshinov's emphasis on dialogue, this surplus extraction now becomes a _dialogical process_.[94] Genres of surplus extraction are somehow more "basic". But how can we differentiate between more and less

---

[93] Voloshinov lists a whole series of behavioral genres in a lengthy paragraph (Ibid., 96-97), followed by a one sentence paragraph: "The production processes of labour and the processes of commerce know different forms for constructing utterances." (Ibid., 97)

[94] One does not generally think of exploitation as being a two-way process of dialogue, but this concept makes sense if we consider that capitalists need the knowledge and skills of direct producers and these things cannot be secured without some degree of active consent. Domination through a combination of coercion _and consent_ is precisely what is meant by Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Thinking of surplus extraction as a dialogical process means conceptualizing hegemony as operating at the level of the relations of production. This form of hegemony is captured very well in Gramsci's concept of "Fordism". See Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, _Selections from the Prison Notebooks_ (New York: International Publishers, 1971) 277-320.

"basic" genres of discourse?

The relation between the genres of surplus extraction and other dialogical forms can be conceived as analogous to the relation between a pile of bricks and mortar on the one hand and a series of structures that could be constructed from them on the other. A specific structure cannot be deduced from the pile of stock, but we can get some idea of the material limitations on the builders from the properties of the material they must work with. Of course, this model merely begs the question, why must it be the genres of surplus extraction that set the material limits on social structures? Why not patriarchal or racial genres? These are every bit as "material" as the genres of surplus extraction.

It is not, however, simply a question of "materiality", but a question of strategic placement. If we want a red brick house, we need red bricks. No matter what the arrangement of white bricks, they will not constitute a red brick house. An egalitarian society can only be constructed with red bricks. Red bricks do not, in themselves, constitute an egalitarian society (one can build prisons with red bricks as well),

however, white bricks will invariably mean exploitation.

Genres of surplus extraction have a strategic placement in relation to dialogical processes in general that make them central to the "red or white brick" choice. This is because the dialogical processes of surplus extraction have a central role in organizing what Len Doyal and Roger Harris call "constitutive activities".[95] Constitutive activities are sub-dialogical in the sense that they are a "translation bridgehead... [between radically different cultures] which is not language-dependent"[96]:

> ...it will be recognized that any form of human life will require them [constitutive activities] in some way or another for physical survival. For example,... both translator and aliens will share a certain measure of understanding of the distinctively human and social ways of doing a variety of different sorts of things (e.g. eating, sleeping, agricultural production, reproducing, construction, sheltering, healing, playing, etc.) None of these can be done in just any old way.[97]

Doyal and Harris' analyses of constitutive activities are

---

[95] Len Doyal and Roger Harris, "The Practical Foundations of Human Understanding," New Left Review, No. 139 (May-June 1983) 65.

[96] Ibid., 65.

[97] Ibid., 65.

an unpacking of Wittgenstein's pregnant statement: "The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language."[98]

The common behaviour of constitutive activities brings us to the really _foundational_ material limitations on human social interaction. We must _always_ eat, sleep, produce and reproduce in "distinctively human and social ways". While recognizing these material limitations is important, there is a sense in which they are uninteresting. They do not present us with choices. We must always do these things, whatever dialogical practices we engage in. Things only become interesting when we consider the way that constitutive practices are organized in dialogical practice. We must always engage in constitutive activities, but we can do so in a multitude of ways. Nevertheless, these choices are not simply a series of potentialities laid out before us. They are structured by more or less basic dialogical processes. Developments at the level of the most basic dialogical processes will have consequences that extend throughout the

---

[98] _PI_, Part I, Sect. 206, 82e.

cacophony of discursive genres. The most basic dialogical processes in class-divided societies are the genres of surplus extraction. Since the organization of surplus extraction has such a wide range of consequences for the organization of constitutive activities, it profoundly structures the very building blocks that other dialogical processes have to work with. Of course, other dialogical processes structure constitutive activities and, therefore, have a reciprocal effect on the organization of surplus extraction, but the reciprocal relation is not a symmetrical one.

The asymmetry of the relation between the process of surplus extraction and other dialogical processes, in capitalist societies, is most economically expressed in the following formulation; non-class genres of discourse that hierarchically organize speakers and addressees are both functional and dysfunctional to surplus extraction, but they are _necessarily dysfunctional_ to a working class project with the aim of replacing capitalist surplus extraction with the self-organization of direct producers. Movements to challenge non-class forms of hierarchy can exploit the dysfunctional

contradictions of their respective hierarchies with surplus extraction, and thus use the power of capital to advance their respective causes. A working class movement cannot advance the struggle to overcome surplus extraction by using the power of non-class hierarchies, because these hierarchies are necessarily antithetical to this goal. Thus, the dialogical processes of surplus extraction organize speakers and addressees in such a way that a radical transformation of all social hierarchies demands the continual affirmation, from all fronts, of a working class project in opposition to capital.

In capitalist society, with the important exception of capitalists, each of us must at least partially accept the "rôle" of "worker". We must speak and be spoken to as workers. We must enter into "equal exchanges" of labour power for wages. We must accept this rôle in order to be human in the most basic sense - in order to survive. But this "equal exchange" is synonymous with exploitation. One of the partners in the exchange extracts a surplus, while the other must be content with mere survival. In fact, at a macro-level, this game must continually produce surplus extraction. Each

individual capitalist is constrained by competition such that

survival as capital depends on capital accumulation. On the

other hand, the fact that the continual accumulation of

capital can only continue through the production of mere

survival for its human component, constitutes the very

contradiction that makes the sign an arena of class struggle.[99]

Whether workers are organized or unorganized, politicized or

"apolitical", there will always be contradictions between the

uniaccentual capitalist category of "wage labour" and the

multi-accentual dialogue of people who are constrained in such

a way that they must perform it.

Although the process of capital accumulation has a

"structural indifference" to "extra-economic identities",[100]

---

[99] This is the contradiction expressed in the first volume
of capital, as Marx makes the transition from the sphere of
circulation (equal exchange) to the sphere of production
(exploitation): "He who was previously the money-owner now
strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-
power follows as his worker. The one smirks self-importantly
and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back,
like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now
has nothing else to expect but - a tanning." Karl Marx,
Capital, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Random House,
1977) 280.

[100] Ellen Meiksins Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism,
(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 267.

and in principle, works just as well with Black, White, male or female wage labour, it is nevertheless functionally integrated with non-class hierarchies such as sexism and racism. Sexism and racism also structure constitutive activities. For instance, in patriarchal societies, human beings are generally constrained such that they must take up some gender position on a "heterosexual matrix".[101] People must speak and be spoken to as gender rôles. These gender rôles structure our eating, sleeping, production and reproduction. These gender rôles have been functionally integrated with capital accumulation. For instance, predominantly female labour in the household allows capital to externalize some of the costs of the reproduction of labour power, and predominantly female work ghettos function as a method of distribution of "shit work" with a built-in legitimation

---

[101] I am using Judith Butler's term here, in the way that she explicitly defines it. The heterosexual matrix, designates "that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized." The assumption made here is "that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality." Judith Butler, Gender Trouble, (New York: Routledge, 1990) 151n6.

mechanism that also divides the working class against itself.

Moreover, when women experience exploitation, they always

experience it as women. Sexist exploitation is not simply

"economic" surplus extraction with sexism "added on".[102] And

part of the reason why sexism is so effective in dividing the

working class against itself, is because male workers derive

material benefit from sexist exploitation even while being

exploited themselves.[103]

---

[102] While we can understand surplus extraction as a process involving property owners and wage labourers without referring to categories of gender (and race), just as workers do not experience surplus extraction as a mere exchange, so women workers cannot separate the economic exchange they enter into from their political subordination as workers and as women. So distinguishing between exploitation (as the extraction of surplus) and oppression (as hierarchical relations of domination that may or may not entail exploitation) may have a didactic value in certain contexts, but it ought not blind us to the fact that the extraction of surplus does not work without being integrated with some kind of oppression. The concepts of sexist exploitation and racist exploitation emphasize this integration.

[103] This material benefit does not generally take the form of an "economic" one. The existence of lower wage ghettoes pull down wages generally, but just as white workers receive what W.E.B. Du Bois called a "public and psychological wage" at the expense of black workers, so do male workers receive benefits of status and power inside and outside the family at the expense of women. See W.E.B. Du Bois, Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880 (New York: Touchstone, 1995) 700.

There are all kinds of reasons why women and men should organize to subvert the heterosexual matrix. Just as workers must constantly engage in dialogical struggles that pit their multiaccentual aspirations against capital's insistence that they accept their given rôle of "wage labour", so must gendered human beings struggle to subvert their assigned gender rôles within the heterosexual matrix. The thesis that the sign is an arena of class contradiction, is repeated in feminist theory by Judith Butler, when she argues: "The injunction to be a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated."[104] As they are currently constituted, gender rôles constrain how we eat, sleep, produce and reproduce, in ways that are clearly undesirable for those not on the "top" of the male/female, straight/gay divisions. One of the many reasons for subverting gender rôles is that the working class should be able to confront its exploiters with a greater degree of solidarity if it is less divided along gender lines. But the

---

[104] Butler, 145.

subversion of the heterosexual matrix is not synonymous with the subversion of capitalist exploitation.

If gender struggles are not integrated into a working class project, there is no reason to expect capitalist exploitation to be challenged. At best, capitalist exploitation could be reformed such that it is no longer functionally integrated with the hetero-sexual reproductive matrix. State-funded daycare, for instance, could replace some of the "externalities" of predominantly female household labour. "Shit work" could be distributed along racist and/or "meritocratic"[105] lines and no longer distributed along sexist ones. In other words, the basic fact that some people must sell their labour power to survive would remain. What would change would be <u>the way</u> that this exploitation occurs. Women might experience exploitation, or even racist exploitation, but would no longer experience sexist exploitation. The unprecedented successes of the women's movement during the past centuries of expansion of capitalist surplus extraction

---

[105] "Meritocracy", in this context, simply means discrimination on the basis of access to education and whatever "natural advantages" people are lucky enough to inherit.

speak to the possibility of potential advances in this direction.

Reformism along these lines is possible, at least in part, because the functional integration of surplus extraction and the heterosexual matrix is not without contradiction. There are also ways in which sexism is dysfunctional to surplus extraction. As Ellen Meiksins Wood argues, "the development of capitalism has created ideological pressures against such [extra-economic] inequalities and differences to a degree with no precedent in pre-capitalist societies."[106] It can, of course, be argued that working class struggles that fail to integrate themselves with a feminist project might successfully challenge capitalist exploitation, but would leave patriarchy in tact. Structurally, however, it is much more difficult for an anti-capitalist workers' struggle to ignore sexism, than it is for an anti-patriarchal feminist struggle to ignore surplus extraction. Because of the functional integration of the heterosexual matrix and surplus extraction which includes the internal division of the working

---

[106] Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism, 267.

class, for those who seek to overthrow capitalism, there is a strategic advantage to putting the heterosexual matrix on the agenda. And the dysfunctional contradictions between the heterosexual matrix and capitalist surplus extraction do not manifest themselves in forms that allow patriarchal power to be used for the achievement of socialism (although it might be useful for resisting certain forms of commodification while leaving the basic structure of capitalist exploitation in tact). Yet, the subversion of the heterosexual matrix does not necessarily achieve a strategic advantage in the fight to put anti-capitalism on the agenda. This is what gives such force to liberal feminism.

It is quite possible for feminists to seek to split apart the functional integration of sexism and surplus extraction by exploiting the contradictions of the relation between the two, such that the considerable material power accumulated in the form of capital, is actually used to undermine sexism. It can be and is argued that the distribution of "shit work" along gender lines is illegitimate (and therefore undermines the legitimacy of capitalism) and inefficient (and therefore

undermines the viability of capitalism). The externalization of costs associated with the reproduction of labour power can be argued against in a similar fashion. There are other ways for capital to get its "dirty work" done, and there may, in fact, be considerable advantages for long-term capital accumulation to be gleaned from an evolution from sexist distribution of "shit work" to racist and meritocratic distribution.

It is much more difficult for workers seeking to challenge capitalist surplus extraction, to use the power of patriarchy to these ends. Obviously this does not mean that a workers' movement cannot be sexist. But a workers' movement that ignores the heterosexual matrix and the benefits that straight male workers derive from it, does itself a strategic disservice insofar as its objective is the challenging of surplus extraction. A workers' movement that is not anti-capitalist, but merely seeks to improve the relative position of some of its members can strategically use straight male privilege to achieve its ends, but these ends obfuscate rather than express the contradiction between the rôle of "wage

labour" and those constrained in such a way that they must perform it. Failure to challenge the sexist aspect of sexist exploitation is a strategic mistake here, not merely because it perpetuates divisions within the working class, but also because the continued acceptance by straight male workers of the benefits they derive from the heterosexual matrix that does the "dirty work" of capitalism serves as an ideological support for surplus extraction itself. Sexism is an investment that straight male workers have in a system that nevertheless exploits them.

Socialists, of course, can and do make strategic mistakes, but it should be clear that sexism is dysfunctional to working class struggles in a way that surplus extraction is not with respect to feminist struggles. In fact, non-patriarchal capitalism is constantly being imagined in the form of a gender rôle "parody" that creates subjects that are misfits in the heterosexual matrix.[107] These misfits cannot properly speak or be spoken to in the heterosexual matrix, yet somehow fit into the rôles of speakers and addressees engaged

---

[107] Butler, 142-149.

in the equal exchanges that constitute surplus extraction.[108]

One can "play" with gender rôles in a way that one cannot play

with class rôles. A penis is little more than a "prop" in a

very powerful theatre piece, but those who possess the means

of production hold the material means of working class

---

[108] The functional integration of surplus extraction and the heterosexual matrix often means that options of where sexual misfits can fit into equal exchanges will be severely limited. Gayle Rubin has suggestively characterized this as a blockage of what Marx identified as "the great civilizing influence of capital". Karl Marx, in David McLellan (ed.), The Grundrisse, (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 94. Rubin argues that "[k]eeping sex from realizing the positive effects of the market economy hardly makes it socialist." Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Borale and David M. Haperin (eds.) The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader, (New York: Routledge, 1993) 20. Rubin is arguing that legislation against prostitutes' right to sell their services in a safe environment or against the sale of sexually "deviant" porn, whether it is defended from a religious fundamentalist perspective or a feminist perspective, reinforces oppressive sexual codes. While this does not mean that purchase and sale of sexual commodities will make people free, it would give capitalism a sorely needed push in the direction that Marx and Engels thought it was clearly moving in when they argued that "[d]ifferences of age and sex have no longer any distinctive social validity for the working class." Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in Robert C. Tucker, (ed.) The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978) 479. Obviously there are other struggles that are needed to bridge "extra-economic" divisions, and all of these together, must be part of socialist struggle.

survival. Of course, it is often the case that women are materially dependent on men for their survival, but there is a qualitative difference between this instance which is often the case and the instance of working class dependence which is always and necessarily the case. A butch-femme lesbian couple can subvert the norms of the heterosexual matrix very well without a penis. Workers can challenge the norms of the capital genre by satirizing the capitalist, but the expropriators must be physically expropriated before the real impact of their "parody" can be felt. This expropriation demands a unity that can only be achieved by overcoming the divisions in the working class bred by sexism and racism.

Integrating feminist struggles with the working class struggle, is not a simple harmonious process. For instance, it means female workers confronting male workers with their complicity in sexist exploitation, while demanding that all workers struggle together to end all forms of exploitation. This is what it means to struggle against a sexist exploitation that is more than "economic" exploitation with sexism "added on". Nevertheless, capital accumulation and

exploitation can continue without sexist forms of exploitation. All that is required for capital accumulation is wage labour, and if feminist struggles limit themselves to equality for "extra-economic" gender identities, then capital is effectively let off the hook.

I have abstracted here, from the concrete, lived experience of exploitation that is always sexist and racist, and have abstracted from feminist, anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles that are historically inseparable, not in the interest of separating struggles that work best when they are united. These abstractions are useful because they clarify the specific role played by the dialogical processes of surplus extraction. By making these abstractions, we are able to see that the dialogical processes of surplus extraction organize speakers and addressees as workers and capitalists whose very survival depends on their continual dialogical engagement in these rôles. Furthermore, gender and race rôles can be functionally integrated with this social hierarchy, but they can also be challenged without endangering the capitalist-worker hierarchy. An anti-capitalist working class

project, however, is structurally antithetical to all forms of hierarchy. It is thus the working class project that has the capacity to act as a unifying principle for various multi-accentual dialogical engagements. It is in this sense that the dialogical processes other than those of surplus extraction structure constitutive activities and have a reciprocal effect on the organization of surplus extraction without decentring it.

How to Think About the Grammatical Peculiarities of the Class Struggle "Language Game"

If the dialogical processes of surplus extraction have a certain primacy by virtue of their organizing function with respect to other forms of social intercourse, then we can link up Voloshinov's philosophy of language with Marx's historical-materialist social analysis. Hierarchical relations between speakers and addressees, in all their diversity, are structured by struggle in the dialogical relations between the direct producers and their exploiters:

The specific form, in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the

119

relationship between rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determined element.... It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers... which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relations of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis - the same from the standpoint of its main conditions - due to innumerable different empirical circumstances... from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.[109]

Just as the process of surplus extraction forms the basis for the "relationship of rulers and ruled", "relations of sovereignty and dependence" and "the state", it forms the basis for a diverse range of behavioral genres. The surplus extraction process is just one among many, where there are "infinite variations and gradations in appearance", but because of its centrality with respect to all the other social processes, the opposition between the direct producers and their exploiters extends beyond the bounds of surplus extraction. The surplus extraction genre constantly overflows its boundaries. We find the class struggle language-game in

---

[109] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, (New York; International Publishers, 1984), 791-792.

all the other diverse language-games. Even though the class struggle language-game is "ordinary language", in the sense that it is part of everyday life, it is not a language-game like the others, because of its function in the organization of the other language-games, or to put it differently, because of the class struggle's centrality to the organization of social life.

This is a far cry from the relationship between base and superstructure that Laclau and Mouffe argue is constitutive of marxism as a whole. The superstructure is not an ideological representation of the material base, but a set of genres or language-games that are organized around the more basic class struggle genre. Class is not "constituted" as an economic category that is then "represented" at the political and the ideological level. The process of class struggle is simultaneously economic, political and ideological. Even though surplus extraction is referred to as an "economic" basis, the whole point of Marx's critique of bourgeois political-economy is that the relationship between capitalist employer and worker is not merely an "economic" exchange

121

relationship between "equal" partners. It is also a power relationship. A surplus is extracted from workers, constrained by circumstances to accept this extraction.[110] The process of surplus extraction structures other processes because of its strategic position in their mutual relations.

This leads us to our second question: How does the class struggle invade the genre-specific social function of a given utterance? It does so in innumerable ways. There are an infinite variety of ways in which utterances can be accented and reaccented by class opposition. But a particularly interesting example, that relates to the relatively untheorized dysfunctionality of the joke in Wittgenstein's anti-nominalism, is humoristic accentuation. It is Bakhtin who develops the "multiaccentuality", that we have already observed in Voloshinov's work, along humoristic lines. Bakhtin's most famous work on multiaccentual humour is directed to the medieval context of the carnival in Rabelais

---

[110] For further development on this point see Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The separation of the `economic' and the `political' in capitalism," in Democracy Against Capitalism, 19-48. Wood develops this line of argument against the post-marxist interpretation of marxist thought in The Retreat From Class, (London; Verso, 1986) 82-95.

and His World[111], but there are also more general developments of irony, parody, and humour as a whole, to be found in his other works.

In class societies with particularly heavy-handed responses to resistance, attempts will be made to maintain a certain seriousness in social intercourse. Bakhtin calls this tendency "mono-tony" or "monotony".[112] It can be thought of as an attempt to limit humoristic multiaccentuality. In a completely monotonous discursive structure, meaning would be unitary. There would be one truth - the truth of the ruling class. In fact, however, pure monotony is an abstraction, only achieved in the intellectual realm. The Saussurean linguistic model of a system of signs is an example of pure monotony.[113] By abstracting a total system of differences from words that normally have dialogical contexts, each word is given an

---

[111] M.M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswalsky (Cambridge, Mass.; MIT Press, 1968).

[112] M.M. Bakhtin, "From Notes Made in 1970-71," in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin; University of Texas Press, 1986), 134.

[113] M.M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences," in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, 120.

unambiguous place where its meaning is fixed. But Saussure himself would be the first to point out that this fixity cannot be maintained in the actual use of words. Speech (parole) is dynamic and unfixed, whereas language (langue) is a systemic whole where the place of each linguistic element is absolutely fixed.

Yet, even though pure monotony can never be achieved, the tendency to monotony is very real in class society. Bakhtin had to deal with the profoundly monotonous Stalinist regime in the context of the Soviet Union. And even though today's liberal-democratic regimes are most often presented as "pluralistic", there are certain strategic regions where monotony is strictly maintained. There is a tendency to confine multiaccentuality to manageable limits.

Where the tendency to monotony manifests itself, there will be social forces at work with an interest in presenting certain meanings as absolutely fixed. Such social forces strive for a repeatability that can only be achieved at the abstract level of the system of signs.[114] For instance, in a

---

[114] Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences," 108.

capitalist workplace, when the man in charge presents himself as the "boss", he strives to imbue the word with respect, legitimacy, etc. And he wants workers to maintain <u>his</u> sense of the word when they repeat it: "Did the boss say that you could do it that way?" There are all kinds of mechanisms to ensure this kind of repetition. This repetition of the boss' "boss" is, from his class perspective, <u>functional</u> to the workplace genre. Nevertheless, as anyone that has worked for such an enterprise will know, there are <u>always</u> going to be various accents placed on workers' repetitions of the word "boss".

Conceptually, the first response to monotony "is the fairly primitive and very ordinary phenomenon of double-voicedness..."[115] Double-voicedness is a simple parody in repetition of the first utterance. After the man in charge leaves, one of the workers presents herself as the "boss", mocking the mannerisms of her supposed superior. While the importance of double-voiced parody should not be underestimated as an effective technique of resisting monotony, this response is not a very deep one because it

---

[115] Ibid., 110.

merely opposes monotony without engaging people in real dialogue. Deeper responses will involve more than a doubling of the original utterance. Meanings will be multiplied - "polyphony" will burst onto the scene.[116] The utterances of the man in charge will be taken apart and recontextualized. An older worker will question the claims to superior knowledge of the "boss": "I was doing this job while our `boss' was still in swaddling clothes." Workers will simultaneously mock their own submission while mocking the authority of the man in charge: "Well, if the `boss' says we should do it that way, who are _we_ to argue with his royal highness?" There will be innumerable instances of polyphony, many of them humorous. They will involve, not only issues of class, but issues of racism, sexism, and other problems experienced in the context of work and working class life.

This Bakhtinian examination of multiaccentual humour in the workplace, brings out its revolutionary potential. Breaking up the monotony of work is not the mere frivolity that we find in Wittgenstein's phantom tool-joke between

---

[116] Ibid., 112.

workers A and B. Breaking up the monotony of work can be a revolutionary exercise. Happily, this does not make it any less funny, but it does help us to understand how the dysfunctionality of humour relates to the proper functioning of a class divided workplace, and the functioning of a class divided society generally.[117] We see how the class struggle invades the genre-specific functions of utterances. The liberatory force of humour is brought to the fore.

Class struggle invades all kinds of dialogical processes, overflowing the boundaries of the class divided workplace. The opposition between working class multiaccentuality and the uniaccentuality of capital is most evident when utterances are directly implicated in the class struggle. For instance, a newspaper may report a conflict between an "automobile producer" and a "union", or between a "corporation" and its

---

[117] The dysfunctional contradictions endemic to capitalist, racist, patriarchal, and other hierarchically organized language games form the strategic terrain of revolutionary struggle. In Chapter 4 we will examine the contradictions between capital's nomenclature (exchange value) and other ways of speaking about the world. In Chapter 5 we will examine the contradictions between penal and psychiatric discourses on the one hand, and the everyday lives of delinquents and the insane on the other hand.

"workers". In the first case, the bourgeoisie, the "producers", are accented with productivity - they are the productive half of the class struggle couplet. In the second case it is clearly the "workers" who are doing the work.[118] In the uniaccentual idiom of capital, production can only be the bringing together of various commodities through equal exchanges. "Producers" (ie. capitalists) bring together the commodities of machines, raw material, wage labour, etc. According to its circular logic, capital is everything; therefore the production of value is the self-expansion of capital. But workers do not simply accept their assigned rôle of "wage labour". They recognize, in various ways, that they are more than a line item on capital's ledger. Class opposition is less obvious when utterances are only indirectly implicated in the class divided work environment. For instance, a councillor may advise a young person to pursue post-secondary education as an "investment" in the future, or as a path to future "maturation". In the first instance, there

---

[118] Although the implications are obvious to us in this context, the bourgeois accentuation usually passes for truth in the mainstream media. This example is taken from Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism, 157.

is an implied instrumental value to learning that pays off in the form of greater remuneration when alienating one's labour power. In the second case, learning is presented as a growth process with a value in itself, outside the circuits of the capitalist economy. Of course, this non-instrumental value can only be fully realized once capitalism is transcended by political struggle. The uniaccentual genre of capital can only see human cognitive development as an "externality" that is more or less useful to the labour market. It is infinitely more for human beings.

Since surplus extraction involves workers and bosses which have rôles assigned to them in the heterosexual gender matrix, and surplus extraction and gender rôle-playing occur simultaneously, class opposition will also be articulated with the hierarchical opposition of gender. For instance, someone may ask me, "What does Jenny do?" I can respond that Jenny is a "working girl" or that she is a "clerical worker". If I call Jenny a "working girl" with no sense of irony, then I am simultaneously affirming the norms of the heterosexual matrix and the capital genre. I am implying that domestic labour,

because it is not integrated into the circuits of capitalist production, is valueless - it is not "work". Thus, I am also valorizing the work done within the circuits of capitalist production and legitimating the capitalist organization of that form of labour. Furthermore, by using the term "girl", I am suggesting that once this young woman develops more fully, she should hope to find a male partner who will help her fill her proper rôle in the household. Until that time however, she is not betraying her femininity by working in her pink collar ghetto, since she is not usurping the male rôle by taking a "real" job. The term "girl" modifies Jenny's "working" in such a way, that it is recognized to be less than male work. If I call Jenny a "clerical worker", however, I am recognizing her membership and the membership of other workers in her pink collar ghetto, in the class of people called "workers". Furthermore, the capitalist exploitation of these workers is not accented with legitimacy. In the genre of capital, Jenny is just part of the line item of "wage labour". She is nothing more than wage labour, but also, nothing less. Nevertheless, the capital genre is functionally integrated with a

130

heterosexual matrix that cannot be expressed in the terms of the former. The "externality" of domestic labour is outside of the realm of the sayable in the grammar of the capital genre even if it is important in reproducing the commodity of wage labour that capital cannot do without. The positive valuation of the "male" in the heterosexual matrix is mapped onto labour within the circuits of capitalist production, and the negative valuation of the "female" is mapped onto domestic labour, in such a way that the female rôle locks one into devalued work whether it is done in the domestic sphere or the capitalist economy. This means not only cheap labour for capital (because the cost of labour's reproduction is externalized, and because the wage labour done by women costs less), it also means that there is a real value for men to be gleaned from alienating their labour power - this activity has a positive value in gender terms. It is "real" work.

These are just a few examples. There are countless examples we can observe in our everyday life. The intricacies of the grammar of the processes by which class struggle invades our ordinary language remains to be analyzed.

Wittgenstein, Voloshinov and Bakhtin provide us with the conceptual tools to undertake this project.

Post-marxism shares some surface similarities with the Voloshinovian-Bakhtinian approach outlined above. Because they are "pluralistic", democratic struggles could, perhaps, be described as "polyphonous" and "multiaccentual". Post-marxist democratic struggles are not, however, opposed to class monotony. Democratic oppositions are based on autonomous chains of equivalence with no necessary class character. The failure to recognize the monotonous tendency of class power in capitalist societies, renders post-marxist "pluralism" complicit with monotony. Liberal-democracy is recognized only as an arena for pluralistic struggles. There is no critical understanding of the bond between liberal-democracy and class power.

Liberal "possessive individualism" is more than just one more conception of liberty. It is precisely how the liberal-democratic "game" works. Possessive individualism renders power "moves" in the private sphere non-political, or autonomous. It insulates them from penetration by the

multiaccentual struggles of the working class. Within liberal-democracy, as a functioning political system, capitalist power is presented as the result of autonomous political entities putting forth their demands. Laclau and Mouffe accept the liberal-democratic ideology uncritically. They merely re-present the "inputs" of the standard liberal-pluralist model, as the challenging of differences with chains of equivalence. A much more radical move would be to show the capitalist monotony behind the liberal plurality. This would mean posing the alternative of a democratic-socialism, where polyphonous self-management would replace the monotonous directives of capital in the private sphere. This is precisely the opposite of the "closure" Laclau and Mouffe argue that everything except liberal-democracy invokes.

Laclau and Mouffe's post-marxism also shares some surface similarities with other "posts" - ie. postmodernism and post-structuralism.[119] If, for instance, we compare the respective

---

[119] Laclau and Mouffe themselves claim to be inspired by the likes of Foucault and Derrida (H & SS., 105, 112.) However, I will be examining Foucault and Lyotard. Lyotard's use of Wittgensteinian language games makes his approach a very interesting contrast to that of Laclau and Mouffe.

133

approaches of Foucault (Chapter 5) and Lyotard (Chapter 4), we find that Foucault, Lyotard, and Laclau and Mouffe all wish to understand the discursive dimension as more than a "representation" of the "material". We find as well, political projects that are conceived as attempts to foster some form of polyphonic diversity. Nevertheless, there are important differences. While Lyotard's postmodernism must share Geras' critique of post-marxism as an "inflation of the symbolic", in the sense that Lyotard's analysis does not go beyond language, his neo-Wittgensteinian approach to language games does not totalize the social as a semiological system à la post-marxism. Furthermore, unlike Laclau and Mouffe, Lyotard recognizes the homogenizing force of the "capital genre" of discourse and argues that the fight against capital must be a strategic priority. Yet Lyotard's exclusive focus on the linguistic dimension renders both his understanding of capital's homogenizing effects and his strategies of anti-capitalist struggle incomplete. In Chapter 4 I will show the lacunae of Lyotard's linguistic critique of the capital genre, while linking the most useful insights of his anti-capitalist

neo-Wittgensteinianism with a materialist critique of bourgeois political economy. In Chapter 5 I will show how the respective strengths and weaknesses of Foucault and Lyotard complement each other. Where Lyotard recognizes the totalizing discursive power of the capital genre but fails to specify its specific material underpinnings, Foucault analyses the workings of micro-technologies of power in excruciating detail, explaining how bodies are worked upon by material institutions like the prison and the asylum. Yet Foucault fails to recognize the connections between these and other bourgeois institutions that make prisons and asylums institutions of a class divided society. Foucault's micro-technological analyses become much more significant once these links are made. Laclau and Mouffe, however, rather than drawing on the _strengths_ of postmodernism and post-structuralism and absorbing them into a forward-looking non-dogmatic marxism, draw instead upon the _most empty and nihilistic_ aspects of the currently fashionable "posts" in order to destroy an economic determinist caricature of marxism that they themselves create. They triumphantly replace this

vulgar marxism with a worked-over bourgeois liberal-democratic approach to politics that they call "post-marxism". Foucauldian dispersion minus Foucault's material analyses of micro-technologies of power is brought together with neo-Wittgensteinian meaning-creating language games, but without Lyotard's analysis of the homogenizing power of capital that would allow them to see through the semblance of polyphonic discourse that is liberal-democracy. Learning from the mistakes of post-marxism, I will now undertake an engagement with two of the most well-known representatives of today's "posts" - Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault - in the interests of strengthening a marxism that is not yet finished.

<u>The Postmodernism-Post-Marxism Nexus:</u>

<u>Laclau, Mouffe, Foucault and Lyotard's Discourses on</u>

<u>Discourse</u>

<u>Chapter 4</u>

<u>What to do with the Differend between Capital and Labour</u>

Jean-François Lyotard expresses a sentiment that runs through all (or, perhaps, nearly all) of the diverse streams of thought that can be characterized as "postmodern", when he advises us to be incredulous toward "metanarratives".[1] But, unlike many of his fellow postmodern thinkers, Lyotard singles out the <u>capital</u> metanarrative as "[t]he problem which overshadows all others..."[2] Following Marx, Lyotard argues that the genre of capital is fundamentally opposed to the flourishing of other genres of discourse, and linguistic diversity in general. Incredulity toward metanarratives,

---

[1] Jean-François Lyotard, <u>The Postmodern Condition</u>, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) xxiv.

[2] Jean-François Lyotard, "A Svelte Appendix to the Postmodern Question", in <u>Political Writings</u>, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 25.

demands, in this case, going beyond a philosophical understanding of capital in order to destroy it.[3] Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, Lyotard does not identify social totality with a semiological system that remains "open" only so long as it is liberal-democratic. Lyotard's "language game", like Wittgenstein's is an untotalizable anti-model meant to show the context-dependent nature of meaning. And like Marx, Lyotard recognizes that the language game played by capital profoundly limits the possibility of polyphony. Because Lyotard's critique of metanarratives at least partially overlaps with some of Marx's anti-capitalist critique of political economy, there exists the possibility for a fruitful engagement between marxism and postmodernism on this shared terrain. In what follows, I will first establish the common ground of Lyotard and Marx - the mutual recognition that the genre of capital both produces and effaces an oppressive working class linguistic reality. This is the "differend" between capital and labour. Second, I will show how Marx's

---

    [3] Jean-François Lyotard, "A Memorial of Marxism" in Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 72.

138

critique of political economy goes further than Lyotard's, because Marx's understanding of capital and his anti-capitalist politics encompass extra-linguistic elements of working class oppression and resistance. Finally, I will show that the strategic implications that arise from the inclusion of extra-linguistic reality in a critical understanding of capitalism demand participation in some form of working class project as the only viable response to the totalizing metanarrative of capital. My analysis draws mainly upon Lyotard's The Differend,[4] "Judiciousness in Dispute or Kant After Marx", "A Memorial of Marxism",[5] and The Postmodern Condition, Marx's first volume of Capital,[6] and A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,[7] as well as V.N.

---

[4] Jean-François Lyotard, The Differend, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

[5] Jean-François Lyotard, "Judiciousness in Dispute or Kant After Marx", in The Lyotard Reader, Andrew Benjamin (ed.) (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989).

[6] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

[7] Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. S.W. Ryzanskay (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977).

Voloshinov's Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.[8]
Voloshinov's work is particularly relevant here, because his
reflections on language deal precisely with the opposition
between the discursive genres of capital and labour that
Lyotard highlights in Marx's critique of political economy,
but Voloshinov's is a decidedly materialist approach to
language.

Bearing Witness to the Differend Between Capital and Labour

Lyotard draws upon Wittgenstein's post-Tractatus anti-
nominalist, context dependent approach to language. Like
Wittgenstein, Lyotard accepts neither a nominalist view of
language as a set of names that represent a material reality,
nor a structuralist view of language as a unified semiological
system. He summarizes his neo-Wittgensteinian stance as
follows:

The examination of language games,... identifies and
reinforces the separation of language from itself. There

---

[8] V.N. Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language
(hereafter M & PL), trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik
(Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986).

is no unity to language; there are islands of language, each of them ruled by a different regime, untranslatable into the others. This dispersion is good in itself, and ought to be respected. It is deadly when one phrase regime prevails over the others.[9]

While it is true that Wittgenstein's writings show a profound respect for linguistic diversity and the context-dependent nature of meaning, against Lyotard it must be pointed out that the common humanity of speakers and addressees makes translation across very different language regimes possible (even if this possibility is fraught with innumerable problems of misunderstanding). Wittgenstein's assertion that the "common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference" which allows us to "interpret an unknown language,"[10] seems to suggest that, despite the fragmented nature of language, the common _material conditions_ of human existence might render some kind of general social analysis possible. We will explore the possibilities of such a general analysis later on. For now, it is sufficient to note that it

---

[9] Jean-François Lyotard, "Wittgenstein's `After'" in _Political Writings_, 20.

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, _Philosophical Investigations_ (hereafter _PI_), trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968) Part I, Sect. 206, 82e.

is precisely Wittgenstein's "anthropological assumption" that

"people make use of language" which Lyotard seeks to eliminate

from the neo-Wittgensteinian theoretical framework[11]:

After Wittgenstein, the first task is that of overcoming
this humanist obstacle to the analysis of phrase regimes,
to make philosophy inhuman. Humanity is not the user of
language, nor even its guardian; there is no more one
subject than there is one language. Phrases situate names
and pronouns (or their equivalent) in the universes they
present.[12]

I will argue later that the stark contrast between the

anthropological assumption that people make use of language,

and the anti-humanist assumption that language makes use of

people, is overstated. What must be noted here is that

Lyotard's anti-humanist assumption effectively removes extra-

linguistic elements from his theoretical framework. If our

status as "names and pronouns" in incommensurable linguistic

universes is held to represent everything that we are, then we

must ignore the fact that we are living, breathing creatures

with certain common behavioural traits and biological needs.

Even though Lyotard chooses to ignore the extra-

---

[11] Lyotard, "Wittgenstein's `After'", 21.

[12] Ibid., 21.

linguistic, this does not mean that he is blind to the human suffering caused by our current global capitalist system. He simply sees this suffering in linguistic terms. Lyotard is worried about the totalizing "grammar" of capital. In order to deal with this general problem, he must develop some general concepts, that would seem, on the face of it, to contradict the incommensurability of the various "islands" of language. Lyotard argues for a kind of "negative generality". While maintaining that language is composed of diverse and incommensurable genres of discourse, he also wants to maintain that the trans-linguistic principle of respect for diversity should be universally recognized. Because Lyotard values the polyphony of language, he takes an uncompromising and critical stance towards threats to polyphony. His negative categorical imperative is expressed as "incredulity toward metanarratives".[13]

Metanarratives are genres of discourse which simultaneously produce and efface a "differend". The concept of the differend is the key justifying term in Lyotard's

---

[13] Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, xxiv.

143

postmodern stance of general incredulity towards metanarratives because it points to the fundamental incommensurability of various language games that must be ignored by totalizing discourses:

As distinguished from a litigation, a differend would be a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgement applicable to both arguments. One side's legitimacy does not imply the other's lack of legitimacy. However, applying a single rule of judgement to both in order to settle their differend as though it were merely a litigation would wrong (at least) one of them... A wrong results from the fact that the rules of the genre of discourse by which one judges are not those of the judged genre or genres of discourse.[14]

Metanarratives are hard to combat because it is difficult to identify their totalizing wrong-producing language game moves. Metanarratives simultaneously produce and efface a differend. Because the totalizing genre judges only by its own rules, and not those of the party it wrongs, it silences the wronged party and makes the wrong invisible.[15] The

---

[14] Jean-François Lyotard, The Differend, xi.

[15] "It is in the nature of a victim [of a wrong] to be incapable of proving that a wrong has been suffered." Jean-François Lyotard, "Judiciousness in Dispute or Kant After Marx", in The Lyotard Reader, Andrew Benjamin (ed.) (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989) 352.

identification of a wrong is, therefore, an important critical move. All of this can be explained using the example of the differend between capital and labour. Here, the wrong of exploitation is both produced and hidden by the "judging" discourse of bourgeois political economy (or the "genre of capital"). Marx makes the important critical move of revealing the wrong done to labour (exploitation) in his critique of political economy.

Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy is the first clear articulation of a wrong (done by capital to wage labour), and is, in fact, Lyotard's model for general incredulity towards metanarratives. Marx allows the wronged worker to speak from the underside of the totalizing discourse of capital as it was expressed in the bourgeois political economy of his time:

If [Marx's] Capital had been the critique... of political economy [Capital's subtitle], it was because it had forced the différend to be heard where it lay, hidden... beneath the universal. Marx had shown that there were at least two idioms or two genres hidden in the universal language of capital: the MCM [circuit of exchange] spoken by the capitalist, and the CMC spoken by the wage

145

earner.[16]

By subjecting the categories of bourgeois political economy to a radical critique, Marx was able to show that the equal exchange expressed in the formula "MCM", is simultaneously a relation of exploitation, expressed in the formula "CMC". With "MCM", money and commodity come together in production to make more money (which will be used to start the process again). Accumulation is the end. From this point of view, we "live to work". With "CMC", the worker sells one commodity (her labour power) to get other ones (the necessities of life). No accumulation occurs, which means that "CMC" will continue to happen. The worker does not "live to work" but "works to live", so that her partner, the capitalist, can continue to accumulate via "MCM". Of course, both "MCM" and "CMC" express relations of equal exchange. Equal exchange simultaneously produces and effaces the wrong of exploitation.

Marx had to produce his own category of surplus value in order to express this wrong. The wrong is inexpressible in the

---

[16] Jean-François Lyotard, "A Memorial of Marxism" in Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 60.

idiom of capital. The grammar of the capital genre is structured in such a way that only equal exchange can be signified,[17] and capital's locutionary force is powerful enough to drown-out any competitors. The reason that Marx's critique of political economy is so powerful is that by showing the contradictions immanent in the movements of value which produce the category of surplus value, Marx is able to use the locutionary force of the capital genre against itself. Marx's language game move is analogous to the movements of Judo, which use the force of one's adversary to bring the opponent to the floor.

Lyotard claims that his postmodernism follows in the radical anti-capitalist tradition of marxism. He argues that "[t]he problem which overshadows all others is that of capital."[18] Oppositional politics can only claim radicality if they combat capital:

---

[17] This deficiency is the starting point for Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy: "Use-value as such, since it is independent of the determinate economic form, lies outside the sphere of investigation of political economy." Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, 28.

[18] Jean-François Lyotard, "A Svelte Appendix", 25.

...what in Marxism cannot be objected to... is that there are several incommensurable genres of discourse at play in society... and nonetheless - one of them at least - capital... - imposes its rules on the others. This opposition is the only radical one, the one that forbids its victims to bear witness against it. It is not enough to understand it and be its philosopher; one must also destroy it.[19]

Going beyond philosophy in order to destroy capital, would seem to imply participation in some form of working class project. This is not, however, Lyotard's position. Faithful to his anti-humanist form of neo-Wittgensteinian philosophy, he argues that there exists no proletarian subject to struggle against capital. There can be no recourse to "authentic" experience of exploitation and alienation to counter bourgeois "ideology". Recognizing the differend between capital and labour means recognizing the incommensurability of the two genres and the wrong that is produced when one is judged in the terms of the other. Justice is not done by judging capital in the terms of labour. Justice is done by the act of <u>recognizing</u> the incommensurability of the two genres. Going beyond philosophy, for Lyotard, means that speakers and addressees situated as names and pronouns in

---

[19] Lyotard, "Memorial", 72.

various linguistically constituted universes must "bear witness" to the differend that capital produces and effaces.[20] Lyotard calls on us to take up the "radical" position of spectator: "Let us wage a war on totality; let us be witness to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name."[21]

Going Beyond Language

The problem is that Lyotard only recognizes half of Marx's critique of political economy. For Marx, simply showing the contradictions of bourgeois political economy is not enough to pose a serious threat to the capitalist system. Marx argues that the contradictions of bourgeois political economy are simultaneously social contradictions, that involve continual class struggle.

Labour power, for bourgeois political economy, is a commodity like any other, bought and sold for commodities of

---

[20] Lyotard, The Differend, 181. The Postmodern Condition, 82.

[21] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, 82.

149

equal value. But Marx shows that this discourse ignores an important social reality. The value of most commodities can be measured by the socially necessary labour time needed for their production. But what is the socially necessary labour time needed for the production of labour power? The actual determination of labour power's value is a process of which bourgeois political economy is necessarily ignorant. All that can be said is that, since workers are physically engaged in the production process, the value of labour power must meet the minimum requirements for the reproduction of the working class. This, of course, begs the question; what are the minimum requirements for the reproduction of the working class? It is clear that an answer that does not take into account "historical and moral"[22] elements, will be inadequate. But the only sentences that can be spoken in the capital genre are composed of commodities (subjects and objects) and their exchange (verbs). Historical and moral elements lie outside the scope of bourgeois political economy, so the genre of

---

[22] "In contrast,... with the case of other commodities, the determination of the value of labour-power contains a historical and moral element." Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977) 275.

capital is inadequate to the task of explaining the value of labour power. This is an important contradiction, but showing this inconsistency does not stop the market in labour power from functioning.

Capital does not need a genre of discourse adequate to explain value in all of its forms. It simply needs a genre capable of producing equal exchanges that facilitate the accumulation process. If the historical and moral conditions are there - if there exists a class of workers divorced from the means of production that is ready to sell its labour power to the class of owners - then it is enough for the capital genre to name the commodity that workers are ready to alienate. Capitalists can engage with moral and historical elements without having a genre of discourse adequate to explain them. The capacity to produce equal exchanges is not challenged simply by "bearing witness" to theoretical inconsistencies. The power of capital is challenged by workers refusing the narrow role they are forced into as expressed by the category of labour power.

For the capitalist system to function, it is not adequate

that the value of labour power be _high_ enough to meet the minimum requirements for the reproduction of the working class. It must also be _low_ enough to facilitate the accumulation process. _Surplus value_ must be produced. It is this double requirement which expresses the oppression of the working class. As long as the only way for one to live is to exchange one's labour power, the majority of human kind is limited to mere survival (at best). And it is a form of life in which one is forced to produce a surplus for the class which directs the enterprises that limit one's existence to mere survival.

It is the presence of this form of oppression which distinguishes capitalism from other forms of social organization. There are other forms of social organization that can be opposed to capitalism, with their own distinctive forms of surplus extraction (ie. feudalism or state socialism). But the form of social organization most radically opposed to capitalism, is one in which there are no class divisions and therefore no extraction of surplus from one class by another. This form of social organization is the

152

self-organization of workers in democratic socialism. Because of the contradictions of the capitalist system, democratic socialism exists, but only in _potentia_.

The possibility of the realization of democratic socialism demands more than a _recognition_ of differend-producing and effacing contradictions. It also demands social-political struggle in the very processes which constitute these contradictions. The social process in which the value of labour power itself is decided, while necessary for the continuation of the accumulation process, also threatens to erupt into working class revolt and, in situations of extreme crisis, can even threaten to erupt into revolution. To say that the value of labour power contains irreducibly historical and moral elements, means that the process by which the value of labour power is decided is inseparable from class struggle. The cost of reproducing the working class, relative to the surplus value it is capable of producing, involves a whole series of questions with answers that will vary depending on the strategies pursued by classes and class fractions and on the balance of class forces: What is an "acceptable level" of

unemployment? What should be considered a "normal working day"? What kind of health and safety regulations (if any) should be enforced in the workplace? Should there be a level of purchasing power that workers or even the unemployed be protected from falling below? etc.

There are also a whole series of questions involving working life in each capitalist enterprise, decided by local struggles, which are implicated in the value of labour power.

These struggles are not the only factors in deciding the value of labour power. There are also a whole series of technology and productivity improvements that affect the cost of the necessities of life and, therefore, the cost of the reproduction of the working class. But the value of other "non-human inputs" are similarly affected by this sort of development. What makes labour power unique is that the very movements of its value are directly dependent on class struggle, or in Lyotard's terms, on the production and effacement of a differend.

The direct implication of class struggle in the formation of the value of labour power may, at first, appear to be an

inconvenience for capital. Would it not be easier for capitalists if the value of labour power were a simple technical question like the value of machines and their fuel? Machines do not have the freedom to rebel, so they cannot interrupt the process of surplus extraction. But neither do machines have the freedom to starve, so they are not capable of producing surplus value.

Machines do not sell their labour power in order to survive. Their value is simply the socially necessary labour time for their production. Machines have independent owners who sell them at market prices that tend towards this value. Assuming market equilibrium, their owners will not get anything more out of the machines by using them in production. The machines will simply constitute part of the socially necessary labour time for the commodities that are produced.

Workers, however, do not have independent masters who sell them in the market place. They are independent agents themselves, who must sell their labour power in order to survive. It is precisely because the question of the socially necessary labour time to pay for survival is an open one, that

there exists the possibility of _surplus value_. It is possible for the capitalist to pay the worker wages that are less in terms of labour time than the labour power received by the capitalist. In fact, capital as a whole, _must_ continually reproduce this asymmetrical relation in order for the accumulation process to continue.

But it is an asymmetrical relation that is presented as a symmetrical one. Exploitation is presented as an equal exchange. Marx reveals the differend hidden by this surreptitious representation, but the force of his critique is not only derived from the contradictions of the categories of political economy. Marx's critique also derives its force from the _social contradictions_ which he points to as evidence of the contradictions of political economy.[23] The value of labour power is not a technical question like the value of other commodities. There are a multitude of diverse struggles which are of key importance in deciding the value of labour power. These are struggles that pit capital's need for surplus value

---

[23] See _Capital_, Vol. 1, "The Struggle for a Normal Working Day", 389-411 and Part Eight "So-Called Primitive Accumulation", 873-940.

against labour's need for an existence that is more than mere survival. It is because these struggles are central to the accumulation process itself that Marx's critique goes beyond philosophy. Marx identifies the social forces that have the potential to destroy capital, and bring its productive capacity under democratic control. These social forces constitute the category of the "proletariat". The proletariat is a potentially radical force because the movements of value that are central to the capital genre require its engagement in struggle and prepare it for a transformative project.

Lyotard, however, cannot accept the existence of a proletarian subject. He only recognizes names and pronouns in discrete linguistically constructed universes. He rejects the proletarian subject as a totalizing, wrong producing category of a marxist metanarrative: "We don't know any proletarians, but we can form the concept of one."[24] The proletarian concept is formed via critique of the categories of bourgeois political economy. The subject of the capital genre says "MCM". The wrong of this phrase is revealed by the "CMC"

---

[24] Lyotard, "Kant After Marx," 354.

157

spoken by labour, but, according to Lyotard, if the latter is the only legitimate (marxist) phrasing of production, then one wrong is merely replaced by another. Lyotard is afraid that countering the capital genre's "living to work" with labour's "working to live" will drown-out other ways of speaking about working and living. Thus, Lyotard argues that marxism presents "itself not as one party in a suit, but as the judge, as the science in possession of objectivity."[25] Thus Lyotard himself is wronged, placed in the realm of "stupidity... subjective particularity..." which is "incapable of making itself understood" except by borrowing from "the dominant idiom [marxism]".[26] In the marxist idiom, as perceived by Lyotard, production is either capitalist exploitation of the proletariat, subject to the exigencies of a world market beyond anyone's control, or a scientifically managed social enterprise where irrationality is finally overcome by scientific socialism. With capitalist production, the world market defines our lives for us (as work). With socialist

---

[25] Lyotard, "A Memorial", 61.

[26] Ibid., 61.

production, the "workers' state" scientifically determines our life requirements and allocates work accordingly. The wrongs of the destruction of the environment, racism and sexism, not to mention the wrong of state socialist exploitation of workers by a technocratic class, which are also implicated in production, remain inexpressible - drowned-out by the "CMC" of the proletarian subject.

Lyotard's critique of scientific socialism can, perhaps, be applied to some of the more dogmatic and scientistic strains of marxism, but it completely misses the critical intent of Marx's category of the proletariat. The point of counter-posing the proletariat's "CMC" to capital's "MCM", is to open up production to democratic control, thus allowing a whole series of differends effaced by the capital genre to be spoken. Lyotard's criticism of the differend-effacing abstraction of the proletarian category is misplaced. Lyotard argues, "We don't know any proletarians, but we can form the concept of one," where he ought to argue in a marxist vein, "We don't know wage labour but we can form the concept of it." That is to say, workers are not merely defined by the wage

relation, but the grammar of capital only allows us to signify this aspect of their existence. The category of the proletariat, as conceived within non-dogmatic forms of marxism, is meant to destabilize the wage relation by foregrounding the class struggle where capital is confronted with the moral and historical elements that refuse exclusion from capital's category of wage labour. The "proletariat" is not the name of a subject that comes ready-made along with capital - its mirror image and nemesis. The category of the proletariat names a continually evolving contradiction between the category of "wage labour" and those that are constrained in such a way that they have very little choice but to perform it. The proletariat is not the guarantor of marxist science, but a force that continually destabilizes and challenges the categories of bourgeois economics. There is no objectively rational proletarian organization of production that can be posed in advance as a scientific alternative to the irrationalities of capitalism. Socialism, when understood as the form of social organization most radically opposed to capitalism, can only mean the democratic self-organization of

160

the direct producers. Workers themselves must decide what is "rational". This means that they must confront problems of environmental degradation, racism and sexism. These are differends that can be discussed by proletarian voices. Capital is necessarily monotonous but the proletariat can be polyphonous.

But why pose "CMC" with such locutionary force against capital's "MCM"? Is it not enough to say that "MCM" not only ignores the moral and historical elements of labour power, but it also treats the environment and the predominantly female labour outside the circuits of capitalist production as mere "externalities". These are, indeed, important contradictions (and they are also directly related to the moral and historical elements of labour power) and they reveal a great deal about the limits of bourgeois political economy, but they do not correspond to social contradictions that are capable of posing themselves with the same transformative force as the contradiction between labour and capital. The social contradiction between labour and capital has a strategic centrality because capital must organize our daily lives in a

161

way that facilitates capital's expansion - surplus value must be produced. In other words, capital must continually produce a class of people with interests directly opposed to this continual expansion - a working class for which capital can only provide survival. And since capital organizes so many aspects of our daily lives, creating a bi-polar class-tension in so many of our quotidian language games, the struggle to organize our lives differently will require a proletarian character to achieve really profound social transformation (ie. democratic socialism).

Lyotard does not recognize the centrality of the contradiction between labour and capital. He refuses to make judgements about the strategic importance of the various differends that capital produces and effaces. This refusal is itself a judgement about the relative importance of extra-linguistic elements. It is the polyphony of _language itself_ that justifies incredulity to the capital metanarrative. It does not matter what capital does to _people_. For Lyotard, people are merely names and pronouns brought to life in various discursively constructed universes. Lyotard's

categorical imperative is an argument for respect for linguistic diversity. But the failure to deal with the extra-linguistic conditions necessary for the recognition of differends, actually does a disservice to the cause of polyphony. Polyphony requires, not only incredulity towards the capital metanarrative which effaces exploitation with equal exchange, but also requires the challenging of capitalist exploitation itself.

Lyotard does not argue that language is everything, or that reality is entirely discursively constructed, but his method has consequences similar to the ones that follow from the thesis that language "goes all the way down".

Lyotard chooses to ignore extra-linguistic elements for two reasons. First, he wishes to avoid the worst excesses of communication theory. Communication theory tends to privilege the cognitive function of language. When language is viewed primarily as a circuit of communication of information about an extra-linguistic reality, the "agonistic" language game moves and countermoves that constitute society become mere

disruptions in a process of self-realization.[27]:

At bottom,... [communication theory] presupposes a language, a language naturally at peace with itself, `communicational', and perturbed for instance only by the wills, passions, and intentions of humans. Anthropocentrism.[28]

Lyotard, in opposition to the thesis that "to speak is to communicate", proposes "to speak is to fight".[29] Lyotard overstates this opposition, just as he does the opposition between anthropocentric language (used by people) and anti-humanist language (user of people). He overstates the opposition between communicational and agonistic language in order to advance his project of changing the focus on the communication of information, to a focus on the functioning of

---

[27] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, 16.

[28] Lyotard, The Differend, 137. Although Lyotard speaks in general terms here, it is difficult to avoid reading this as a critique of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas models social evolution on the "ontogenetically analyzed stages of cognitive development" found in the work of J. Piaget. As the challenges of "system problems" are continually met through the use of "accumulated cognitive potential", human development tends towards rational consensus in the domains of strategic action, legitimation, legality and morality. See J. Habermas, "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism" in J. Habermas Communication and the Evolution of Society, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979) 130-177.

[29] Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, 10.

agonistic language games through which senders, receivers and the information sent and received are constituted.

This brings us to the second reason for ignoring the extra-linguistic. Since Lyotard wishes to focus on the agonistic language games which constitute the social, and his political project is to encourage the proliferation of these diverse games, in opposition to totalizing metanarratives, he must eschew language game moves which challenge the legitimacy of other moves on the basis of their failure to accord with an extra-linguistic reality. The reality "trump card" must be rejected because it is always possible for players who are better situated to "fix" the rules by which the trump is established. Wrongs are invisible because they are inexpressible within the grammar of the genre where litigations are decided. The victimizer obtains

...the silence of the witnesses, the deafness of the judges, and the inconsistency (insanity) of the testimony. You neutralize the addressor, the addressee, and the sense of the testimony; then everything is as if there were no referent (no damages).[30]

It is preferable to bracket the question of the referent, and

---

[30] Lyotard, *The Differend*, 8.

examine the different genres by which referents are established. This reveals the differend which was hitherto invisible and aids the cause of polyphony. This is why bearing witness to the differend is thought to be a radical act.

Lyotard has two principle defences to deflect epistemological objections to his choice to ignore the extra-linguistic. First, while it must be admitted that there is something extra-linguistic involved in social relations, it is not unreasonable to bracket such concerns because we can understand a great deal about society without reference to the extra-linguistic. "Society" does not become unintelligible when conceived only in linguistic terms:

It should now be clear from which perspective I chose language games as my general methodological approach. I am not claiming that the _entirety_ of social relations is of this nature - that will remain an open question. But there is no need to resort to some fiction of social origins to establish that language games are the minimum relation required for society to exist...[31]

Second, whatever extra-linguistic elements might exist, they are becoming less and less important because of our contemporary "postmodern condition". Because we live "in a

---

[31] Lyotard, _The Postmodern Condition_, 15.

society whose communication component is becoming more prominent day by day, both as a reality and as an issue, it is clear that language assumes a new importance."[32]

Going Beyond Bearing Witness

While denying neither the problematic nature of authority derived from supposedly superior representations of extra-linguistic reality, nor the reality-constituting power of agonistic language games, I will argue that an exclusively linguistic focus misses the centrality of class struggle to the continued functioning or radical transformation of capitalist society. This is an important defect, because the failure to pose a working class project in opposition to the capitalist one, whatever one's reservations about capital's totalizing grammar, will mean defacto support for the status quo.

For V.N. Voloshinov, language is both communicational and agonistic, both used by and a user of speakers and addressees.

---

[32] Ibid., 16.

Language evolves in processes of struggle within a "sign community". Since sign communities, in the present context at least, are class divided - they contain both exploiter and exploited - the sign itself "becomes an arena of the class struggle".[33] It is the struggle over meaning that gives life to language:

A sign that has been withdrawn from the pressures of the social struggle... inevitably loses force, degenerating into allegory and becoming the object not of live social intelligibility but of philological comprehension. The historical memory of mankind is full of such worn out ideological signs incapable of serving as arenas for the clash of live social accents.[34]

Meaning is not simply derived from the referent. It is constructed through social struggle in language. This is not to say, however, that the referent is irrelevant. There is a struggle over the representation of the referent precisely because it is a source of power. The grammar of the capital genre structures the sayable in such a way that the referent of "production" can only be represented as a series of equal exchanges and it is the class project of capitalists to make

---

[33] Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, 23.

[34] Ibid., 23.

168

this an exhaustive representation. This makes accumulation appear to be the self-valorization of capital itself, rather than the exploitation of the working class, and this surreptitious representation is instrumental in the continual reproduction of relations of exploitation. Thus, the ruling class simultaneously communicates and distorts the referent:

The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium. The ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual.[35]

But this distortion is never fully successful. There is always some degree of struggle over meaning. There is always a degree of multiaccentuality, even if the "inner dialectic quality of the sign comes out fully in the open only in times of social crises or revolutionary changes."[36] Multiaccentual signs opposed to the uniaccentual idiom of capital continually disturb the totalizing tendencies of the capital genre, because the referent of exploitation that capital refuses to

---

[35] Ibid., 23.

[36] Ibid., 23.

name _exists_, and its existence is expressed in the form of social contradictions _whether or not_ these social contradictions are able to "speak".

I do not wish to suggest, here, that social contradictions are entirely "extra-linguistic", but merely that "CMC" existed before Marx said it. Clearly, there are both linguistic and extra-linguistic elements involved in the social contradictions of labour and capital. The repetitive strain disorder suffered by a garment worker and the words uttered in her fight for compensation from her employer are both elements of social contradictions. But these social contradictions are referents that can only be named, as social contradictions, by a discourse that counter-poses "CMC", or something like it, to the totalizing "MCM".

Social contradictions, ironically, are absolutely central to the expansion of the totalizing genre that refuses to recognize them - the genre that effaces them. As we observed in Chapter 3, the accumulation of capital is the result of a process where activities central to human existence -

"constitutive activities"[37] - are organized as equal exchanges, and these exchanges continually produce a surplus for one class of partners, and mere survival for the other class of partners. Since these activities are an essential part of being human, and they are organized only in this way, human beings have no choice but to act as partners in these equal exchanges. For a few lucky ones, this will mean a choice between a life as exploiter or exploited, but most will be forced, by circumstances, into the role of exploited. This process of surplus extraction cannot, however, be named in the genre of capital. In the capital genre, only equal exchanges are sayable. Capital accumulation can only be the self-valorization of capital itself. The vocabulary of capital consists of names of commodities (specific forms of capital). Sentences are formed with these names and the verb "exchange", which is always equal. _Capital is therefore the only acceptable subject, in both a grammatical and a metaphysical sense, of the process of capital accumulation_.

---

[37] See Len Doyal and Roger Harris, "The Practical Foundations of Human Understanding," _New Left Review_, No. 139 (May-June 1983).

For capital to name exploitation would be a nonsensical denial of its own generative powers - it would be an admission that the organization of more and more human activities, in the form of equal exchanges is a moral-historical project of one class, imposed on another, rather than simply "the way things are". Capital self-expansion would no longer appear as a natural process. In other words, the capital genre would cease to have the totalizing quality essential to it. The capital genre is therefore necessarily blind to the exploitation that constitutes capital accumulation itself. Naming this reality does not "open capital's eyes", because the name is nonsense in the capital genre. It violates the rules of grammar of the capital genre. But there are human beings who, simply because they are human, must engage in the very activities that constitute humanity, which are only accessible by taking the name of "wage labour" for 8, 10, 12, 14, 16 hours a day.[38] These human beings have an interest in

---

[38] These constitutive activities are precisely what Wittgenstein calls the "common behaviour of mankind" which allows us to "interpret an unknown language". These are the common material conditions that constitute the basis for a general social analysis where Lyotard is only able to see ungeneralizable islands of language. In capitalist society,

172

organizing things differently. They insist on being more than "wage labour". They are a problem that the capitalist class cannot ignore even if the problem cannot be spoken in the capital genre, because the problem is also the very life-blood of capital's existence as a problem. Capital cannot "solve" the problem - it is the problem. Grammatically, "wage labour" is a commodity - a subcomponent of capital. That is the only way that the word can be used in the capital genre. But practically, capitalists must engage with the moral and historical elements of wage labour in order to maintain it as a source of value - capitalists must engage in class struggle. So the "self-valorization" of capital is based on the nonsensical historical and moral elements of its wage labour subcomponent. It is self-valorization because wage labour is a subcomponent of capital, but it is only able to act as a source of value because it is not capital - because of its moral and historical elements. Yet everything depends on effacing precisely these aspects of wage labour because their

---

the necessity of gaining access to constitutive activities effectively forces us to engage in the equal exchanges that constitute the genre of capital. See Chapter 3 of this work.

173

visibility risks provoking demands from workers that go beyond the mere survival that capital must provide.

Clearly, the environment and the predominantly female labour outside the circuits of capitalist exchange have multi-accentual qualities that are effaced by the category of "externalities". Here too, there are moral and historical elements. Yet capital is not forced to organize and engage these elements in ways that carry strategic risks anything like the risks involved in organizing and engaging with wage labour. Some of the natural world is divided up into units that have value, but nature is passive insofar as exchanges are concerned. This is why Smith's political economy is an advance over the "Physiocratic illusion that ground rent grows out of the soil, not out of society".[39] Nature does not produce value. Value is a social relation. Of course, nature is "wronged" just as workers are. There is a differend between the terms "eco-system" and "dumping-ground", just as there is between "wage labour" and "human being", but an eco-system cannot refuse to be a dumping-ground. Human beings can fight

---

[39] Marx, _Capital_, Vol. 1, 176.

the use of eco-systems as dumping-grounds, but will they do so with the same level of engagement as human beings fighting to be human beings? Perhaps. Does ending the use of eco-systems as dumping-grounds necessarily mean the end of capital? Strictly speaking, no.

The only logical requirement for the expansion and survival of capital is the production of surplus value which means that human beings must be forced into the role of exploitable wage labour. Environmental considerations can make production more costly, and limit possible areas of capital expansion, thus making the production of surplus value more difficult, but this does not necessarily mean an end to capitalism. In fact, capitalists can be concerned about the environment as well as workers:

> ...the issues of peace and ecology are not very well suited to generating strong anti-capitalist forces. In a sense, the problem is their very universality.... it is no more in the interests of the capitalist than of the worker to be wiped out by a nuclear bomb or dissolved in acid rain. We might as well say that given the dangers of capitalism, no rational person should support it; but this, needless to say, is not how things work.[40]

---

[40] Ellen Meiksins Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 266.

Given the capital genre's inability to speak about anything outside of the exchanges that constitute capital's self-expansion, it is extremely unlikely that, as long as production is organized in a capitalist fashion, ecological devastation will cease. Nevertheless, capitalists and workers live in the same biosphere and both can work towards placing limits on certain areas of capital expansion. Both can be "environmentalists". It seems extremely unlikely, however, that the capitalist class will give up its class privilege simply because it is inconsistent with sound ecological principles. Clearly, it is up to the working class to end class privilege, which means that environmentalism cannot fundamentally challenge capitalist ecological destruction without a working class project.

The predominantly female labour outside the circuits of capitalist exchange is often crucial to the reproduction of the working class and allows capital to externalize some of these costs. Clearly, women are not only wronged as workers, but also, as women, by capital. There is a differend produced by the inapplicability of the term "work", in the capital

genre, to the referent of women's reproductive labour. The common experience of being wronged in this way has contributed to the self-organization and struggle of women in feminist movements. Because capital wrongs women in this way, feminist struggle must be directed against it, yet the feminist struggle can only be really anti-capitalist when it is integrated with working class struggle. Since this female labour is unpaid, it can be used to externalize some costs involved with the reproduction of the working class, but it is not impossible for female labour to be integrated into circuits of exchange, and thus recognized as "work". But if "recognition" as a woman means more than recognition as wage labour, then there is common cause to be made with male workers.

Capital has a "structural indifference" to "extra-economic identities".[41] For the genre of capital, there is no difference in principle between male, female, Black or White wage labour. Nevertheless, the process of capital accumulation always manages to functionally integrate itself with these

---

[41] Ibid., 267.

identities. They have helped justify the distribution of "shit work" and wage differentials, and they have divided the working class against itself. White male workers' relative privilege in terms of power, status and wealth over other workers gives them a real investment in a system that exploits them and it obscures their exploitation. The oppression of extra-economic identities also obscures the class nature of the exploitation suffered by "doubly" or "triply" exploited groups. Extra-economic identities are thus _useful_ to capital, but not, in principle, _indispensable_. There are other ways to distribute "shit work" and wage differentials. There are other ways to divide the working class against itself. If those struggling against racism and sexism want more than the less shitty end of the shitty stick given wage labour then they must integrate their struggles with the working class struggle.

As I have argued in Chapter 3, this is not a simple process of adding the "extra-economic" struggles onto the anti-capitalist struggle. Women and men, Black and White are exploited differently, and these different forms of

exploitation will demand different forms of struggle. Nevertheless, capital accumulation and exploitation can continue without (hetero)sexist and/or racist forms of exploitation. All that is required for capital accumulation is wage labour, and if the anti-racist or anti-(hetero)sexist struggle limits itself to equality for "extra-economic" racial or gender identities, then capital is effectively let off the hook.

Lyotard recognizes that capital is the "problem which overshadows all others,"[42] but he is not able to explain why the metanarrative of capital has such totalizing power. Why are state metanarratives, for instance, overshadowed by capital? The capital metanarrative has become the central problem of (post)modernity because it is not merely a totalizing, differend-producing and effacing genre, but is also a genre which has a central role in organizing the activities which constitute speakers and addressees - activities that go beyond language.[43] This is also the reason

---

[42] Lyotard, "A Svelte Appendix", 25.

[43] In Chapter 5 I will show how Foucault's analyses of penal and psychiatric micro-technologies of power explain how

why class struggle is central to the continued functioning or radical transformation of capitalist society. Capital draws its self-expanding power from its organization of the activities that are central to human existence in such a way that all human beings must enter into the fundamentally bi-polar nexus of exchange relations that continually produce surplus value (capital's self-expansion) for one set of exchangers, and mere survival for the rest. It is this continual extraction of a material surplus that gives the capital genre the locutionary force to drown-out polyphony. Ownership and control of cultural production, direct influence on private education and indirect influence on public education, in short ideological hegemony depends at least in part on surplus extraction.

Nevertheless, surplus-extraction is only made possible by organizing and engaging wage labour in class struggle and preparing it for a transformative project. The historical and moral elements that constitute "wage labour" are extraneous to

---

the constitutive activities of delinquents and the insane are organized in both linguistic and extra-linguistic dimensions. Yet Foucault fails to theorize the central role played by capital in organizing constitutive activities.

it as a category in the capital genre, and yet the question of the necessary labour time for the reproduction of the working class cannot be avoided. This question pits the need of capital accumulation against the need for lives that are more than mere survival. Thus it is the same _material_ centrality that makes capital an "overshadowing" metanarrative, that also gives a strategic centrality to class struggle in a radical transformative project. If we bracket the referent, and only deal with language, counter-posing "eco-system" to "dumping-ground" has the same strategic value as counter-posing "human being" to "wage labour". But, if we recognize the necessary dependence of the capital genre on the extraction of surplus value from wage labourers that must be organized and engaged in class struggle, then the class struggle takes on a strategic centrality. _Both_ human beings and eco-systems have moral and historical elements that are effaced by capital. Ecological and proletarian struggles _cannot_ be _ethically_ prioritized. Yet, it is possible to recognize that it is working class struggle that constitutes the weakest link in the equal exchanges of the capital genre.

As we will see in Chapter 5, Foucault also fails to strategically prioritize social struggles. But Foucault's refusal to do so has nothing to do with the bracketing of the referent. Foucault does not bracket the referent. On the contrary, he recognizes the referent as a source of power and resistance. The meaning of prisoners' bodies is not only decided discursively, but is also created by their engagement in repetitive daily activities in an architecture of power. Nevertheless, Foucault does not situate this architecture in relation to other micro-power mechanisms in a way that allows us to make sense of the social whole. And, I will argue, this is not because the social whole is intrinsically nonsensical, but rather, because it must be understood as a social whole that is organized around the activities of surplus extraction and class struggle. It must be understood as a class divided social whole.

The Postmodernism-Post-Marxism Nexus:

Laclau, Mouffe, Foucault and Lyotard's Discourses on

Discourse

Chapter 5

The Micro-Technology of Surplus Extraction:

Foucault's Contribution to Marx's Critique of Political

Economy

Foucault's approach to power, unlike that of Lyotard, is decidedly materialist. The lack of engagement between marxists and Foucauldians, given the similarities in their approaches to power, is truly astounding. Many marxists, including Marx himself, have focused their analyses, as Foucault argues they ought to in order to avoid "marxist" economic determinism, on "the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organise and delimit it and extends itself beyond them, invests itself in institutions, becomes embodied in techniques, and equips itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention."[1] By examining

_____

[1] Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures", in Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Pantheon Books,

the "referent" of institutions, techniques and violent means of intervention, both Foucault and Marx extend their analyses beyond the agonistic language games of Lyotard which establish the criteria for the judging of referents. In Marx's critique of political economy, analysis is centred on the point where the power of capital surmounts the rules of bourgeois exchange that organise and delimit the relation between owner and worker, investing itself in institutions, becoming embodied in techniques, and equipping itself with instruments and eventually even violent means of material intervention - a material intervention that Marx calls "surplus extraction". Surplus extraction can be thought of as a kind of Foucauldian "micro-technology", whose relation to other micro-technologies (eg. penal and psychiatric technologies) needs to be theorized. I will undertake this task, drawing upon Foucault's analyses of penal and psychiatric technologies in The Birth of the Prison[2] and Madness and Civilization , and upon Marx's

---

[2] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[3] Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

critique of political economy in the first and third volumes

of Capital[4]. I will argue that theorizing the relation between

these micro-technologies of power allows us to develop a

general (marxist) strategy that is absent in the work of

Foucault - a strategy that is needed in order to combat the

(post)modern proliferation of oppressive micro-technologies.

Micro-Political Base and Macro-Political Superstructure

It is hoped, by Foucault, that revealing the micro-

technologies of power that form the underside of rules of

right will lead to a recognition of "the manner in which they

[micro-technologies of power] are invested and annexed by more

global phenomena and the subtle fashion in which more general

powers... are able to engage with these technologies..."[5] In

other words, Foucault hopes that analyzing micro-technologies

of power will give insight into the functioning of a more

global hegemony or hegemonies which he deliberately leaves for

---

[4] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). Capital, Vol. 3, (New York: International Publishers, 1984).

[5] "Two Lectures," 99.

later elaboration from the ground-up, as it were. It is as if Foucault seeks to replace the economic base of the vulgar marxism he criticises, with a micro-political base, which leads us to examine forms of macro-political superstructure that must have some kind of functional compatibility with the technologies of the base in order to engage with them and organise them.

Foucault, however, never arrives at an explanation of how macro-political power functions within modern society. He never achieves the project he set out for himself in the early and mid 1970s, of explaining the macro-political engagement of micro-political technologies. Foucault remains bogged down in a multitude of micro-technologies of power. He does, however, provide the simple example of macro-power in feudal society as a model that might be followed in analyzing more complex modern situations:

Take a simple example, the feudal form of power relation. Between the serfs tied to the land and the lord who levies rent from them, there exists a local, relatively autonomous relation, almost a tête-à-tête. For this relation to hold, it must indeed have the backing of a certain pyramidical ordering of the feudal system. But it's certain that the power of the French kings and the apparatuses of State which they gradually established

186

from the eleventh century onward had as their condition
of possibility a rooting in forms of behaviour, bodies
and local relations of power which should not at all be
seen as a simple projection of the central power.[6]

This is precisely the approach followed by Marx in the

third volume of Capital with the crucial difference that Marx

gives special emphasis to the surplus extraction that occurs

within the tête-à-tête of lord and serf. Marx posits a special

relationship between micro-technologies of surplus extraction

and more general forms of power:

The specific form, in which unpaid surplus labour is
pumped out of direct producers, determines the
relationship between rulers and ruled, as it grows
directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts
upon it as a determined element.... It is always the
direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of
production to the direct producers... which reveals the
innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social
structure, and with it the political form of the
relations of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the
corresponding form of the state. This does not prevent
the same economic basis - the same from the standpoint of
its main conditions - due to innumerable different
empirical circumstances... from showing infinite
variations and gradations in appearance, which can be
ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given

---

[6] Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," A
conversation with Alain Grosrichard, Gerard Wajeman, Jaques-
Alain Miller, Guy Le Gaufey, Dominique Celas, Gerard Miller,
Catherine Millot, Jocelyne Livi and Judith Miller, in Michel
Foucault, Power/Knowledge, Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Pantheon
Books, 1980) 201.

circumstances.[7]

Even though Marx refers to an "economic" base here, it is clear that surplus extraction is a _political_ relation as well - the technology of surplus extraction is a _political_ technology. This is obvious in the case of feudalism:

It is... evident that in all forms in which the direct labourer remains the `possessor' of the means of production and labour conditions necessary for the production of his own means of subsistence, the property relationship must simultaneously appear as a direct relation of lordship and servitude.... Under such conditions the surplus-labour for the nominal owner of the land can only be extorted from them by other than economic pressure, whatever the form assumed may be.[8]

As Foucault states, "relations of power" are "profoundly enmeshed in and with economic relations and participate with them in a common circuit..."[9] The unpaid surplus labour of the serf is extracted by the lord by means of direct and overtly political coercion. The lord's right to the serf's labour is derived from his political status. And what Marx shows in _Capital_ is that, although the owner and worker of capitalist

---

[7] Karl Marx, _Capital_, Vol. 3, 791-792.

[8] Ibid., 790-791.

[9] "Two Lectures," 89.

188

society share the same formal juridical rights, their relation of "equal exchange" is clearly a case of domination of the former over the latter - even though this domination is not "political" since it occurs in the "private" sphere. Owners exercise this private power because of the historical innovation of absolute and arbitrary power of the owner over his property grounded in positive right. Thus "political marxists" like Ellen Meiksins Wood have argued that "capitalism represents the ultimate privatization of political power."[10]

Nevertheless, Foucault does not engage with this sort of marxism. This is, no doubt, at least partially due to the fact that his interest lies with "people situated outside the circuits of productive labour: the insane, prisoners, and... children. For them labour, insofar as they have to perform it, has a value which is chiefly disciplinary."[11] So although

---

[10] Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The separation of the `economic' and the `political' in capitalism", in Ellen Meiksins Wood, Democracy Against Capitalism, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 40.

[11] Michel Foucault in conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, "The Eye of Power", in Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge, Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Pantheon Books,

Foucault deals with important institutional and extra-institutional mechanisms of power that regulate people's day-to-day lives, these mechanisms are not directly implicated in surplus extraction. But there are some important questions begged here.

What are the relationships between Foucault's political technologies and the technologies of surplus extraction which Marx argues are the central categories for understanding the macro-power structure of any class divided society? Is discipline through "unproductive" labour even thinkable without an already existing capitalist system of surplus extraction - that is to say, without an already existing, more or less widespread, system of factory discipline? These questions can also be given a formulation that bears directly on the discussions of Chapters 3 and 4: How does the class divided nature of the organization of constitutive activities in society as a whole effect the organization of constitutive activities in the prison and the asylum respectively? Foucault does not really confront these problems head on.

1980) 161.

Foucault fails to confront the question of the centrality of surplus extraction to politics because instead of exploring the relations between technologies of surplus extraction and other technologies of power, he organizes technologies of power around regimes of truth, and he organizes (or, more accurately, disorganizes) regimes of truth around the principle of dispersion. While it must be recognized that truth and power are intimately connected, and Foucault has some important insights in this regard, the macro-political "superstructure" only becomes comprehensible (and it clearly is incomprehensible to Foucault) when the central role of the micro-technologies of surplus extraction in the organization of that superstructure is taken into account. We must raise new questions about the relation between Foucault's regimes of truth and the predominant mode of surplus extraction in the capitalist era - the wage relation of owner and worker.

How Micro-Technologies Work

We can observe numerous similarities and differences,
functional links and dysfunctional contradictions, and
circuits of exchange between the technologies of surplus
extraction and other micro-technologies. The question is, do
these relationships make more sense if we think of the
technologies as a series of "dispersions" each of which is
governed by a "nexus of regularities"[12] organized around a
particular "régime of truth",[13] as Foucault is want to do[14]; or

---

[12] Michel Foucault, _The Archaeology of Knowledge_, trans.
A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 48.

[13] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power" interview with
Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasuino in _Power/Knowledge_,
Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 132.

[14] This is what Wittgenstein calls "playing with words".
(_PI_, Part I, Sect. 67, 32e.) Foucault does not take this word-
play to the extremes of Laclau and Mouffe (See Chapter 3 of
this work). Foucault does not derive a semiological system
from the play of regularity and dispersion as Laclau and
Mouffe do with equivalence and difference, because Foucault is
concerned with _specific social practices_, whereas Laclau and
Mouffe deal with symbolic relations at the macro-level. Laclau
and Mouffe, by isolating the symbolic dimension of various
practices, are able to construct a total semiological system
of equivalence and difference. But Foucault refuses to group
all social practices into the single category of "discourse".
Describing diverse social practices that can only be
understood on their own terms as "regularity in dispersion" is
thus merely a meaningless play on words (like the description

if we think of them as sets of practices organized in a complex hierarchy with surplus extraction in the dominant position? I will argue that more sense can be made using the latter paradigm. My case will be made, simply by pointing out the practical links between "extra-economic" institutional apparatuses of the prison and the asylum on the one hand, and the mechanisms of surplus extraction on the other. There are functional links, dysfunctional contradictions and circuits of exchange that can only be brought out by an examination of specific technologies on their own terrain.

Prisons and asylums are "capital investments" in a very literal and straightforward sense. These institutions are costly material structures financed by the diversion of resources from the capitalist economy. And, as with any investment, there is risk. The bourgeoisie, from the beginning of the capitalist era, has continually posed the question of whether the return on these investments is justified by their

---

of the continuous element of a thread as the continuous overlapping of discontinuous fibres) rather than an ontological mistake à la Laclau and Mouffe. Foucault does not reify "regularity in dispersion" by mapping regularity and dispersion onto the categories of "equality" and "liberty".

risk. To many bourgeois political economists at the turn of the nineteenth century, the whole enterprise of confinement appeared to constitute a "dangerous financing",[15] an unproductive drain on the economy. It was argued that the confinement of the poor, criminals and the insane disrupted the labour market, causing more social dislocation, thus bringing about the need for larger houses of confinement, causing more disruptions, and so on.

Even after the need for some forms of confinement became generally accepted, there remained the endless task of identifying bad risks. And once bad risks are identified, it is not possible to follow simple administrative procedures of rationalization. Political battles ensue. There are always dysfunctional contradictions between the mechanisms of confinement and the mechanisms of surplus extraction. Prisons and asylums can never be completely rationalized. There is always an element of "dangerous financing", even in the most functional institutions.

Nevertheless, prisons and asylums, over the course of two

---

[15] Michel Foucault, _Madness and Civilization_, Trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) 233.

hundred years, have come to form apparently indispensable tools for the maintenance of order. In theory, order is maintained by the production of "docile subjects" in the prison system, and "disalienated subjects" in the asylum. However, prisons and asylums only work in this way as abstract ideal-types. In the actual functioning of these mechanisms of order, "delinquency" and "unreason" are produced along with docility and disalienation. Yet, this does not mean that these technologies of power are dysfunctional. Delinquency and unreason are, in fact, parts of the order that is produced. They are part of the return on capital's investment.

Despite their location "outside the circuits of productive labour", the institutional practices of the asylum and the prison each have a set of asymmetrical relations with practices of surplus extraction that allow us to characterize both the asylum and the prison as bourgeois institutions. Work done by institutionalized individuals in the asylum and the prison is not usually organized so as to produce surplus value for capital (although this situation is changing, especially

in prisons of the US and China[16]). Institutionalized work is different from "productive labour". But the organizational forms of institutionalized work are, in fact, adapted from specialized segments of the "productive labour" process. Certain aspects of the labour process in the capitalist system, with potential disciplinary applications, are hived-off and reproduced in the institutionalized environment. Institutionalized work, thus specialized for its function in a distinct apparatus, differs qualitatively from "productive labour", but it is, nonetheless, part of the capitalist mode of production.

For Adam Smith, labour was able to fill the role of "the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities"[17] because of the regularity of the drudgery involved in all

---

[16] See "There's Prison Labor in America, Too," _Business Week_, No. 3252, Feb. 17 1992, 42-44. See also Alexander C. Lichtenstein and Michael A. Krolly, "The Fortress Economy: The Economic Role of the U.S. Prison System," in _Criminal Injustice_, Elitu Rosenblat (ed.) (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996) 16-39. See also Julie Browne, "The Labor of Doing Time," in _Criminal Injustice_, 61-72.

[17] Adam Smith, _Wealth of Nations_, in _The Essential Adam Smith_, Robert L. Heilbroner (ed.) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986) 175.

forms of work. The worker "must always lay down the same portion of his ease, his liberty, and his happiness"[18] over a given period of time spent in the labour process. Marx points out the historical specificity of Smith's characterization of labour: "...[Smith] views this expenditure merely as the sacrifice of rest, freedom and happiness, not also man's normal life-activity. Of course, he has the modern wage-labourer in mind."[19]

The role of labour in the prison and the asylum has been precisely the breaking up of "normal life-activity", into more manageable units of regular drudgery - the regular sacrifice of ease, liberty and happiness. Despite the general absence of an official contract of exchange between juridically equal partners, institutional work is part of the capitalist mode of production.

Nevertheless, the institutional labour process, unlike the extra-institutional labour process, is not defined by alienation. In fact, Foucault contrasts alienating factory

---

[18] Ibid., 177.

[19] Karl Marx, _Capital_, vol. 1, footnote on 138.

labour with work in the asylum which has the "single aim of disalienating the mind lost".[20] Asylum work "possesses a constraining power superior to all forms of physical coercion, in that the regularity of the hours, the requirements of attention, the obligation to produce a result, detach the sufferer from a liberty of mind... and engage him in a system of responsibilities..."[21] Regular sacrifice of ease, happiness and liberty due to the requirements of attention and results, precisely the same features of labour that make it the source of exchangeable value and alienation in the capitalist economy, render it disalienating in the context of the asylum.

Of course, both the institutionalized worker and her proletarian counterpart are alienated from their "normal life-activity", but only the worker operating in the capitalist economy has a commodity to alienate - her labour power. Only juridically free agents own this commodity. Therefore, only such agents are capable of alienating it. In the institutional context, labour power is not alienated because there are no

---

[20] <u>Madness and Civilization</u>, 248.

[21] Ibid., 247.

free agents.[22] The labour process is actually _disalienating_ in the context of the asylum because, in her submission to the labour regimen, the institutionalized worker is re-integrated to the rational world from which she had previously been alienated. The "mind lost" is disalienated.

In the context of the prison, submission to the labour regimen is not a means to the end of disalienation, but an end in itself:

What, then, is the use of penal labour? Not profit; nor even the formation of a useful skill; but the constitution of a power relation, an empty economic form, a schema of individual submission and of adjustment to a production apparatus.[23]

Prisoners, that become accustomed to the daily sacrifice of ease, liberty and happiness, through integration into a regularly functioning production apparatus, are formed into

---

[22] Even in prisons where wages are paid, they "do not reward production; they function as a motive and measure of individual transformation: it is a legal fiction, since it does not represent the `free' granting of labour power, but an artifice that is presumed to be effective in the techniques of correction." Michel Foucault, _Discipline and Punish_, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 243.

[23] _Discipline and Punish_, 243.

docile subjects.[24]

Work is not a universal feature of confinement, but there are other mechanisms which function in a similar way, engaging the confined individual in an activity with the requirement of regular sacrifice of ease, liberty and happiness, to produce disalienation and docility. The most obvious example is the time-table which breaks up the confined individual's day into monotonous, repetitive activities, requiring submission to a regimen.[25] The monotonous regimen of prisoner and patient are good examples of Bakhtin's humourless, repetitive "monotony" that we examined in Chapter 3. As an authoritarian imposition of a monotonous discursive structure, the time-table divides all daily activities into an inflexible regimen, and as we find in Bakhtin's monotony, the time-table never works in practice without being punctuated with polyphonous humoristic accentuations. These accentuations fall into Foucault's concept of "resistance".[26]

---

[24] Ibid., 128-9.

[25] Ibid., 149-51.

[26] See Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies," in
Power/Knowledge, Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York: Pantheon Books,

The discrete organization of time and activity is mirrored by and achieved through the organization of space. The architecture of disciplinary power, given ideal expression in Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, allows the penal and psychiatric authorities, the organizational and observational control necessary to order and, most importantly, to know, the minutiae of the confined individual's existence.[27] Thanks to the controlled conditions of physical and spiritual isolation, and daily regimentation, the augmentation of docility and disalienation become measurable and, at least in theory, perfectible. Foucault calls this achievement the crossing of the "`technological' threshold", the point where "the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process."[28]

Foucault recognizes that the factory organized on capitalist principles has also crossed the technological

---

1980) 142.

[27] Discipline and Punish., 195-228. See also Jeremy Bentham, "Panopticon Papers" in A Bentham Reader, Mary Peter Mack (ed.) (New York: Pegasus, 1969) 189-208.

[28] Discipline and Punish., 224.

threshold. In fact, it is impossible to maintain an absolute distinction between the micro-technologies of surplus extraction, penal technologies and psychiatric technologies. Although the extraction of surplus is the primary function of the surplus extraction apparatus, this function is clearly reinforced by the docility produced by a penal-like space-time management with its concomitant science of social engineering. In fact, the docility producing machine, par excellence, Bentham's Panopticon, was inspired by a factory designed by Jeremy Bentham's brother, Samuel, for Catherine the Great of Russia.[29] Furthermore, it is clear that the "freedom" of the proletarian must always be placed in quotation marks. The distinction between a "free" exchange in the market and forced institutionalized labour will have more or less sense depending on a variety of conjunctural circumstances. There cannot be a clear-cut opposition between working class alienation and the disalienation of lost minds. Submission to the production apparatus by working class individuals is disalienating in the sense that, through regular repetition,

---

[29] Michael Ignatieff, A Just Measure of Pain (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978) 110.

it produces a _rationale_ for accepting that submission. A working class made up of rational subjects is precisely the kind of work force required by the surplus extraction apparatus. And, finally, I will argue that prison life and asylum life are alienating in that institutionalized individuals are caught in relationships where, through their own activity, they are constrained to produce "surplus power" and "surplus reason" for an alien force. The precise natures of surplus power and surplus reason are not, however, specifiable without first examining the contradictions of the functional models we have been using.

Theorizing the Micro-Technological Contradictions

The actual operation of apparatuses of surplus extraction, prisons and asylums, does not conform to our perfectly integrated functional models. As Foucault argues, "[T]here are no relations of power without resistances..."[30] As we observed with Bakhtinian monotony in Chapter 3, monotonous regimes can never insure constant and faithful

---

[30] Foucault, "Power and Strategies," 142.

repetition without polyphonous accentuations. Yet, resistances are not simply dysfunctional. They are components of the micro-technologies of power. There are ways in which resistances undermine the functioning of these technologies, but there are also ways to recuperate elements of resistance. Resistance, like power, is contradictory.

Mechanisms of surplus extraction have rarely been able to function without bringing together large groups of proletarians. The experience of anti-social exploitation in a social labour process, has produced and continues to produce, on many occasions, individual acts of defiance. But workers learned very quickly that their strength lay in association. Time and again, individual "free agents" selling their labour power to an employer, have unionized to further their common interests. On occasion, workers' associations have threatened to overthrow the entire system of surplus extraction apparatuses, but these associations have generally been somehow integrated into the normal functioning of the system of production. They generally cause manageable trouble. Yet, there is always the possibility that more profound crises will

arise. Capital itself must be understood as a "dangerous financing". As Marx and Engels argued, the bourgeoisie, in order to continue its existence and development as a class, must produce "its own grave-diggers".[31]

Just as mechanisms of surplus extraction produce both manageable and unmanageable proletarian rebellion, prisons produce both manageable and unmanageable delinquency, and asylums produce both manageable and unmanageable unreason.

The manageability of delinquency relative to previous forms of illegal practice constituted its utility to the emerging bourgeois order of the turn of the nineteenth century. Previously, illegal practice had a place in the moral order, that was, in many ways, much more dangerous than the place of delinquency. Crime was an affront to the power of the sovereign, and punishment was the ceremony intended both as a restitution of the transgressor to the sovereign and as a representation of the natural order of sovereign and subjects. But in practice, public torture and execution were also

---

[31] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, Robert Tucker (ed.) (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978) 483.

opportunities for the crowd to defend the criminal as a popular hero, thus endangering restitution and subverting the natural order of sovereign and subjects.[32] Through the transformation of crime into the commonplace event of an irrational transgression of a rational juridical order, and the transformation of punishment into the "humane" correction of delinquency, "the people was robbed of its old pride in its crimes..."[33]

Of course, the prisons really do not "correct" delinquency, but, in fact, continually reproduce it. But, this does not mean that prisons are not functioning properly. The penal system is "a mechanism intended to administer illegalities differently, not eliminate them all."[34] In this new adminstration of illegalities, delinquency becomes an object of knowledge, a force to be acted upon, a mechanism of surveillance (through a system of informants), and a mark of

---

[32] Discipline and Punish, 48-65.

[33] Ibid., 69.

[34] Ibid., 89.

the petty criminal.[35] The technologies which regiment the prisoner's daily life cannot help but produce rebellion. The social stigma of criminality, and the absence of "normal life-activity" in the prison environment guarantee recidivism. But the surveillance technologies of the prison and the state's bureaucratic apparatus, make criminality knowable and manageable. Delinquency itself, through a system of informants, is actually integrated into mechanisms of surveillance and control. And, perhaps most importantly, delinquents cannot be popular heroes:

> ...delinquency... maintains at a sufficiently low level
> everyday illegal practices (petty thefts, minor acts of
> violence, routine acts of law-breaking); it prevents them
> from leading to broader, more obvious forms, rather as
> though the exemplary effect once expected of the
> spectacle of the scaffold was now sought not so much in
> the rigour of the punishments, as in the visible, branded
> existence of delinquency itself...[36]

Despite the apparent domestication of criminality, delinquency retains a transformative potential. Foucault points out that the nineteenth century anarchist movement moved some way towards the goal of re-establishing the

---

[35] Ibid., 277-83.

[36] Ibid., 278-9.

"political unity of popular illegalities" by attempting to separate "delinquency from the bourgeois legality and illegality that had colonized it".[37] This is not the strategy Foucault recommends to contemporary prison movements, but it serves as evidence of the potential for expanding upon the resistance within delinquency.

Resistance

The potential of resistance in the prison, the asylum, and other social spaces, argues Foucault, is best served by the strategy of "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony (social, economic, and cultural) within which it operates at the present time..."[38] It is not a question of proposing truths of delinquency and unreason as alternatives to hegemonic truths. The best this strategy will produce is a rebellion whose defeat is "inscribed in advance".[39] Accepting

---

[37] Ibid., 292.

[38] "Truth and Power", 133.

[39] <u>Madness and Civilization</u>, 252.

the categories of the dominant power/knowledge mechanism, even
if they are given different values, tends to reproduce the
same moral economy. Even if one were somehow able to pose a
radically new truth, avoiding the dominant knowledge/power
categories, the result would not be a truth free of power.
This is why Foucault concludes that intellectual engagement
ought not be "a matter of a battle `on behalf' of the truth,
but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and
political role it plays."[40]

There is no question of a general strategy of resistance,
since each micro-power technology operates with its own logic,
under a distinct régime of truth. There are connections, but
they are contingent, and cannot be theorized at the general
level. Foucault abandons the project he set out to accomplish
in the early and mid 1970s. It appears that it is impossible
to understand how micro-technologies of power are appropriated
by more "global phenomena". Foucault refuses the terms of the
question, "What is to be done?":

...if I don't ever say what must be done, it isn't
because I believe that there's nothing to be done; on the

---

[40] Ibid., 132.

contrary, it is because I think that there are a thousand things to do, to invent, to forge, on the part of those who, recognizing the relations of power in which they're implicated, have decided to resist or escape them.[41]

The one attempt that Foucault makes to theorize a macro-power structure does not suggest any way to unite the resistance that is scattered throughout distinct micro-technologies. There are no general contradictions in Foucault's techniques of "governmentality". Just as with Foucault's reading of Machiavelli's "art of government" the prince acts as an external power on his territory and subjects,[42] so too does Foucault's force of governmentality act as an external power on its "population", through the organization of various techniques, distinct micro-technologies, that are summed up in the seventeenth and eighteenth century term, as "police".[43] It is the invasion of peoples' daily lives that differentiates governmentality from

---

[41] Michel Foucault, Remarks on Marx, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) 174.

[42] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality", in The Foucault Effect, Graham Burchill, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 90-93.

[43] Ibid., 102-104.

210

the art of government, but this does not mean that governmentality is _internal_ where the art of government was _external_. Insofar as governmentality acts as a _general_ power, at the _macro_-level, it takes as its object the general and non-contradictory "population" which can be known and measured through aggregate statistics. Its strategies depend on the manipulation of this data through the science of political-economy. These external, abstract manipulations are then applied to the population, but not directly. They are applied through a multitude of distinct micro-technologies, summed up in the term "police". Each of these micro-technologies have their own distinct contradictions, but the contradictions do not operate at the macro-level of governmentality. Governmentality is a macro-strategy without a subject that operates without contradiction. Power is unified and resistance is scattered. This is a far cry from the project that Foucault had set for himself in the early and mid 1970s - a project that was supposed to explain how power relations at the micro-level extend their contradictions throughout a social formation.

The self-imposed inability to present an overall theory (or proposed truth) about how micro-technologies of power are intertwined and mutually dependent at the level of the social system, is at the root of the practical-strategic "risk of being unable to develop these [micro-] struggles for want of a global strategy or outside support..."[44] Yet, despite recognizing this risk, Foucault refuses to acknowledge any systemic imbalances that might ground a global strategy of struggle. He cannot support the unification of various micro-struggles in a proletarian class project because he sees this as a subordination of political struggles to the "economic" struggle of the working class. Foucault mistakenly believes that all marxists view power "primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of class domination which the development and specific forms of the forces of production have rendered possible."[45] In this vulgarized marxist model, power is a superstructural support for the economy. For vulgar marxism,

---

[44] "Truth and Power", 130.

[45] "Two Lectures," 88-89.

power is merely a means to revolutionize economic relationships, so it is reasonable to surmise that micro-technologies of power will be uncritically appropriated to this end. Foucault does not recognize that there are forms of marxism that look at class domination as a particularly important form of power that colours a multitude of other power relationships. For these forms of marxism, it is important to challenge power in all its forms, and challenging class power is a strategically central means to that end.

The alternative that Foucault finally comes to present is the neo-Hobbesian hypothesis that multiple resistances constitute a struggle of "all against all": "There aren't immediately given subjects of a struggle, one the proletariat, the other the bourgeoisie. Who fights against whom? We all fight against each other. And there is always within each of us something that fights something else."[46]

And whilst Foucault is ambivalent, seeing a strategic risk whose alternative is thought to present a greater risk

---

[46] "Confession of the Flesh", 208. Foucault, in fact, goes further than Hobbes, since the war of all against all is not limited by any form of social contract and is even present at the sub-individual level.

213

(of unchallenged and uncritically appropriated micro-power mechanisms), in this climate of "post-communism" some of Foucault's followers sound remarkably like Margaret Thatcher - arguing that there is "no alternative". Jon Simons argues that the time has come for "an internal critique of our present that proceeds without proposing a viable alternative."[47] Since liberalism no longer needs "to legitimate itself in the face of socialist critiques claiming to offer better social systems", we ought to turn to Foucault's "critical thought for a Western present without an alternative."[48]

Foucault does not go this far. He does not want to legitimate liberalism, or deny the force of socialist critiques of capitalism. Nevertheless Foucault would agree that there is a "Western present" that does not have "an alternative", in the sense that there is not one alternative, but many. And all these alternatives must pose themselves

---

[47] Jon Simons, Foucault and the Political, (London: Routledge, 1995) 124.

[48] Ibid., 124.

simultaneously, without a "global strategy".[49] There are "a thousand things to do".[50]

I do not wish to deny the essentially polyphonic nature of struggle against multiple power/knowledge mechanisms, but I do wish to question the extent to which this multiplicity must be at odds with "global strategy". This essentially, is what I have argued throughout this work. In my critique of Laclau and Mouffe (Chapter 3) I argue that anti-capitalist, anti-racists and anti-(hetero)sexist struggles must all be understood on their own terms, but that their inter-connections must be understood as more than the abstract articulation of "equivalence and difference". In my critique of Lyotard (Chapter 4), I argue that the differends between capital and labour on the one hand, and between capital and nature on the other hand, have similar ethical implications when considered in the abstract as discourses, and each differend must be "witnessed" in its specificity, but when the production and effacement of these differends is considered as

---

[49] "Truth and Power," 130.

[50] Remarks on Marx, 174.

215

a means of organizing our quotidian activities, their strategic relation becomes apparent.

If one insists, as the Foucault of the late 1970s and 1980s does, that a general strategy of resistance to diverse micro-technologies of power is impossible, then there is a sense in which one must accept a _de facto_ Thatcherite version of, "there is no alternative". Micro-technologies of power are organized around the technology of surplus extraction, and the working class project of transforming these relations, currently organized on capitalist principles, must form the core of polyphonic resistance. Failure to unite resistance in this way will mean a continuation of capitalism, with whatever technical adjustments isolated struggles are able to achieve to their respective power/knowledge mechanisms. This becomes obvious when we examine the "surplus power" and "surplus reason" that define the asymmetrical relationship between prisons and asylums on the one hand, and mechanisms of surplus extraction on the other.

Surplus Power, Surplus Reason and Surplus Value

Surplus power and surplus reason, like the concept of surplus value, express an asymmetrical relation between two positions. Surplus value appears as the self-valorization of capital, brought about through the exchange of commodities of equal value. Marx reveals the asymmetry hidden by the equal exchange - he reveals the extraction of a surplus that moves from labour to capital. He reveals an unequal social relation hidden by the equal relation of things. Surplus power and surplus reason appear as the self-valorization of power and reason themselves. They appear as the expenditure of power and reason on delinquent and unreasonable elements in order to produce more power and reason. In fact, however, it is the unequal relation between delinquency and legality in the prison and between unreason and reason in the asylum that are productive of power and reason respectively. Legitimate power defines itself in opposition to the petty usurpations of delinquents. Reason defines itself in opposition to the ravings of the lunatic. By isolating and engaging with delinquent and unreasonable elements, in an architecture that forces their active submission to power and reason, surplus

217

power and surplus reason are produced. The spheres of power and reason are thus able to expand, as does the sphere of capital, via the extraction of surplus.

Nevertheless, the character of the expansion of capital on the one hand, differs qualitatively from the expansion of power and reason on the other. The macro-structure of capitalist competition constrains distinct fractions of capital in such a way that there is a tendency for them to bring their respective micro-mechanisms of surplus extraction into conformity with the average rate of exploitation. This macro-structure gives the expansion of capital a "necessary" or "immanent" character. Neither power nor reason have distinct macro-structures that constrain their micro-technological apparatuses in such a way as to produce necessary or immanent expansion. Expansions of the spheres of power and reason are contingent on various historical circumstances. Furthermore, the micro-technologies of power and reason are dependent on financing from the capitalist economy, making them possible objects of "rationalization", depending on whether or not they are perceived as "bad risks".

This rationalization, in certain historical circumstances, can itself constitute a drive to expand the spheres of power or reason.

Foucault himself uses the term "surplus power" to designate the asymmetrical relationship between disciplinary technology and the disciplined subject. The explicitly subordinate status of disciplined subjects is what distinguishes the "disciplinary link" from the "contractual link". The latter presents itself as a link between ostensibly equal partners in an equal exchange. Of course the equality of capitalist and wage labourer is largely fictitious. Foucault is quick to point out that "workshop discipline is not the least important" of the "many real procedures [which] undermine the legal fiction of the work contract".[51] Surplus power is directly productive of surplus value. The disciplinary link underwrites the contractual link.

But as we have already observed, even where prisoners are involved in production, there is no contractual link to distort. The primary aim is generally not the production of a

---

[51] _Discipline and Punish_, 223.

material surplus, but rather, "individual submission and...

adjustment to a production apparatus". The prison thus appears

as a clearly demarcated zone of pure "extra-economic"

relations, where surplus power is produced simply to

strengthen the bonds of coercion internal to the power zone.

This position is untenable, however, given the very clear

links between mechanisms of surplus extraction and penal

technologies. It is inadequate to limit the flow of surplus

power within the disciplinary link, as does Foucault, for

disciplinary links not directly implicated in mechanisms of

surplus extraction. The financing of prisons flows from the

capitalist economy, and, insofar as this "dangerous financing"

is successful, surplus power flows back to it. Illegality is

managed as less threatening "delinquency". Of course, the

financing is never completely successful (delinquency is not

always manageable), and the production of surplus power is

every bit as contradictory as the production of surplus value.

Nevertheless, and this is the crucial point, the production of

both forms of surplus involve an asymmetrical relationship

with capital in the dominant position.

"Surplus reason" is not a category used by Foucault. Nevertheless, the asymmetrical relation of disciplined subject to disciplinary mechanism that produces surplus power in the prison, is paralleled by the relation between the patient and the mechanism of disalienation in the asylum. Asylum structures, of course, are also disciplinary, and productive of surplus power, but the emphasis on "disalienating minds lost" justifies the new category of surplus reason. The world of reason is made more rational by isolating, studying and explaining unreason. Reason defines itself in opposition to unreason. The world of reason is expanded by asylum practices which penetrate unreason and disalienate minds lost. Foucault underlines the pre and post-psychoanalytic continuity in asylum structures with respect to asymmetry:

> ...psychoanalysis doubled the absolute observation of the watcher with the endless monologue of the person watched - thus preserving the old asylum structure of non-reciprocal observation but balancing it, in a non-symmetrical reciprocity, by the new structure of language without response.[52]

Just as the surplus power produced by disciplinary asymmetry is not contained within the prison, but flows back

---

[52] Madness and Civilization, 250-251.

to the capital that finances it, so too does capital act as expropriator of surplus reason. Mechanisms of surplus extraction require subjects who accept their places in these mechanisms as rational. It is precisely this form of rationality that is reinforced by the asylum system. Just as the penal system manages illegalities in the form of "delinquency", so the asylum system manages unacceptable responses to micro-technologies of power in the form of "unreason". And, of course, unreason is every bit as contradictory as delinquency. Unreason can be unmanageable as well. Financing its confinement can be a dangerous enterprise. Thus far, however, it appears to have been worth the risk. Surplus reason continues to be produced.

Conclusion: Capitalist Hegemony and the Need for General Strategy

This analysis of surplus power, and surplus reason in Foucault's thought, combined with a historical-materialist analysis of the mechanisms of surplus extraction, gives us a series of productive apparatuses invested in institutions and

techniques situated at "the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organise and delimit it and extends itself beyond them".[53] But these micro-technologies are organized in a hegemonic structure, with the micro-technology of surplus extraction at the centre. This centre is not an "economic" base which determines a "political/ideological" superstructure, but a strategically crucial mechanism of power.

There are a number of strategic implications that follow from this reorganization of micro-technologies of power into a hegemonic structure. Foucault's project of "detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony (social, economic, and cultural) within which it operates at the present time..."[54] is still a useful enterprise. Destabilizing régimes of truth that are part and parcel of the domination of reason over unreason and legality over delinquency allow problems to be posed in new and radical ways. If the power of truth escapes the grasp of penal and psychiatric authorities, then

---

[53] "Two Lectures," 96.

[54] "Truth and Power," 133.

an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges"[55] becomes possible. Removing the power of truth from these authorities is a means of breaking the "circular process" whereby "the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another".[56] This means that "subjugated knowledges", or "knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity"[57] can develop more effective challenges to micro-technologies of power. Even though Marx claimed a scientific status for his critiques of bourgeois political-economy, these same texts can also be read as attempts to detach the power of truth from bourgeois political-economy, which would allow the subjugated knowledges of the working class to overcome certain barriers. This is the reading offered by Lyotard.[58] According to this reading,

---

[55] "Two Lectures", 81.

[56] Discipline and Punish, 224.

[57] "Two Lectures," 82.

[58] See Chapter 4 of this work.

marxism is a genre of discourse that allows the proletariat to speak from the underside of bourgeois political economy. Thus Lyotard's critique of capital as a totalizing metanarrative can at least partially compensate for the absence of a theorization of capital in Foucault.

Once the asymmetrical organization of micro-technologies of power is recognized, "detaching the power of truth from forms of hegemony" is no longer adequate in itself. If "forms of hegemony" are themselves organized under a single, more or less unified, general hegemony, then resistance must have a general character as well. Since, under capitalism, general hegemony is organized around the micro-technology of surplus extraction, this means that various forms of resistance must be unified in a working class project.

If the power of truth is alienated from prison authorities, and the subjugated knowledges formerly under the category of delinquency successfully challenge the régime of truth that constitutes the petty criminal, this would create a very important crisis. It could mean, for instance, a crisis of bourgeois legality via a popularization of certain forms of

illegal practices. This would also constitute a crisis for capitalism insofar as mechanisms of surplus extraction are dependent on the surplus power produced by the penal system. But there is no reason to think that, in the absence of a general attack on the system of surplus extraction, capital will not eventually be able to rationalize its bad risks in the penal system. And there is no reason to think that no new oppressive régime of truth will arise in this newly created vacuum in an architecture formed of interlinking micro-technologies of power.

The absence of general strategy in Foucault is a serious defect because the power of truth cannot simply be detached from _forms_ of hegemony, since it will nevertheless remain attached to _capitalist hegemony_, in the singular. The only way to detach the power of truth from _capitalist hegemony_, is to attack the keystone of the system of micro-technologies of power - the mechanisms of surplus extraction. This does not mean that working class self-organization of production can automatically bring about an end to all forms of oppression. Nevertheless, it does offer significantly more to subjugated

knowledges than does capitalist hegemony. Production organized on democratic socialist principles does not have the same functional "fit" as capitalist surplus extraction with respect to the surplus reason and surplus power produced in the prisons and asylums. The socialist reorganization of production is precisely the sort of catalyst needed to detach the power of truth from various forms of hegemony, and break a multitude of vicious circles where the "formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another".[59]

---

[59] Discipline and Punish, 224.

The Postmodernism-Post-Marxism Nexus:

Laclau, Mouffe, Foucault and Lyotard's Discourses on

Discourse

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Combining Lyotard's general critique of the capital

genre's metanarrative with Foucauldian micro-analyses of

prisons, asylums and workplaces, I have thus suggested how

some of the most useful aspects of postmodernism and post-

structuralism might be absorbed into a non-dogmatic marxism.

This project is far from complete, but one can observe a

marked contrast between the marxism evolving from these

engagements and the post-marxism of Laclau and Mouffe that is

the result of opposing the "posts" against marxism. Whereas

Laclau and Mouffe view marxism as a form of vulgar economic-

determinism which has fettered the brilliant superstructural

analyses of Luxemburg, Gramsci and Althusser by tying their

symbolic readings of politics to the predetermined economic

categories of the base (Chapter 2), I view marxism as a

critique of the categories of bourgeois political economy that allows the polyphonic voices of the proletariat to disrupt surplus extraction (Chapters 3 and 4). Whereas Laclau and Mouffe view social struggles as the result of the articulation of symbolic elements in a system of mutually related signs - a social ensemble - with no necessary class character (Chapter 3), I view social struggles as the result of the more or less authoritarian organization of our everyday lives in (hetero)sexist and racist matrices (Chapters 3 and 4), and in the micro-technologies of prison, asylum and workplace (Chapter 5) whose continual reproduction also means the reproduction of a proletariat with interests that are fundamentally opposed to the authoritarian organization of our quotidian discursive and non-discursive practices.

The proletariat is not, however, a ready-made subject constituted at the level of the "economic base" seeking expression at the level of the "political/ideological superstructure." The proletariat is the name given to a continually evolving contradiction between the bourgeois category of "wage labour" and those human beings who are

constrained by circumstances such that they have very little choice but to perform it. There are many other contradictions in capitalist societies. There is a contradiction between the natural world and the names it is given in the capital genre (i.e. "externality" or "resource commodities"). There is a contradiction between domestic work and its status in bourgeois economics as an "externality." There are contradictions between the formal equality of ethnicities and genders on the one hand, and material inequalities on the other hand. There are contradictions between the production of delinquents and mental patients on the one hand, and the functional requirements of penal and psychiatric institutions on the other.

But the difference between the social contradiction that opposes the direct producers to exploiters on the one hand, and other social contradictions on the other hand, is that the first contradiction must _necessarily_ be continually reproduced by capital in a way that carries _strategic risks_ for capital far beyond any other contradiction. Capital literally and materially _constitutes itself_ through wage labour. When wage

labour refuses to be wage labour, capital's very existence is threatened. Lyotard is correct to point out the ethical problems inherent to the genre of capital - a genre that must continually produce and efface differends between its own "metanarrative" and the narratives produced by other genres (Chapter 4). Yet merely "witnessing" these differends is not enough. The capital genre will continue to produce equal exchanges where capital is both subject and object of exchange, and thus capital will continue with the material process of accumulation despite the witnessing (undertaken by intellectuals like Lyotard) of the injustices this process produces. The only way to pose a real challenge to capital accumulation and the capital genre is to develop to the fullest extent, the contradiction between the bourgeois category of "wage labour" and those human beings who are constrained by circumstances such that they have very little choice but to perform it. Fundamentally challenging the power of capital means going beyond bearing witness - it means developing a radical proletarian alternative to capitalist exploitation.

For the proletariat to take this radical stand - for the contradiction between the category of "wage labour" and the human beings that are shoe-horned into this category to express itself in such stark terms - all of the other contradictions must be brought to the fore as well. Those whose interests are not tied to capital accumulation cannot fully recognize their common interests unless all forms of oppression (which are generally functionally integrated with surplus extraction) are targeted by a working class project. It is with these strategic observations in mind that we should read the following passage from Volume Three of Capital:

The specific form, in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship between rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determined element.... It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers... which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and with it the political form of the relations of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding form of state...[1]

The very activities that make us human are organized in such a way that a surplus is continually produced by direct

_____

[1] Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 3, (New York: International Publishers, 1984) 791-792.

producers for a class of exploiters. This basic fact structures all hierarchically organized social relations. But for the exploited to do anything about this situation the "innermost secret" and "hidden basis of the entire social structure" must be laid bare. This means being brutally explicit about the links between class exploitation and other hierarchically organized social relations.

I have only pointed in some of the directions that this research and activism might take. I have suggested how we might think about the functional integration and dysfunctional contradiction of the dialogical processes which assign class and gender rôles respectively (Chapter 3). The capital genre requires speakers and addressees that fit the rôle of wage labour. These speakers and addressees must also fit into the rôles of the heterosexual gender matrix. Just as workers are shoe-horned into the category of "wage labour," so are women, lesbians and gay men shoe-horned into the categories of the heterosexual gender matrix. And just as the capital genre is never entirely successful in this enterprise, and the sign

itself becomes "an arena of class struggle,"[2] so too does "[t]he injunction to be a given gender" produce "necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated."[3]

The "wage labour" category does not have a gender, but the capital genre is functionally integrated with the heterosexual gender matrix despite the fact that the capital genre itself does not have the grammatical tools to say anything about gender. The power of capital can be turned against gender inequalities - the functional link can be broken - if gender inequalities are shown to be problematic for continued capital accumulation (eg. for reasons of legitimacy or efficiency). Even though sexism is generally functionally integrated with capital accumulation, there are dysfunctional contradictions as well. Part of the reason why liberal feminism has been able to make the huge gains over the

---

[2] V.N. Voloshinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (Cambridge Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1973) 23.

[3] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990) 145.

past two centuries of capital accumulation is the ability to exploit these contradictions. Strictly speaking, wage labour is a necessary requirement of capital accumulation, whereas the reproduction of the heterosexual gender matrix has been a historical-practical requirement. Capital can find other ways of getting its "dirty work" done if externalizing the costs of wage labour's reproduction through unpaid female domestic labour and the distribution of "shit work" through female work ghettos prove to be inconvenient. Liberal feminism has had some success in making these options inconvenient, thus, to a certain extent, breaking the functional link between the capital genre and the heterosexual gender matrix. The functional link is not, however, reversible in the case of workers struggling to end their exploitation. For workers to reject the very legitimacy of "wage labour", there must be a unity in the working class that can only be achieved by rejecting the heterosexual gender matrix. A workers' movement that is not anti-capitalist, but merely seeks to improve the relative position of some of its members can strategically use straight male privilege to achieve its ends, but these ends

obfuscate rather than express the contradiction between the rôle of "wage labour" and those constrained in such a way that they must perform it. Failure to challenge the sexist aspect of sexist exploitation is a strategic mistake, not merely because it perpetuates divisions within the working class, but also because the continued acceptance by straight male workers of the benefits they derive from the heterosexual matrix that does the "dirty work" of capitalism serves as an ideological support for surplus extraction itself. The power of patriarchy will not help challenge capitalism. These general principles are a useful guide for further research and activism but there is still a great deal of practical work to be done here and with respect to other "extra-economic" identities.

I have also suggested how we might think about the relationship of surplus-extraction, penal, and psychiatric "micro-technologies" (Chapter 5). In these cases, there is a direct link between the capitalist state on the one hand, and penal and psychiatric micro-technologies on the other. This link is the "dangerous financing" of the enterprises of surplus power extraction and surplus reason extraction

respectively. Although prisons and asylums are theoretically supposed to produce "docile subjects" and "disalienated subjects" respectively, they in fact produce "delinquency" and "unreason". This does not mean, however, that prisons and asylums are dysfunctional for capital. Delinquency is a method of administration of illegalities[4] which makes criminality knowable and manageable. Unreason provides an "Other" against which reason can define itself, and even if minds contaminated with unreason are never completely "disalienated", they are safely isolated and studied as unreason. The submission of delinquents to a disciplinary regime produces surplus power. The isolation and study of unreason produces surplus reason. Yet just as the production of surplus value is a contradictory enterprise where capital must necessarily produce its own "grave-diggers"[5], so are the production of surplus power and

---

[4] Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 89.

[5] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978) 483.

surplus reason examples of "dangerous financing".[6] The financing is dangerous because the functional integration of penal and psychiatric micro-technologies with the micro-technology of surplus extraction can never be guaranteed. The transformative potential contained in delinquency briefly but brilliantly burst forth in the nineteenth century anarchist movement where "the political unity of popular illegalities" was at least partially re-established by separating "delinquency from the bourgeois legality and illegality that had colonized it."[7] There is a great deal of work that needs to be done to flesh-out the precise means by which delinquents and patients can make their respective administration unmanageable, whilst integrating their respective struggles into the general working class struggle. This work must also take into account the changing terrain of struggle that is produced by the struggles themselves and by the continual rationalization of the "bad risks" that are identified by powerful political-economic interests.

---

[6] Michel Foucault, <u>Madness and Civilization</u>, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) 233.

[7] <u>Discipline and Punish</u>, 292.

In North America for instance, it appears that rates of incarceration are being pushed up by a neo-liberal turn in social policy combined with a "get tough" approach on crime (especially drug offenses).[8] Maintaining growing prison systems has placed hefty financial burdens on states that have been trying to cut costs by cutting social services. Privatization of prisons and the increasing use of prison labour in private enterprises reduces the immediate financial costs of incarceration and fits well with the neo-liberal turn in social policy. The broader impact of these developments is, however, more ambiguous. This situation is creating a growing class of ghettoized workers (with an astounding over-representation of people of colour)[9] that is not protected by normal labour laws. This class is even larger when we include those workers "outside" the prison system who are forced to work without the protection of normal labour laws through "workfare" legislation. But even though these workers are

---

[8] Mike Davis, "The Politics of Super Incarceration," in Criminal Injustice, Elihu Rosenblat (ed.) (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996) 74-76.

[9] Joel Olson, "Gardens of the Law," in Criminal Injustice, 43-44.

ghettoized, they are more clearly than ever before, workers - they are forced by extremely powerful circumstances into a wage relation. There exists the possibility that links of resistance made with "free" workers that compete in the same market might force a crisis in an already heavily subsidized disciplinary apparatus. Blurring the distinction between labour and prison labour may be costly because it could also mean a blurring of the distinction between surplus value and surplus power. Workers not in the penal system may also start to see the quotation marks around the "free" of their "free" labour. This crisis, of course, is only one possibility that depends on innumerable struggles - but it is a possibility that is rendered more likely by working class strategies of struggle that take this situation into account.

At its best, marxism offers us a coherent understanding of a contradictory reality. It shows us the potentialities of social struggles in these contradictions. Postmodern thought is part of our contemporary contradictory reality and it must be engaged as such - both as object of analysis and as terrain of struggle. The refusal of postmodern thought to draw the

various theoretical, discursive and social contradictions that it deals with into a "metanarrative" tells us something about the present conjuncture. It tells us about more than a century of political frustration of the activists seeking to unite diverse struggles into a common socialist project. It tells us about a ubiquitous enemy (capital) whose multiple forms belie its fundamentally homogenizing and monotonous nature. Yet the refusal is ultimately unjustified. Taking a completely contingent and ad hoc approach to the conception of the links between contemporary social struggles does indeed take us beyond marxism, but it plunges us into an ultimately disempowering chaotic abyss. The first step in finding our way out of the abyss is recognizing that capital must systematically engage with the very people who live in the abyss - and it must engage with them in the capital genre's own terms. There is no word for "humanity" in the capital genre - the closest possible translation would be "wage labour". Failure to make the connections between various struggles that human beings engage in is a defacto acceptance of capital's continual surplus extraction via the wage

241

relation. It is an acceptance of the translation of "humanity" as "wage labour". Finding our way out of the abyss means opposing capital's rule with a systematic working class understanding of the process of surplus extraction which opposes real human beings to capital's abstract category of "wage labour". Failure to develop such a systematic approach will put us in the position of Saint-Exupéry's lamplighter - isolated on his far-off planet, unable to understand the mysterious unseen forces that are speeding-up his work process, making his existence increasingly inhuman and unlivable.

Sources

Althusser, Louis. "On the Marxist Dialectic" in _For Marx_, trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Verso, 1990.

Althusser, Louis. "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in _For Marx_.

Bakhtin, M.M. _Rabelais and His World_, trans. Hélène Iswalsky, Cambridge, Mass.; MIT Press, 1968.

Bakhtin, M.M. "From Notes Made in 1970-71," in _Speech Genres and Other Late Essays_, trans. Vern W. McGee, Austin; University of Texas Press, 1986.

Bakhtin, M.M. "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences," in _Speech Genres and Other Late Essays_.

Bentham, Jeremy. "Panopticon Papers" in _A Bentham Reader_, ed. Mary Peter Mack, New York: Pegasus, 1969.

Browne, Julie. "The Labor of Doing Time," in _Criminal Injustice_, ed. Elihu Rosenblat, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996.

Bobbio, Norberto. "Gramsci and the conception of civil society" in ed. Chantale Mouffe, _Gramsci and Marxist Theory_, London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

Butler, Judith. _Gender Trouble_, New York: Routledge, 1990.

Callari, Antonio. and David F. Ruccio. "Introduction: Postmodern Materialism and the Future of Marxist Theory," in eds. Antonio Callari and David F. Ruccio, _Postmodern Materialism_, London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996.

Davis, Mike. "The Politics of Super Incarceration," in ed. Elihu Rosenblat, _Criminal Injustice_, Boston, MA: South

End Press, 1996.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Doyal, Len and Roger Harris. "The Practical Foundations of Human Understanding," *New Left Review*, No. 139, May-June, 1983.

de Saint-Exupéry, Antoine. *The Little Prince*, trans. Irene Testat-Ferry, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1995.

de Saussure, Ferdinand. "From Course in General Linguistics," in eds. Richard and Fernande DeGeorge, *The Structuralists From Marx to Lévi-Strauss*, New York; Anchor Books, 1972.

Diskin, Jonathan and Blair Sandler. "Essentialism and the Economy in the Post-Marxist Imaginary," *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 6, No. 3 ,Fall, 1993.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, New York: Touchstone, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. *Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York; Pantheon, 1972.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

Foucault, Michel. "The Confession of the Flesh," A conversation with Alain Grosrichard, Gerard Wajeman, Jaques-Alain Miller, Guy Le Gaufey, Dominique Celas, Gerard Miller, Catherine Millot, Jocelyne Livi and Judith

Miller, in ed. Colin Gordon, <u>Power/Knowledge,</u> New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Foucault Michel. in conversation with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, "The Eye of Power", in ed. Colin Gordon, <u>Power/Knowledge,</u> New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. "Truth and Power" interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasuino in ed. Colin Gordon, <u>Power/Knowledge,</u> New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Foucault, Michel. <u>Remarks on Marx,</u> trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito, New York: Semiotext(e), 1991.

Foucault, Michel. "Governmentality", in eds. Graham Burchill, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, <u>The Foucault Effect,</u> London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

Foucault, Michel. "Power and Strategies," in ed. Colin Gordon <u>Power/Knowledge,</u> New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Geras, Norman. "Post-Marxism?" <u>New Left Review,</u> No. 163, May/June 1987.

Gramsci, Antonio. <u>Selections from the Prison Notebooks,</u> ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Habermas, J. "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism," <u>Communication and the Evolution of Society,</u> trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

Harvey, David. <u>The Condition of Postmodernity,</u> Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990.

Ignatieff, Michael. <u>A Just Measure of Pain,</u> New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

Jameson, Frederic. <u>Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,</u> Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991.

Kenny, Anthony. <u>Wittgenstein</u>, England: Penguin Books, 1973.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe. <u>Hegemony and Socialist Society</u>, London: Verso, 1985.

Laclau, Ernesto and Chantale Mouffe. "Post-Marxism without Apologies," <u>New Left Review</u>, No. 166, Nov/Dec 1987.

Lichtenstein, Alexander C. and Michael A. Krolly. "The Fortress Economy: The Economic Role of the U.S. Prison System," in ed. Elitu Rosenblat, <u>Criminal Injustice</u>, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996.

Luxemburg, Rosa. "The Mass Strike, the Political Party and the Trade Unions," in ed. Mary-Alice Waters, <u>Rosa Luxemburg Speaks</u>, New York; Pathfinder Press, 1970.

Lyotard, Jean-François. <u>The Postmodern Condition</u>, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minneasota Press 1984.

Lyotard, Jean-François. <u>The Differend</u>, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1988.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "Wittgenstein's `After'," in <u>Political Writings</u>, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "A Svelte Appendix to the Postmodern Question", in <u>Political Writings</u>, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "A Memorial of Marxism" in <u>Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event</u>, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "Judiciousness in Dispute or Kant After Marx", in ed. Andrew Benjamin, <u>The Lyotard Reader</u>,

Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989.

Macpherson, C.B. The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism, Toronto; Oxford University Press, 1962.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in ed. Robert C. Tucker, The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978.

Marx, Karl. Capital, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, New York: Vintage Books, 1977.

Marx, Karl. Capital, Vol. 3, New York; International Publishers, 1984.

Marx, Karl. The Grundrisse, ed. David McLelland, New York: Harper and Row, 1971.

Marx, Karl. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. S.W. Ryzanskay, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977.

Olson, Joel. "Gardens of the Law," in ed. Elitu Rosenblat, Criminal Injustice, Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996.

Popper, K.R. The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 2, London; Routledge and Kegean Paul, 1962.

Resnick, Stephan A. and Richard D. Wolff, Knowledge and Class, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Rubin, Gayle, S. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in eds. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Borale and David M. Haperin, The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader, New York: Routledge, 1993.

Simons, Jon. Foucault and the Political, London: Routledge, 1995.

Smith, Adam. Wealth of Nations, in ed. Robert L. Heilbroner,

<u>The Essential Adam Smith</u>, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1986.

Texier,Jacques. "Gramsci, theoretician of the superstructures" in ed. Chantale Mouffe, <u>Gramsci and Marxist Theory</u>, London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979.

"There's Prison Labor in America, Too," <u>Business Week</u>, No. 3252, Feb. 17 1992, 42-44.

Voloshinov, V.N. <u>Marxism and the Philosophy of Language</u>, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.
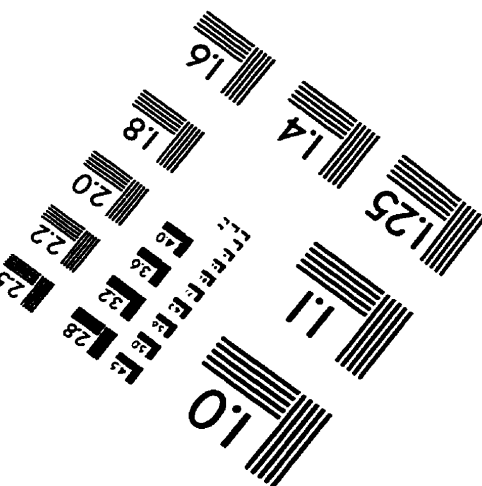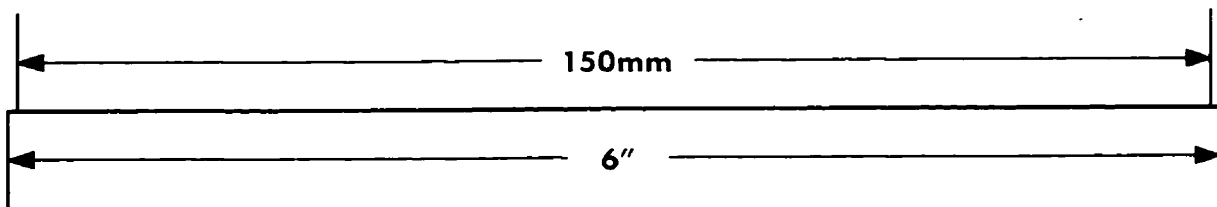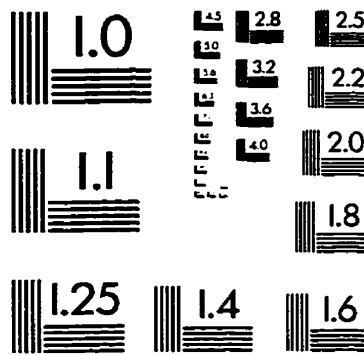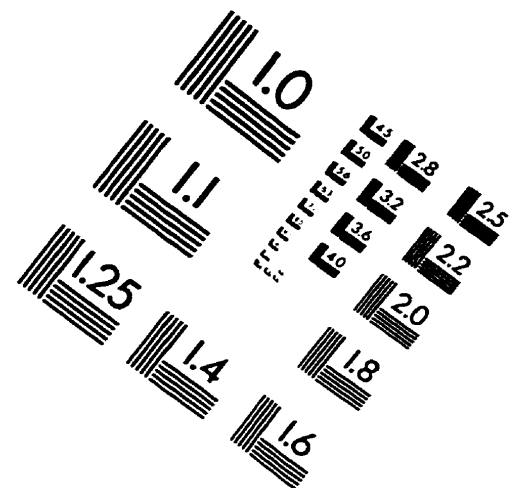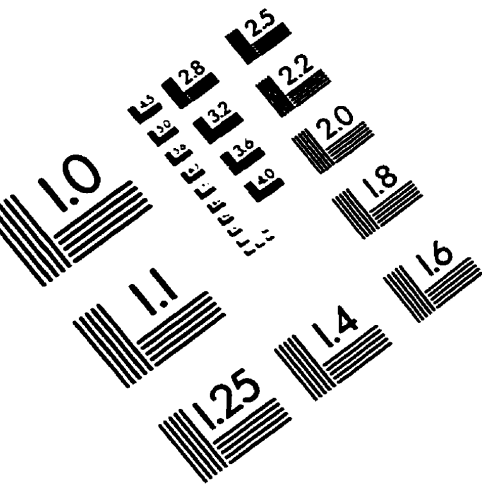
Williams, Raymond. <u>Marxism and Literature</u>, New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. <u>Philosophical Investigations</u>, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, New York: Macmillan Company, 1968.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins. <u>Democracy Against Capitalism</u>, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Wood, Ellen Meiksins. <u>The Retreat From Class</u>, London; Verso, 1986.

IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (QA–3)

150mm

6"