

When Rick Wolff reviewed *Work Time* for *boundary 2* in 1990 (or 1790, whenever; dates roll after awhile), he mentioned in passing that there were passages where I seemed overly "deterministic." I think I still am. I wouldn't like to admit that as a permanent affliction, but within certain parameters there seems to me good reason to push a little toward a kind of economic determinism: most ways in which capitalism and democracy are theorized by advocates accord economic relations foundational primacy; U.S. culture is pervasively money obsessed; "the economy" is perhaps the most mystical, and mystified, term around in the U.S. (Julie and Kath demonstrated just how mystical/mystified it has become for left theorists no less than for advocates.) Those aren't reasons for a philosophically implacable determinism about all societies always through all time, but together they do suggest to me that at least a warily circumscribed determinism isn't a bad critical tool for here and now. I.e. in the Kurt Vonnegut mode, if you are what you pretend to be, and both "capitalism" and its critics pretend the social formation is economically determined, then perhaps in part it is.

One of the effects of this form of determinism, however, is that it continues to push me toward asking "of what?" about any given representation—it's a representation, of what? Again, I want to ask that in a warily controlled way and not as an inevitable necessity. But it's come to seem more and more relevant to me across our discussions as they've involved proliferating economic representations in so many sectors, forms, etc. The proliferation suggests that economic representations do constitute a kind of "common sense" in Gramsci's usage of the term—i.e. pervasive, contradictory, simultaneously shared and hidden, etc. And like Gramsci I'm less interested in the ontological quiddity to "of what?" (or the epistemological tortures of how one might know) than in the directions the representations point. So as addressed to any given representation, "of what?" might be translated roughly as "what is it you're looking at that you would move us in this direction toward it?" And correlatively of course, what then do we move away from, what disappears from the horizon altogether, etc. On that basis there seem to me certain recurrent patterns of direction among the representations we've brought up in discussion. One very common example might be labeled initially as a deflationary direction, i.e. the representation functions to deflate, undercut, pragmatize, "cut to the chase," in relation to some other common sense construct that then subsequently

appears overheated fantasy receding into the distance behind us. The classic blues song, "Money," would be an instance: "the best things in life are free, but you can give 'em to the birds and bees. I want money. That's what I want." In general, that is, when common sense truisms collide in contradiction, the econ rep version usually functions in this deflationary way.

Anyway, it's possible to identify a number of these patterns of direction, and that might well lead to a kind of classic cultural studies exercise. Given my reasoning above about "determinism"—capitalism is often theorized in ways that make economic relations primary; U.S. culture is money-obsessed; "the economy" is much mystified—then the directional patterns of economic representations help us understand a number of things about that complex by first raising some crucial questions. Where are directions smooth and uncontested, where in contrast does one find points of tension and conflict that might identify interventional possibilities for alternative economics? What alternatives have been obliterated over time by a progressively uniform flow of movement that might now be usefully revived? When have patterns of direction changed significantly?, etc. And it's not that I'm uninterested in this kind of cultural studies work, which does seem to me altogether valuable. But I'd also like to push my "of what?" questioning toward some other possibilities as well, particularly pedagogical.

If as I'm assuming economic representations are directional, then by altering the direction they point it's possible to alter the view they represent. And I think this might anticipate a way to thread through a familiar dichotomy in classroom practices. Take for a current example all the arguments over who's fomenting "class warfare." Republicans charge that Democrats are inciting class resentment and anger in the way they go about focusing on corporate regulation. Molly Ivens replied in a recent column that it's time we learned to recognize that stock options are a form of class warfare, etc. etc. In teaching these exchanges in a writing class, the emphasis would typically fall on either the logic, marshalling of evidence, organization of arguments; or, the rhetorical devices at work, the projection of audience, etc. Should the texts be used in courses in other disciplines, discussion would likely tip much more toward the former in some, the latter in others. In either case the dichotomy reinforces a whole sequence of familiar cultural binaries, and I think my idea about beginning with representations as directional can help to find a different path. You can

think first in terms of what you see in each case rather than immediately in terms of "evidence." (E.g. what does each representation of "class warfare" let you see of economic relations; what disappears from view, etc.). And rather than rhetorical devices or tricks of persuasion, you can think first instead in terms of directional itineraries—e.g. if this representation points you here, where would the next likely step be; what might it lead an audience to imagine from there, etc.

None of this involves a huge shift from current pedagogies, that is, it stays well within the parameters of a current pedagogical "common sense"—keeping in mind Gramsci's dictum that if you depart radically from common sense you don't change things radically, you just get ignored. But within that configuration it alters practices enough to allow movement in alternative directions. And I can think of few more important circumstances to work on than the complex of economic representations. Keeping in mind again my triple-headed determinism, then restructuring the pedagogical lessons of economic representations seems a necessary part of restructuring economic relations and proliferating alternative possibilities. But in addition I think economic representations lend themselves particularly well to classroom work, so that the work "pays off" more directly than it might otherwise. I see everyday a lot of marvelous stuff a number of my colleagues do with literary texts, but it's hard to imagine in what ways students might then go ahead to circulate some of that work in different ways in other contexts. There's just so much of it that is course-specific, and often context-specific as well—e.g. knowing the historical circumstances of an early 19th century novel or whatever. At the other end of the spectrum colleagues do some great things with commercials, TV shows, etc., but here again it's hard for a lot of that to circulate in specific ways. By the time students leave the class, engage in discussions maybe years later with others, nobody remembers that particular show or commercial. Economic representations in contrast tend to have longer pathways as it were, remain current in more contexts, and thus make available more circumstances to circulate continued discussions and more occasions to alter directional possibilities. I'm just over the word limit here, so you'll have to trust me on that last assertion, but...