

Rethinking MARXISM Volume 11, Number 2 (Summer 1999)

THE END OF CAPITALISM:
QUEER IDENTITY, POLITICAL AFFECT,
AND NONCAPITALIST ECONOMIES

Michael Moon
David F. Ruccio
Arturo Escobar
J. K. Gibson-Graham

Valuable Class Time

Michael Moon

Some readers may pick up J. K. Gibson-Graham's *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* (1996) for the pleasure of seeing queer theory engaged in novel and productive ways, but one hopes they will read on in order to aid their thinking about what have proved to be some of the Great Intractables or Unthinkables of first-wave queer theory. I have particularly in mind several different moments in *The End of Capitalism* in which Gibson-Graham attempts to retheorize class, a notorious dead zone in some recent American leftist social theory as well as in much queer theory.

Reading *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* has made me more fully mindful of some unfinished business about economics and class in queer studies and elsewhere. My first conference paper, delivered at the first annual National Lesbian and Gay Studies gathering at Yale in the fall of 1987, was entitled, "Homosexual Economies" (Moon 1987), and when someone asked me during the question period what I meant by "economies," I replied, "Oh, you know, systems of exchange," and left it at that—"the Economy, stupid!" to quote Gibson-Graham. But my insistence on the transparency of the term "economy" in relation to the term "homosexual" was already being belied for me in my own thinking by work I had been doing on Horatio Alger. I attempted in my essay on Alger not merely to perform yet another "outing" of the figure Hugh Kenner had called the American "laureate of the paradigms of ascent" (1975) but, as its title attested, to demonstrate specifically how Alger's books for boys were fables of the male-homoerotic dynamics of class and capitalism in turn-of-the-century America. (Alger is only now beginning to be taken seriously as an important purveyor of American social thinking; see Nackenoff [1994].)

The truth of the matter is that Alger's books were not "fables" so far as I was concerned. It was not their supposedly campy quaintness that powerfully drew me to *Ragged Dick* and *Luke Larkin's Luck*; it was what I saw as the deadly and uncanny accuracy with which they seemed to me to represent the brute facts of economic life and class mobility in the gay-male world still largely in place a century after Alger started writing about them in the late 1860s and 1870s. The playwright Robert Patrick's quip, "There *are* two sexes in the gay-male world—the young and the rich," seemed fully enacted in a quite demystified and demystifying way in Alger. This phenomenon otherwise seemed quite mystified in most of the "respectable" gay fiction I knew; aside from Alger, it was so openly represented in my experience only in the institutions of gay porn and sex work.

My abiding but unspoken sense that Alger was no clueless dummy but a nitty-gritty realist grew out of my own ten years' experience in Manhattan in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a ribbon clerk by day and a frequenter of bars, discos, gay caba-

rets, and high-minded gay discussion groups by night. The defamiliarizing shock that eventuated in my essay on Alger, class, and capitalism was twofold. Its first phase occurred early in graduate school during my first extended engagement with the history of American culture. Coming out, I had come to recognize all around me those intricate economies whereby youth, sex, companionship, deference, flattery, and ambitious emulation could be readily exchanged for “guidance,” employment, housing, gifts, expensive dinners and vacations, fancier parties, and seats at the theater and opera. A few years later, as a graduate student, I realized that these economies had been well in place not just since World War II but for at least a century before that. Andy Warhol records in his diary that he attended a gala at the Metropolitan Opera in the 1980s and discovered that, as he says, it was exactly the same as he had left it in the 1950s with, as he puts it, all these older men introducing all these younger men to “the finer things in life” (1989, 554). To Warhol’s amusement but not to his surprise, the boys of the 1950s were the daddies of the 1980s. (Will the boys in their twenties whom Warhol saw being brought downstairs from standing room to box seats in the 1980s be bringing boys as yet unborn downstairs a few decades from now? Maybe, maybe not; the Met management can only hope so.)

The second phase of my shock was my realization that it was not just gay men, but bourgeois men in general, for whom participation in the market in men was an entirely formative and enduring set of experiences and institutions. Not all these transactions occurred at the opera, it turned out; they also took place at sporting events and in corporate boardrooms. About this time there appeared an article in *Raritan* entitled, “Homophobia, Misogyny, and Capital: The Example of *Our Mutual Friend*,” by one Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1983), hitherto unknown to me, which affirmed and expanded my emerging sense that it was not only gay men, it was not even particularly gay men, who entered into market relations for and with each other and who executed their little dances on the slippery slope of rivalrous male-homosocial desire.

It now strikes me, looking back at these developments after having just read *The End of Capitalism*, that Sedgwick’s article of 1983 on Dickens and mine of 1987 on Alger both announce in their titles their engagement with theories of capitalism, and with its effects on sociosexual realms and their effects on it. Class, capital, and capitalism have not been significant terms in much queer work since (allowing for some notable exceptions). Over the ensuing decade, when a wave of AIDS activism has transformed queer intellectual practice, it has until the recent emergence of work like Gibson-Graham’s not seemed possible for many of us to conceive again of economic theory’s having much heuristic power for our work or thinking. The recent and current writing of Gibson-Graham and some of their colleagues on the complex and processual character of the dynamics of social class may, I hope, return queer theory to the unfinished business of thinking through class.

One thing I notice since reading Gibson-Graham as I reflect again on the market in men that I first perceived when I was coming out is that there is not much about it that looks like “capitalism,” even less like that shibboleth, “late capitalism.” Gibson-Graham’s courageous example in the chapter, “Hewers of Cake and Drawers of Tea,” emboldens

me to reclaim the term “feudal” to characterize many of these economies. The strong resistance to this term, which she writes about having experienced from audiences (Gibson-Graham 1996, 212–4), confirms my sense that the persistence of “feudal” characteristics in gender and other relations is a “hot” and, in many ways, unwelcome issue, not only in feminist theory, economics, and historiography but also in homologous areas of queer investigation—as in the relations I have described between younger and older men which, in Gibson-Graham’s terms, might be said to be governed not by late capitalism so much as by “a feudal class process . . . [occurring] under conditions of fealty and mutual obligation” (54 n. 8). Gibson-Graham’s recognition of constitutive “feudal” residues in contemporary gender and class relations is potentially full of significance, I believe, for a reevaluation of the ways gender, sexuality, and class inflect each other in same-sex as well as hetero social relations. Gibson-Graham’s retheorizations of the “feudal” help me think again about the persistence of what I have been thinking of as “archaic” elements in queer culture-making and social relations.

Since the work of Georg Simmel (1971), prostitution has been generally understood as having taken on many of the uncanny and supposedly specifically modern qualities of the money in which it is transacted. But perhaps we need to think more about the ways in which prostitutes, like many queers and many women, have, in Bruno Latour’s (1993) phrase, “never been modern.” We need also to note something of which we hardly need be reminded at this point: that “prostitution” is not one thing. In some times and places, as feminist historian Christine Stansell (1986) demonstrates, the practices that constitute it have been in many ways indistinguishable from the constitutive practices of working-class marriage.

The End of Capitalism (as we knew it) is a work that is as timely as it is welcome. I hope it betokens, as it reinaugurates, a renewal of interest in and concentration on cultural studies of capitalism and other economic systems—an interdisciplinary pursuit that has in some ways lagged since the mid-1980s. J. K. Gibson-Graham’s *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* can help us take up again this partially lapsed project of cultural studies of economics. I hope that readers of their book may want to acquaint or reacquaint themselves with such important predecessor texts for Gibson-Graham’s project as Jean-Christophe Agnew’s *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (1986); Richard Halpern’s *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (1991); and Monique Wittig’s 1989 essay, “On the Social Contract,” and her 1984 essay, “The Trojan Horse” (both collected in Wittig’s *The Straight Mind* [1992]). Understanding and responding to the dynamics of social class, within and beyond queer communities, has only become a more urgent matter in the years since these pioneering studies first appeared.

References

- Agnew, J.-C. 1986. *Worlds apart: The market and the theater in Anglo-American thought, 1550–1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Halpern, R. 1991. *The poetics of primitive accumulation: English Renaissance culture and the genealogy of capital*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kenner, H. 1975. *A homemade world*. New York: Knopf.
- Latour, B. 1993. *We have never been modern*. Trans. C. Porter. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Moon, M. 1987. Homosexual economies. Paper presented at 1st Annual National Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference, fall, at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Nackenoff, C. 1994. *The fictional republic: Horatio Alger and American political discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sedgwick, E. K. 1983. Homophobia, misogyny, and capital: The example of *Our mutual friend*. *Raritan* 2 (3): 126–51.
- Simmel, G. [1907] 1971. Prostitution. In *On individuality and social forms: Selected writings*, ed. D. N. Levine, 121–6. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Stansell, C. 1986. *City of women: Sex and class in New York, 1789–1860*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Warhol, A. 1989. *The Andy Warhol diaries*. Ed. P. Hackett. New York: Warner Books.
- Wittig, M. 1992. *The straight mind and other essays*. Boston: Beacon.

Toward an Anthropology of Class Discourses

David F. Ruccio

In thinking about the significance of *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* (Gibson-Graham 1996), I was reminded of two recent movies: Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* and *The Second Time*, directed by Mimo Calopresti. Loach's film amounts to a celebration of a small band of Trotskyist fighters who, misunderstood and attacked from all sides, alone carried the theoretically and politically correct banner during the Spanish Civil War. In my view, this film seems to represent the old verities: all we need to do is return to the unambiguous, clear lines set out by traditional Marxism in order to identify "the enemy" and carry on the battle. *The Second Time* is quite different. It focuses on the chance meeting, twenty years on, of a professor of business administration and his would-be Red Brigade assassin (the professor still carries the bullet in his head and his nemesis is on work-release from prison). The overall message of this film is that the certainties of the 1970s no longer hold—indeed, they should be summarily forgotten or abandoned—and that, today, no new way forward has emerged. The director seems to be saying, "I simply don't know!"

I sense the ubiquity of both these sentiments out there. Either we hold on to traditional Marxism (which one, however, would that be? and what do we do with those who refuse to go along?) or we have no clear way of effectively understanding, let alone changing, the world. *The End of Capitalism*, it seems to me, provides an alternative, a way out of this dilemma—which is why, when I reviewed the book for Blackwell, I called it both “provocative” and “optimistic.” Provocative, in the sense that there are good reasons to rethink traditional notions of capitalism, that monster which has served for many on the Left as the explanation for anything and everything that happens in the world. And optimistic, because there are all sorts of new ways, discursively and politically, to set about changing the world. It represents, therefore, a radical alternative to both Loach and Calopresti—and to those on the Left who hold to such views.

The goal of the book, on my reading, is to create new spaces of noncapitalist forms of economy and social life, spaces where noncapitalism can be imagined and where it can be put into practice. The problem is, the conceptions of capitalism that we on the Left carry around are just too big—too all-encompassing, omnipresent, unified, and powerful—to make this possible. Sure, they give us a clear map of the world, but they also make it impossible to do anything about it. It’s as if, during the course of analysis, we find the key to unlock all our troubles and then discover that the cause is so large and compelling that there’s nothing we can do to change our situation. That’s an impossible predicament for an individual, no less in their political outlook than in their personal life. However useful (or not) in the past, the conceptions of capitalism that create this effect are just no longer compelling.

Or better said, they aren’t compelling for *some* individuals and groups even when they may be for others. This is one of the challenges presented by the book: the kinds of visions (of what exists now or what might be brought into existence in some other time and place) that motivate some folks just don’t work for others. In other words, the *affective* relationship of some to the project of theorizing and participating in social change may not be (and probably is not) shared by others. Can’t we allow that, among the diverse band of Marxists and other left-wing thinkers and activists, some may be aroused and provoked by the kinds of arguments put forward by Sartre, others by Sen—and still others by Sade? What this means is that the space of political affect and desire can be rendered as fragmented and multiple rather than, as others have argued or seem too often to presume, unified and singular. The “dark” vision of the Frankfurt School (in which the entire world is engulfed by capitalist commodity production and exchange), not to mention particular forms of “anger” or “resentment” that are often seen and experienced on the Left, may inspire some but simply leave others cold. They want and need a different emotional relationship to politics. Therefore, one of the important issues suggested by *The End of Capitalism* is that the space of political affect has to be negotiated rather than assumed, talked about and analyzed instead of being flattened under the steamroller of a false universality (which is always, of course, “my” way of relating to politics which I project onto “you”).

So the strategy employed by Gibson-Graham is to rethink Capitalism, to make it smaller, more malleable and porous, less unified—in short, to discursively constitute capitalism such that it occupies qualitatively different spaces and, quantitatively, occupies less space in our Marxist imaginary. A good project, don't you think, for a geographer to undertake!

In these brief comments, I don't want to go through the strategy in detail, talking about all the individual chapters. (My advice is to buy the book. But beware: bookstores don't seem to know where to shelve it—sometimes placing it in women's studies, in other cases placing it in the business and economics section!) But I do want to mention what I think is remarkable about the way the author has gone about doing the work. On the one hand, she has found her way back into and through the thicket of the Marxian tradition, discovered and borrowed the more nondeterministic or anti-essentialist aspects of that tradition, and used the tools of class analysis to deconstruct “big” capitalism—by emphasizing the role of noncapitalist (communal, ancient, feudal, and other) class processes *and* by looking at what she calls capitalist distributive class processes which are related, but never reducible, to capitalist appropriation or exploitation of surplus labor. In this way, she takes the economic and social landscape that is often assumed to be uniformly capitalist (to be governed by the structural imperative and globalizing logic of capitalist class exploitation) and remaps it, allowing all sorts of noncapitalist and capitalist distributional processes to come to the fore (not by bringing the old dinosaurs back to life but by conjuring up all kinds of new, even fanciful animals—a Dr. Seuss approach to Marxism rather than that of Stephen Spielberg?).

She also reaches *outside* the Marxian tradition and builds on some of the more important moments of postmodernism, feminism, and queer theory. The questioning of oppositional hierarchies and the decentering of the subject, debates about the rape script, and the queering of the social “body” are all shown to be key moves in the attempt to rethink Capitalism and its effects. This is an unusual theoretical alliance—and one that speaks directly to some of the discussions currently taking place, and to some of the impasses that seem to have been reached in contemporary debates in critical social theory. I am thinking, in particular, of two.

One is signaled by Linda Nicholson and Steven Seidman's edited collection, *Social Postmodernism* (1995). Their book is relevant for two reasons. First, both editors write, in brief autobiographies in the introductory chapter, that they felt compelled to throw off the shackles imposed by Marxism in order to embrace the possibilities opened up by postmodernism. Second, the essays they've gathered together demonstrate that it is possible to think about the discursive and institutional construction of a wide variety of social (racial, ethnic, sexual, and so on) identities—yet class, aside from a few scant references, is largely ignored. Why the necessity to break from Marxism in order to benefit from the theoretical strategies and political perspectives offered by postmodernism? And why don't class identities get rethought and redeployed, alongside and in conjunction with other identities and subject positions, instead of being merely left behind? It seems to me that *The End of Capitalism* (as we

knew it) effectively demonstrates that it's possible to combine some of the key insights and tools of postmodernism (and nonessentialist traditions in feminism, queer theory, and elsewhere) and to combine them with elements of the Marxian tradition—not as a new, self-styled synthesis but as a fruitful engagement that opens up new ways of “theorizing around.”

The other contribution to which *The End of Capitalism* represents an effective response is Terry Eagleton's (1996) angry critique of postmodernism. Here, what I don't understand is the level of anger and disgust expressed by Eagleton and other Marxists toward postmodernism—which is blamed for everything wrong in the world today, from the rise of neofascist movements in the United States and Western Europe to the recent electoral successes of Hindu fundamentalists in India. For which the answer is to return to Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*! Now, I'm more a fan of the “early Marx” than perhaps my Althusserian orientation should allow, but what I can't fathom is the depth of hatred of postmodernism and the need to defend an “Enlightenment Marx.” Once again, this book represents an alternative: it's possible to incorporate the issues raised by postmodernism (concerning the role of discourse, the fragmentation of the subject, and the decentering of economic and social space) and, at the same time, to create an imaginary and strategy of class transformation.

The great merit of *The End of Capitalism* is to show that there are and can be different conceptions of capitalism—not only of the big Capitalism that we on the Left have long carried around but also of smaller capitalisms, different capitalisms, alongside which many forms of noncapitalism can be envisioned, created, and strengthened.

One of the problems, of course, is that opening up the discursive space for noncapitalism can unleash all kinds of new, not-necessarily-friendly monsters: forms of noncapitalism (such as ancient self-exploitation, feudal bondage, and so forth) that we might not want. The question is, how does this proliferation of noncapitalist class processes relate to the ostensible goal of Marxian theory, the fostering of more communal forms of production and social organization? My own view is that envisioning and devising class alternatives to capitalism, in whatever form, denaturalizes capitalism and creates the possibility of dreaming of and fabricating alternatives, including communal alternatives. In addition, it just might be the case, in a particular economic and social setting, that we would even prefer to set up or strengthen a noncommunal class process or a different capitalist process as against the prevalent forms of capitalism. It all depends.

Which leads me to a second concern: the project that is contained within the book touches directly on the thorny issue of how we choose our representations and strategies. Without formulating it as such, the author's answer to a wide variety of theoretical and political questions seems to be radically contingent. There is no “correct” representation of capitalism; it all depends on the effects—theoretical, political, and so on—of one conception versus another. For example, she sees traditional notions of capitalism as having negative consequences. At this point in time. For her. For the purpose of imagining and creating noncapitalism. Therefore, she has begun to investigate other options. At a different point in time, and from a different standpoint, she

might choose to argue the opposite—or move in still another direction. This is one of the lessons she seems to have learned from the two “partisan relativists” to whom the book is dedicated (Resnick and Wolff 1986), that the effects of discourse matter. Similarly, the question whether to see or intervene to create a particular form of noncapitalism, or to struggle over the distributive mechanisms of capitalism itself, depends. She doesn’t offer—and presumably would eschew—any universal answer to such a question. Any effective response requires a knowledge of the actual context and conditions of the relevant situation—in other words, a “concrete analysis of the concrete situation.” Rather than resting on a crude empiricism, this way of approaching the problem would appear to draw on the best legacy not only of Lenin but also of Gramsci and the “aleatory materialism” of Althusser (Callari and Ruccio 1996).

My final point relates to the way in which this attempt to create a space for new discourses of capitalism, especially new class discourses, raises a question about where such discourses might exist and how they may be being created and enacted before our very eyes. There seems to be a tendency on the part of Marxist intellectuals (but not only Marxist; see Amariglio and Ruccio [forthcoming]) to presume that popular, everyday discourses are engulfed by a kind of mystification or false consciousness and that their job is to root out and displace such “common senses” (except, of course, when they find some popular “confirmation” of what they’ve been saying all along). Here’s my question, then: to what extent might there exist everyday *class* discourses—of both capitalism and noncapitalism? Those may or may not be the same as academic discourses; indeed, they may have a logic all their own—their own discursive structures—which always already serve to create imaginaries of class transformation. If we look, we may find them in movies such as *Pretty Woman* and prime-time TV shows as well as in editorial columns and conversations around the dinner table and in bars. If so, then a new project emerges from *The End of Capitalism*, one that requires a more anthropological kind of investigation in order to recognize and negotiate these everyday economic and social discourses. We may find class discourses and forms of political affect that are quite different from existing academic ones—but interesting and innovative and worthy of our attention all the same. The existence of such everyday class discourses would mean that class is not as repressed in the United States and elsewhere as some of us may think. Indeed, such discourses may be alive and well in the social imaginary, even if “falsely” resolved, sublimated into “love conquers all” ascents of fire escapes and other Hollywood endings.

Descending from the academic tower, listening and looking as we walk the streets and enter the suburban malls below, we may encounter and learn to produce all kinds of new discourses of capitalism and imaginaries of noncapitalism. We may even learn to create for ourselves alternatives both to Loach and to Calopresti. J. K. Gibson-Graham, it seems, has already taken her first steps.

These comments were first presented at a session with the authors at the conference, Politics and Languages of Contemporary Marxism, sponsored by RETHINKING MARXISM and held 5–8 December 1996 at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

References

- Amariglio, J., and D. F. Ruccio. forthcoming. The transgressive knowledge of “ersatz economics.” In *Economic knowledges: Producers, consumers, consequences*, ed. R. Garnett. New York: Routledge.
- Callari, A., and D. F. Ruccio, eds. 1996. *Postmodern materialism and the future of Marxist theory: Essays in the Althusserian tradition*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Eagleton, T. 1996. *Illusions of postmodernism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nicholson, L., and S. Seidman, eds. 1995. *Social postmodernism: Beyond identity politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Resnick, S. A., and R. D. Wolff. 1986. *Knowledge and class: A Marxian critique of political economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Discourse and Culture in the Undoing of Economism and Capitalocentrism

Arturo Escobar

This book constitutes a creative and sustained effort at liberating perceptions of society and the economy from certain blinders imposed by questionable epistemological cum political habits associated with political economy. Drawing on various strands of antiessentialist thought, the author makes a powerful case for the existence of a pervasive capitalocentrism that ineluctably shapes and limits our understanding of society and our sense of political intervention. Her goal is clear: to liberate the perceptual field in order to make visible the manifold discourses of economic difference that either exist in people’s practices or that can be envisaged theoretically once capitalism is displaced from the epistemological centrality it has been accorded by our most cherished frameworks. The argument is eloquently and passionately made, and the book succeeds in initiating and advancing forcefully a long overdue conversation that has been hinted at in other fields but never developed as thoroughly as in this work. Theoretically sophisticated, the argument builds on recent trends in antiessentialism, poststructuralism, and feminist and queer theories with applications to political economy, gender studies, and geography.

The book’s form is somewhat unusual, as the author herself suggests at the end of the opening chapter, which provides the only clear-cut entrée to the argument. In keeping with the spirit of the theoretical posture that inspires it, the work resembles

more a hypertext than a linear narrative, resisting the logic it wants to dismantle (defined, one might say with Donna Haraway, as the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” that characterizes positivist epistemology; as she adds in her new book, the figure of hypertext should instead “incite an inquiry into which connections matter, why, and for whom” [1997, 128]). Chapters can thus be read in various sequences or clusters and the ideas will not be exactly the same, even if each path carves the same main argument from varying perspectives and degrees of nuance and detail. At first glance, the book can be said to have been inspired by (antiessentialist) Marxist fathers and poststructuralist mothers, but soon one realizes that there is no simple heterosexual lineage with identifiable progeny, but multiform partial products crafted out of unusual and original connections or by reworking main sources from somewhat marginal perspectives. Inspiring in its theoretical eclecticism, the book nevertheless is impressively coherent and systematic.

The overall argument of the book is of utmost scholarly and political importance today. Political economy seems to be at a stage best defined perhaps by Foucault as that moment in life “when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all” (1986, 8). Gibson-Graham engages in this exercise of freeing (Marxist) thought from what silently thinks it and, like Foucault’s analysis of sexuality, her journey rejuvenates our thought and our relationship to ourselves.

To be sure, charges of economism, reductionism, universalism, rationalism, and productionism in political economy (Marxist and otherwise) are by no means new. Arguments that resemble Gibson-Graham’s include Baudrillard’s (1975) critique of the code of signification of Marxism in the concept of production, historian William Reddy’s (1987) conceptualization of market culture and exchange, Ranajit Guha’s (1989) notion of capitalism and imperialism as characterized by “dominance without hegemony,” Jean and John Comaroff’s (1991) rethinking of hegemony, and the efforts of those associated with the volume *The Foucault Effect* (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991). Such work also advocates removal of the economy from the centrality it has been accorded in the history of modernity by developing a broader frame to which the market and the economy can be referred. Gibson-Graham, however, makes the most cogent argument for “going on looking and reflecting” on society and the economy from the bowels of political economy itself.

The task of simultaneously making visible and deconstructing capitalocentrism is advanced steadily in successive chapters from various angles: antiessentialism, class theory, identity, globalization, and post-Fordism. Along the way we are treated to finely tuned theoretical discussions (from Laclau and Mouffe to feminist economics and theories of space), unprecedented connections (for instance, between recent feminist takes on rape and globalocentrism), and glimpses of how the world might look were we to abandon our obsolete theoretical lenses. The corollary is that we need to dare to think with feminists that change is possible by giving up the idea, sustained by Marxists, that what “the revolution” is called upon to destroy is this impossibly large monster of an

all-embracing capitalism. Capitalocentrism is real, and it hampers our political practice. To dismantle it has similarly powerful practical consequences.

While the volume, predictably, is less successful in illuminating the nature of the discourses of economic difference with which the author wants to populate the firmament of political economy, throughout the book we get concrete ideas about economic difference in general and noncapitalism in particular. Based on the redefinition of class articulated by Resnick and Wolff (1987), which highlights the processes of appropriation and distribution of surplus labor, noncapitalism is shown to exist in many domains, from the household and collective economies to those of immigrants, the subsistence economies of many rural societies in the Third World, and even in many market transactions. It will be the task of subsequent work(s) to theorize more fully both economic difference in general and noncapitalism in particular based on what the author has already accomplished in this book.

To conclude, I would like to offer a few thoughts on this last issue by referring first to the relation between two parallel projects that are not clearly distinguished in the book—that of deconstructing capitalocentrism and that of displacing the economy—and by suggesting other areas where noncapitalism could be fruitfully explored. While the book's main concern is to develop an antiessentialist approach to capitalism, particularly through the elaboration of a discourse of class difference, it also addresses the question of the reification of the economy as a true descriptor of reality (a true entity "in the real world") and whether this discursive operation itself can be radically revised. In repeated instances (Gibson-Graham 1996, 39, 97, 119, 149) the author refers to the need to defamiliarize the economy, to move away from theorizing society as centered upon economy, and to envision the economy as an overdetermined social location rather than as an empirical domain of action. The relation between this seemingly larger project and that of debunking capitalocentrism is not made apparent. To what extent, in displacing capitalocentrism, are we also displacing the economy as an organizing principle of social life? In my mind, decentering the economy entails a larger project of critique of modernity, to the extent that the economy is one of the foundational features of modernity. Polanyi's (1957) protoanti-essentialism—his relational system of different formal manifestations of the economy that nevertheless retains the idea of an essential, substantive economic stratum—is a point of departure for this exercise, which would also have to incorporate insights from Foucault's (1973) epistemic analysis (modernity as anchored in the analytic of scarcity and production set up by the invention of the economy) and newer interpretations, such as those mentioned above (Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991, especially the chapter by Procacci). The critique of capitalocentrism provides another necessary vantage point for this project.

Second, it is also clear to this reviewer that the book has a lot to contribute to, and could have benefited from, works in economic and ecological anthropology that also highlight issues of economy and economism. In *Conversations in Colombia: The Domestic Economy in Life and Text*, Gudeman and Rivera elegantly unveil the existence of discourses and practices of economic difference in the daily lives of Andean

peasants. Noncapitalist market and subsistence practices are found to be imbricated with capitalist ones in a longstanding conversation among economic forms and rationalities. Similarly, ecological anthropologists have become increasingly eloquent at documenting ethnographically what could be called practices of ecological difference that exhibit clear features of noncapitalism. (The best example of this trend is the collection edited by Descola and Pálsson [1996].)

This is to say as well that “culture” is a crucial domain in which to advance as much the theorization of noncapitalism as the critique of capitalocentrism. While culture as such is largely absent from the Gibson-Graham volume, the book offers essential lessons for those wishing to revision the economy and ecology from anti-essentialist cultural perspectives. One would hope that the dialogue among the various manifestations of antiessentialist thought (in political, economic, cultural, and ecological theory) will commence in earnest. This courageous book signals the way and offers many elements for beginning the journey. As I have suggested elsewhere (see Escobar 1997), in the long run, reconstructing both our frameworks and the world will require multiple collective efforts of weaving together practices of ecological, cultural, and economic difference for the production of other societies, natures, and economies. This task could be best advanced in conjunction with the collective struggles of social movements throughout the world.

References

- Baudrillard, J. 1975. *The mirror of production*. Trans. M. Poster. St. Louis: Telos Press.
- Burchell, G., C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds. 1991. *The Foucault effect*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Comaroff, J., and J. Comaroff. 1991. *Of revelation and revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Descola, P., and G. Pálsson, eds. 1996. *Nature and society: Anthropological perspectives*. New York: Routledge.
- Escobar, A. 1997. Cultural politics and biological diversity: State, capital, and social movements in the Pacific coast of Colombia. In *The politics of culture in the shadow of capital*, ed. L. Lowe and D. Lloyd, 201–26. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Foucault, M. 1973. *The order of things*. New York: Vintage Books.
- . 1986. *The use of pleasure*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Guha, R. 1989. Dominance without hegemony and its historiography. In *Subaltern studies*, vol. 6, ed. R. Guha, 210–309. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Gudeman, S., and A. Rivera. 1990. *Conversations in Colombia: The domestic economy in life and text*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Haraway, D. 1997. *Modest_Witness@Second.Millennium.FemaleMan__Meets__Oncomouse*. New York: Routledge.
- Polanyi, K. 1957. *The great transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Reddy, W. 1987. *Money and liberty in modern Europe*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Resnick, S., and R. Wolff. 1986. *Knowledge and class: A Marxian critique of political economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Capitalism Goes the “Full Monty”

J. K. Gibson-Graham

The recent box office success of the *The Full Monty* has been intriguing and heartening for me since it is, without a doubt, the film version of *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it)* . . . at least that was the realization that came over me as I viewed it with shock and amazement the first time around and with increasing recognition the second and third. *The Full Monty* is a film about capitalism and deindustrialization; masculinity, identity, sexuality; political affect and collective endeavor; it is about movement and becoming—many of the themes addressed in *The End of Capitalism* (Gibson-Graham 1996). As readers of *RETHINKING MARXISM* may perhaps be more familiar with *The Full Monty* than with a book that is, after all, yet to become a bestseller, I thought I might use this film rendition as a point of reference in responding to the very thoughtful and generous commentaries offered by Michael Moon, David Ruccio, and Arturo Escobar.

All three commentators recognize that my goal is to queer the Capitalist Economy and contribute to reshaping our subjective relationship to things “economic.” They appreciate that by representing an already existing environment of economic diversity in which independent, feudal, slave, communal, capitalist, and other class processes interact, we begin to displace the monster of Capitalism and create a space for imagining and enacting new forms of economy. What they have also creatively suggested are some exciting ways that a language of class might be extended into new fields or developed in different directions.

Ruccio draws attention to the proliferation of everyday class discourses in contemporary film and the opportunities they offer for invigorating a different (post-modern) politics of class. Escobar highlights existing representations of economic difference within ecological, economic, and cultural anthropology that could be used in thinking about noncapitalist activities outside the confines of capitalocentrism. And Moon, prompted to revisit his own analyses of “homosexual economies” in nineteenth-century American literature, draws attention to the rich connections between sexuality, queer identity, social mobility, and class. In responding to these suggestive comments I am encouraged by Ruccio to draw upon *The Full Monty* to explore the issues of queer identity, political affect, and noncapitalist practices that were raised in *The End of Capitalism* and picked up by the three commentators.

In the opening scenes of *The Full Monty* a group of retrenched steelworkers lament their fate—that of economic extinction. Interestingly it is not their identity as steelworkers that they see themselves as losing but their identity as “men.” Says one bloke, “A few years and men won’t exist—we’ll be extinct, obsolete, dinosaurs, yesterday’s news.” This co-implication of economic, gender, and even sexual iden-

tities is echoed in a comment made by the exasperated wife of one of the men: “He’s given up—work, me, everything!” Not merely unemployed, the men are impotent and politically immobilized. *The Full Monty* illustrates the overdetermination of class identity, masculinity, and heterosexuality and raises questions about the style of politics appropriate to a “postindustrial” context in which the old dichotomies that stabilized class, gender, and sexual identities appear to be dissolving.

In a context of deindustrialization and the destruction of established life styles and identities it is easy to feel resentment, outrage, and nostalgia. Such are the emotions aroused by another recent British film success, *Brassed Off*, which portrays a struggle to keep a colliery band together in the wake of a mine closure. For me this film reeks of modernist political affect. It foregrounds the familiar left emotions of class hostility, victimized self-regard, and pure animus in the face of a powerful enemy. It expresses a desire for fundamental redress as well as the bitterness, resignation, and guilt that accompany the thwarting of that desire, while fashioning a nevertheless entertaining tale of struggle.

The social interactions between characters in the film are never far from the edge of violence as bounded territories of belonging (to us or them) are momentarily transgressed. Love across the management/worker divide is vigilantly policed; female membership in the all-male band is allowed only after the woman flügelhorn player undergoes ritual (humorous) humiliation and initiation; the working and politically active wives are shunned by their demoralized and soon to be unemployed husbands; and the key relationship between father and son is maintained only through an embarrassing infantilization of the grown son. In the face of major changes the characters in this film opt for stasis: reasserting old subject positions, voicing empty demands for solidarity, and eliciting righteous indignation from the viewer. This representation of political powerlessness relieved only by outbursts of bombastic and largely symbolic resistance (such as playing the William Tell Overture at Albert Hall as the miners accept their retrenchment payouts) is replicated in countless contemporary struggles of the left (against privatization of state services, for example, or the inroads of globalization). What is intriguing is our continuing desire for this kind of narrative, the subject positions it constructs, and the familiar political emotions it arouses.

In stark contrast, the refreshingly queer identities forged in *The Full Monty* offer a valuing of different selves and new political affiliations. In this portrayal of a community a year or so on from a major plant closure, the old antagonisms no longer seem relevant. Workers *and* managers are unemployed; as one worker comments to his old foreman, “You’re just like the rest of us . . . crap.” Women have jobs and the men are economically dependent on *them*. The women go out drinking en masse and form raucous audiences for imported male strip shows while the men aimlessly kick footballs, shoplift, and retreat into a lost adolescence. The son in this film acts as moral judge of and then banker to his father. The world, it seems, has been turned upside down.

The ramifications of job loss are significant for these men but they are unable to draw sustenance from old models of resistance-style politics. In the face of a culture

of consumerism, sexual and gender expectations, idealized body images, and economic self-valuation, they make tentative efforts to reshape themselves. Individualistic it may seem, but in the process of rehearsing their own striptease, a communal subjectivity emerges built upon mutual recognition and support. Part of the delight of *The Full Monty* comes from watching the characters move out of relations of misrecognition—if not hatred—structured by the management/worker, man/woman, straight/gay divides, into relations where the relief and joy of recognizing otherness promote a revaluing of self. As they work together to refashion themselves as strippers the film traces a difficult process of becoming: new masculine selves emerge, ones that are physically aware, sexually diverse, and politically open. *The Full Monty* humorously but powerfully illustrates the mutual constitution and enforcement of binarized gender, class, and sexual identities and highlights how the destruction (or liberation) of economic identity might break the chain of equivalences (male/worker/heterosexual) that has hitherto served to impede the validation of queer identities, postmodern politics, and economic possibilities.

In *The End of Capitalism* I hinted at different narratives of class transformation, new avenues for class politics, and an expanded range of class emotions. Constructing communal class relations in households, struggling with capitalist enterprises to exact new surplus distributions, and engaging in noncapitalist commodity production (as worker collectives or self-employed workers in nonexploitative class relations)—all are unscripted processes of change that yield an array of social and affective possibilities. And even the experience of exploitation may not necessarily be freighted with negative affect. In *The Full Monty* it is clear that the women, recently employed in service-sector jobs, are enjoying their newfound economic independence, albeit as wage laborers, and their involvement in a capitalist class process is allowing them to construct more assertive gender identities and to reshape traditionally constrained sexual identities. Michael Moon points to the social mobility and cultural space offered to gay boys who enter into what might be represented as feudal class relationships with older daddies. These two thumbnail sketches provide a glimpse of the varied economic contexts in which novel or “queer” identities and social possibilities are able to flourish.

A common reaction to the end of *The Full Monty* is a feeling of regret that the climactic one-night-stand striptease is so economically inconsequential. Haunting the exuberance and daring of that wild last moment when Gaz, Dave, and their troupe bump and grind to the words “I believe in miracles” is the realization that the few hundred pounds they will earn from the performance will not be enough to sustain them in the face of widespread regional deindustrialization and long-term unemployment. Yet this dampening summation ignores or devalues what has “become” through their performance: a space where straight and gay, black and white, fat and thin, gorgeous and plain, ex-workers and ex-managers, fathers, sons, husbands, and lovers can act together to build a communal economic identity based upon self-value and identification across difference. Where this brief experience of pleasure in an alternative economic practice will lead is anyone’s guess.

What is clear is that the evaluative response that places such an experiment in the “not good enough” box is inherently conservative and capitalocentric. It is the form of response I often encounter in relation to the research I am pursuing in the wake of *The End of Capitalism*. My attempts to describe already existing examples of non-capitalist class processes and economic practices (whether sophisticated and long-standing cases such as that of the Mondragón Cooperative Corporation in the Basque region of Spain, or unknown and recent cases such as a collective of self-employed, farm-based producers in the South Gippsland region of Australia) are met with the frequent reaction that these “experiments” are idiosyncratic, local, small, not independent of insidious market forces, not truly communal, perhaps short-lived or not organized by unions. In the hierarchical valuing system of left economism, the positive presences of nonexploitative class processes (involving communal and self-appropriation of surplus) are easily dismissed or underestimated. Lurking behind this devaluation is the “realistic” assessment that these economic practices do not constitute *the* ground from which a thoroughgoing transformation of the capitalist system might be mounted.

In my current community-based research I am engaged in a series of conversations about economic difference, noncapitalist practices, and alternative regional development paths with people in a number of regions in the United States and Australia where films like *The Full Monty* and *Brassed Off* could easily have been filmed. A recent videoconference organized as part of this research project involved a “performance” by people from organizations where new economic relations are being forged. The eleven projects showcased prioritize social and environmental values over profits; they mobilize the untapped and undervalued resources of the community; and they build partnerships across difference. Using the video facilities of regional universities in three Australian states, these representatives “stripped” for each other in an afternoon of show and tell and began to see their own and each other’s organizations in a new light.

A self-named jack-of-all-trades explained how an organization called WoodWorx enables retrenched electricity workers and unemployed youth to mill unwanted timber (access to which is granted by the local logging and paper manufacturing multinational) and to make beautiful outdoor furniture in a public access woodworking shop. A community worker spoke about the Fig Tree Community Garden where those serving out community service orders, elderly and disabled people, kindergarten kids, and interested local residents have created such a productive environment that they are now starting to market their garden produce. A representative of Home Paddock Inc. explained how women on marginal farms are using their household skills to create new products with market value and have formed a cooperative to support their independent activities. An executive from a regionally dominant capitalist enterprise discussed the financial assistance it was providing to its soon to be retrenched workers, allowing them to retrain in occupations in which they might become self-employed.

What emerged from this event was ample evidence of the extent and variety of economic practices that are being enacted in communities and regions. What also

occurred was the beginning of a conversation between regions that are often pitted against each other in the race for new opportunities for “mainstream” economic development. What was patently evident was that understandings of economic difference and even of noncapitalism *do* exist, but they are likely to be voiced in terms of community building and environmental sustainability—that is, as “noneconomic” and therefore marginal to the “mainstream economy.” In the process of stripping in public, the participating organizations came out in a new way and began to revalue themselves as *economically* innovative and politically powerful.

As Ruccio, Moon, and Escobar suggest, there is vast scope for a kind of ethnographic investigation into the everyday discourses and class practices of noncapitalism. The project of queering the identity of local economies that has grown out of *The End of Capitalism* aims to encourage a different (noncapitalocentric) language of economy to emerge.¹ By providing performance spaces for economic difference, such as the videoconference, the project hopes to make the practices of economic diversity more visible, self-aware, and “real.” And while the outcomes of our striptease/show and tell cannot be predicted, visions of community economies have begun to emerge and economic communities have started to form.² Where this all might lead is anyone’s guess.

References

- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

1. The more theoretically oriented project of disentangling representations of the market and commodification from capitalism and of complicating and acculturating market relations is already well advanced in economic anthropology and cultural history as Escobar and Moon have pointed out. The readings suggested by all the commentators will be particularly useful in the task of rethinking the economy.

2. For more information about the research project introduced here, contact The Community Economies Project c/o Julie Graham, Department of Geosciences, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003 USA or c/o Jenny Cameron, School of Public Policy, Monash University, PO Box 197, Caulfield East, VIC 3145 AUSTRALIA.