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Invisible Leviathan: Speculations on Marx, Spivak, and the Question of Value

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Any really "loving" political practice must fall a prey to its own critique.
—Spivak, "The Practical Politics of the Open End"

"Marxism," as Louis Althusser correctly observed, "has in its history passed through a long series of crises and transformations" (1979, 237). However, if it is to survive as a living intellectual and political force into the twenty-first century, then its practitioners must respond in particularly creative ways to the present "crisis of Marxism." For the crisis is an especially acute one. I say this for two reasons. First, perhaps more than at any time during this century Marxism has succumbed to an ebullient Right enjoying an unprecedented ideological hegemony. Second, this defeat by the Right has been exacerbated by Marxism's current unpopularity on the Left. Regarded as essentialist, foundationalist, and totalizing—in short, as too "modern"—Marxism's indifference toward and/or effacement of "otherness" and "difference" has been meticulously exposed by postmodern, poststructuralist, and postcolonial critics.

Thus pressed on two sides, contemporary Marxists find themselves in an acute dilemma. On the one hand, the relevance of Marx's critique of political economy has in many respects never been greater. The gulf between the Right's ideological obfuscations ("the end of history," the triumph of liberal democracy, the beneficence of the "invisible hand," the sanctity of possessive individualism, and so on) and the reality of spreading poverty and intensified uneven development demands an immanent critique in which an explanatory-diagnostic account of the present conjuncture

is conjoined with a sober anticipatory-utopian reading of the possibilities for progressive change. On the other hand, if Marxists are to "reclaim reality" (to borrow Bhaskar's [1989] felicitous phrase), then they must deploy the very same claims to truthfulness, comprehensiveness, and certainty that the Right has so effectively used both to conceal the violent realities of a capitalist world economy and to prosecute its own counterrevolutionary case. In short, Marxism (as Marx himself realized over a century ago) will simply not be able to win back the hearts and minds of ordinary people if its cognitive claims are not based on good economic and social "science." The problem is that such a strategic reversion to its "modern" architectonics threatens to reinstall all the closures and exclusions that have exposed Marxism to so much criticism from its erstwhile comrades on the Left.

Symptomatic of the difficulties of fashioning a Marxism supple enough to operate simultaneously on these two fronts is the inadequacy of many of the Marxisms presently proffered as responses to the current "crisis." On the one side, a number of what we might call "modern" Marxists working in the fields of economic theory and the history and philosophy of economic thought have bravely stuck to their guns and kept the light of classical Marxism burning through the dark days of the 1980s and 1990s. Among them one might count figures such as Chris Arthur, Alex Callinicos, Guglielmo Carchedi, Michael Eldred, Ben Fine, Norman Geras, Lawrence Harris, David Harvey, Ian Hunt, Joseph McCarney, Fred Moseley, Patrick Murray, Bertell Ollman, Geert Reuten, Derek Sayer, Tom Sekine, Ali Shamsavari, Tony Smith, Michael Williams, and Ellen Meiksins Wood. This is, of course, a heteroclitite list and I do not mean to imply any absolute identity among these authors. But what they do share, for all their differences, is a strong belief in the coherence and continued relevance of Marx's *oeuvre* in something like its original form. On the other side, a number of what might be called "postmodern" Marxists have sought to open up historical materialism in the direction of otherness and difference in order to accommodate the insights of postmodern, poststructuralist, and postcolonial critics. Most notable here has been the "post-Marxist" work inspired by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and the "antiessentialist Marxism" of Resnick and Wolff (1987), which present historical materialism as a nonessentialist, nonfoundationalist, and nontotalistic critique of political economy. The strengths of each camp are the weaknesses of the other, and the mutual suspicion between "modern" and "postmodern" Marxists has been manifested in a series of well-known and fractious debates in which advocates on each side have been vilified by their antagonists. Modern Marxists argue that critique must be grounded in a coherent and systematic theory of political economy, while postmodern Marxists argue that such an orthodox approach does violence to the overdetermined complexities of any social formation. Conversely, where postmodern Marxists creatively open up the borders and soften the hard edges of Marxism, modern Marxists argue that this undermines the scientific rigor necessary for theory to function effectively as critique.

We seem here to arrive at something of an impasse or grand either/or. *Either* critique must rest on firm ontological and epistemological foundations, even though

such an absolute grounding is strictly impossible *or* critique must become honest about its partiality and precariousness but thereby relinquish the foundationalism that has allowed it to function so effectively in the past. These are, I think, debilitating alternatives. Indeed, to concede that they exhaust the current available options for any revived historical materialism arguably amounts to an admission of the intractability of the contemporary crisis of Marxism. For this reason it seems to me vital to develop a "third way" between what Richard Bernstein aptly describes as "the Scylla of 'groundless critique' and the Charybdis of rationally grounded critique that 'rests' on illusory foundations" (1993, 8) if Marxism is to move forward creatively into the twenty-first century. If this is possible, then the phrase "the crisis of Marxism" can, as Althusser argued, be given "a completely different sense from collapse and death." Instead we can say: "At last the crisis of Marxism has exploded! At last it is in full view! At last something can be liberated by this crisis and in this crisis" (1979, 237).

In the spirit of these stirring words, this paper aims to advance the project of finding a "third way" for Marxism in which both modern and postmodern elements can be brought into a tense but productive conjunction. This both/and approach builds on the previous works of Parker (1985, forthcoming), Amariglio and Callari (1989), Diskin and Sandler (1993), Keenan (1993), and Garnett (1995). These authors, rather than seeking to reduce Marxism to one or another side of a putative modern-postmodern divide, instead emphasise and embrace the *ambivalences* of Marx's project. By elucidating the mutually constitutive interplay of modern and postmodern elements in Marx's *oeuvre*, this approach initiates what Garnett calls "a new genre of . . . Marxist criticism in which texts are judged not simply as more or less (post)modern but as modern/postmodern in particular ways" (1995, 43) and, we might add, with particular effects.

The specific focus of my concern is Marx's theory of labor value. Celebrated by its devotees as a brilliant insight into the foundations of the capitalist mode of production and dismissed by its detractors on both Right and Left as logically flawed and historically inaccurate, the "labor theory of value" is still the focus of much debate within and outside the Marxist fold (see, for instance, Mohun 1996). It is not my intention to reconstruct that complex debate here. Instead, I take it as axiomatic that Marx's value theory offers an indispensable basis for any contemporary Marxism. The key question, however, is in what *modality* contemporary Marxists should read value. Value theory is routinely regarded as among the most central and most "modern" parts of Marx's theoretical corpus, especially as it is articulated in *Capital*, volume 1, where Marx makes such grandiose reference to the "luminous summits of science." There, explicated through a materialist inversion of Hegelian dialectical logic, value theory is often considered the site of a foundationalism in which exploited human labor (*Homo faber*) is the originary subject of a system (totality) which it both makes and becomes subject to as a force standing over against it. However, this is not the only way in which value theory can be read. I use the textual metaphor deliberately because I think Althusser and Balibar (1970) were right to argue that how one *reads* Marx makes all the difference in the world to what *kind* of Marxism one extracts from his texts.

With this in mind, the burden of this essay is to show that Marx's value theory, as explicated in *Capital*, volume 1, can be read as a constellation of both modern and postmodern elements, each enabling and disabling the other. Highlighting the ambivalence of value theory in this way, I hope to demonstrate that it can be deployed for a powerful critique of political economy and simultaneously brought into a form of theoretical crisis. Specifically, I focus on the value form (or what is usually considered the "qualitative" or social relational aspect of value theory). I do so not because I think "quantitative" concerns unimportant but because by illuminating the connective imperative between the content and form of capitalist social relations it is Marx's form considerations that give value theory its fundamental class character and its deep critical and normative coloration.

As a vehicle for my argument I begin with an appreciative critique of economist Murray Smith's important new book *Invisible Leviathan: The Marxist Critique of Market Despotism beyond Postmodernism* (1994a). I do so for two reasons. First, Smith's trenchant argument is based on a resolutely "modern" reading of Marx which places him in the company of those who still seek to defend the integrity and continued relevance of the classical project. Second, Smith uses a "fundamentalist" understanding of value theory to offer (as the title of his book suggests) a critique of both the contemporary Right and those of a postmodern/poststructuralist bent on the Left. *Invisible Leviathan* is thus intended to work simultaneously on the two fronts I identified above. Consequently, it offers a particularly clear and forthright example of what intellectual and political resources a "modern" Marxism can offer us at the end of the twentieth century.

These resources, I argue, are at once indispensable and vulnerable. On the one side, Smith's project of disclosing "Leviathan" (i.e., capitalism) turns on an ontological conception of value as a ghostly concrete abstraction which, when defetishized, makes critically visible the global connections obscured by the "market theories," as he pejoratively calls them (various neoclassical and neoinstitutional frameworks), which have become the reigning economic orthodoxy of our times (Smith 1994a, 2). This "envisioning of the economy" through value is, I argue, an essential epistemological move because it reaffirms *vision* as a key faculty for Marxist economic theory at a time when the Right has so effectively hidden the exploitative and despotic social relations of global capitalism from view. If Marxism is to reclaim reality from the Right then it must, I suggest, use this visualizing "power" of theory to show critically that the world is structured in *this* way rather than *that*. On the other side, however, I also suggest that Smith's valuable attempt to make "Leviathan" visible is in the end compromised by the modality of theoretical envisioning he deploys. In a characteristically "modern" gesture, Smith's is an omniscient, exorbitant opticality which seeks to grasp the social whole (*sic*) in all its dimensions through a particularly reductive reading of the value form. Furthermore, Smith (232–37) takes an unremittingly negative attitude toward those discourses—or what he regards as latter-day versions of unreason—that can arguably be used to render his theoretical vision, and the conception of value underpinning it, more supple: postmodernism and post-

structuralism. This is not to say we should endorse everything that comes under these two labels (or, more recently, the label of postcolonialism), but it is to say that knee-jerk rejections of the sort in which Smith indulges bespeak a defensive narrow-mindedness that is, I think, characteristic of contemporary "modern" Marxism more generally.

In the second part of the essay I therefore turn to a different, more reflexive reading of the value form: that offered by feminist cultural critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Although noted for her outstanding contributions to poststructuralist and postcolonial thinking, she has also articulated a persistent concern to rethink Marx, particularly his theory of labor value (Spivak 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1990a, 1990b, 1994, 1995). This marks her out as an unusual and distinctive figure, since most of those working in the fields of poststructuralism and postcolonialism are wary of, or even opposed to, any kind of Marxist theory. For this reason one might reasonably expect to find a number of examinations of Spivak's Marxism in the critical literature. Surprisingly, however, this is not the case, and we still await a thoroughgoing elucidation of Spivak's scattered speculations on Marx and the question of value. For this reason my consideration of Spivak is a modest and provisional attempt to render the nature and implications of those speculations somewhat clearer.

As I show, Spivak's stress on reading and her persistent use of *textual* rather than just visual metaphors is both deliberate and important. For if Smith is right that theoretical envisioning is absolutely essential for a Marxist critique of capitalism, then Spivak's speculations show how it must also be inflected by what I will call value's "textuality." This does not mean that value is simply a concept in a book, but it does mean that it cannot be seen *simply* to reside in some "extradiscursive" ontological realm where theory can then innocently map it. Rather, value as an object of thought is for Spivak as much constituted or brought into presence by theory as it is constitutive of it. Here her notion of textuality becomes important because it implies that, far from being a discrete entity with a pristine ontological existence, value is necessarily approached through theoretical lenses that suture it in particular ways and thus keep at bay the *heterogeneity* intrinsic to theory's textuality.¹ This, I argue, provides an effective counterpoint to Smith's goal of making "Leviathan" visible, for Spivak's interest in the textuality of value is not antiocular but, more subtly, implies that bringing certain things into view depends on the *active displacement* and marginalization of other things to which they are connected. In particular, her reading of value as a *catachresis*—that is, something that has no adequate literal referent—offers a strategic position from which the value concept can be deployed for a critique of global political economy and at the same time rendered radically unstable. While this may appear to oppose the position of Smith and like-minded modern Marxists, I suggest instead that it teases out a both/and logic already immanent, but rarely registered, in their readings of value. My conclusion is that by requiring us to rethink both the nature

1. The term "suture" has a number of different meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Here it signifies the imperfect absence of a former identity or relation, imperfect because some trace of that identity/relation is still apparent, as when a scar marks the site of surgery.

of value as a ghostly global abstraction and the nature of its origin ("living labor"), Spivak's speculations open up the possibility of an ambivalent modern/postmodern Marxism which can retain its critical force without degenerating into an arrogant and arrogating metatheory that displaces other voices, lives, and histories.

The Value of the Value Form: Production and Real Abstraction

Abstract wealth, value, money, hence abstract labour, develop in the measure that concrete labour becomes a totality of different modes of labour embracing the world market.

—Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*

At the heart of Smith's critique is a particular rereading of Marx's value theory. I say "rereading" because Smith engages critically with over a century of Marxist and Marxisant thinking about value in which, so he argues, the logic, power, and originality of Marx's value theory have been progressively diluted and distorted. Abjuring the interpretation of the "neo-Ricardian" school, his distinctive contribution to the value debate is to draw critically upon the insights of what he calls the "neo-orthodox" school (after, for example, Diane Elson) and especially the "fundamentalist" school (after, for example, Anwar Shaikh) in order to restore the original unity of the qualitative and quantitative aspects of Marx's value analysis. This is a formidable achievement, and Smith is to be congratulated for the rigor with which he has tried to demonstrate the probity and distinctiveness of Marx's original position.

An overall assessment of Smith's comprehensive rereading of value is beyond my competence here. In what follows, therefore, I want to limit my attention to Smith's conception of the value form and its vital role in enabling his disclosure of global "Leviathan." While this risks doing violence to the integrity of his argument, it does, I think, open a valuable window onto its "modern" cognitive and normative dimensions. Smith's most original value form arguments are largely parasitic on others, but no less important for that. They amount to two theses. First, value originates unequivocally in the realm of *production* as the creation of *living labor*. Second, value as a social abstraction has an emphatically *ontological* status that needs to be recognized. Both claims are deceptively familiar, so in this section I will try to indicate why Smith thinks them distinctive. But in order to do this it is first necessary to spell out Smith's more general ontological and epistemological commitments as well as his basic ontological conception of value as a virtual dimension whose forms of appearance dissimulate its real nature and content.

Real Abstractions and Thought Abstractions

Smith's is a "no-nonsense" brand of Marxism which owes its cognitive appeal to the particularly confident link it posits between "knowledge" (his theory) and the

"real" (capitalism). *Ontologically* that reality is understood through what Bertell Ollman called a "philosophy of internal relations" (1971, 26). Here Smith emphasizes (after Ollman, as well as Rubin 1990) that Marx's relationalism, inherited from Hegel, implies that each "part" of capitalism internalizes, as part of what it is, its relations with all other aspects of capitalism (1994a, 52). The parts therefore cannot be isolated in the manner of analytical thought precisely because their relations with other parts are so important to what they are.² But *epistemologically* Smith insists that this view of capitalism does not commit him to a "reflectionism" where thought simply mimics the real (i.e., the absolute nonautonomy of thought, or what Roy Bhaskar [1989, 157–58] terms the "ontic fallacy"): this, he avers, can only lead to the dogma of "dialmat" (i.e., dialectical materialism). Neither, Smith claims, does this aversion to crude mimeticism imply, conversely, that knowledge makes its object (i.e., the absolute autonomy of thought, or "epistemic fallacy" [1994a, 13]): this, he argues, can only lead to equally dogmatic brands of social constructionism (121). Instead, for him Marx's is a sophisticated procedure whereby thought, through increasingly "determinate thought abstractions," *mediates* the real.³ In other words, according to Smith, Marx viewed knowledge (or what Bhaskar [1989, 68] calls the "transitive dimension") as being capable of generating real insights about the world (what Bhaskar calls the "intransitive dimension" [127]), while being both fallible and partial and always *nonidentical* with the world.⁴

Here, then, Smith suggests that Marx is able to do justice to the *specificity of theory* as a "product of a thinking head" (Marx's words), *without* severing it from the material world. As important, it is precisely this specific "labor of thought," as Smith calls it, that for him also actively *permits that world to be seen* (1994a, 121). Theory thus becomes an indispensable moment of critical practice in Smith's Marxism: it is precisely *because* reality (like value) does not simply "disclose" its relations for all to see that the labor of theory is necessary to reconstruct it in thought. In short, then, Smith claims that Marx's subtle epistemology enables him to claim a particularly intimate connection between thought and the real—thought that, to quote Smith, "takes shape according to the specificity of its objects themselves"—without it falling into the reflectionism that "postmodernists" like Richard Rorty detect in so much "modern" theory (1994a, 121; Rorty 1979). Here Smith feels he is able to offer what

2. Both Ollman (1971, 1993) and Rubin (1990) are clear about the Hegelian heritage of Marx's relationalism. See also Carol Gould (1978) and Kevin Brien (1987). Indeed, Smith (1994a, chap. 11) contrasts Marx's Hegel-inspired relationalism to the antinomies of postmodern thought which, he argues, ideologically sever the related and which reflect a resurgent Kantianism in contemporary theory. In this he is not alone: Christopher Norris (1990), for example, has offered insightful analyses of Jean-François Lyotard's problematical Kantianism.

3. Patrick Murray (1988, chap. 10) offers perhaps the clearest available account of "determinate" and "general" thought-abstractions.

4. H. T. Wilson captures this position well: "The question of thought's authority therefore compels us to come to terms with what it must be relative to reality, once we have acknowledged that it is not and never can be coterminous with reality. Its authority must lie in what it can achieve when it sees its task as one which includes *constituting* the object of disciplined empirical study in the interests of practice, *without* any capacity . . . to achieve an *identity* with reality" (1991, 27–28, emphasis added).

might be called the exemplary promise of theory, but in a refined form: because theory (after much conceptual labor) becomes profoundly *immanent* to (but not identical with) its object, it becomes itself what Joseph McCarney calls "a form of social change" rather than merely the basis for ratiocination about the desirability of such change (1990, 127).

The Duplicity of Value: Content and Form

If the above is a fair summary of Smith's philosophical commitments, then it follows that for him value is primarily a real internal relation/dimension of capitalism but also a theoretical concept that illuminates that relation. I will say more about how (indeed even if) Smith puts his subtle epistemological protocols into practice later. But for now let me say more about his basic ontological conception of value (chap. 4). This conception posits value as a social entity that duplicitously expresses three contradictory social relations of capitalism as a historically determinate socioeconomic order. The first is the equalitarian exchange relation between private producers and consumers who meet in the marketplace. Here Smith reconstructs Marx's famous account of the four value forms from *Capital*, volume 1, in order, like him, to conclude that "money as the measure of value is the *necessary* form of appearance of the measure of value which is immanent in commodities, namely labor time" (1994a, 57–58). He then discusses Marx's equally famous account of commodity fetishism, wherein "the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's [*sic*] own labor as objective characteristics of the products of labor themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things" (quoted in Smith 1994a, 58).

This structure of misrepresentation is, as is well known and as Smith is at pains to show, complex. In the first place, it is only at the moment of commodity *exchange* that the concrete labors producing commodities as use-values are actually brought into a relation. In the second place, Smith continues, it is therefore the act of commensurating things in exchange that abstracts from the real inequality of these concrete labors (and from the "natural" differences of the commodity bodies themselves) to give *real existence to labor in the abstract*. Third, Smith insists that abstract labor (the substance of value measured as socially necessary labor time) is therefore a *social form*, as, in turn, is value itself: "value has a purely social existence" (54). Fourth, because this virtual objectivity *appears* as a relation among *things* mediated by the money form, it is itself, Smith goes on, the content of that further form but does not seem to be so. As Marx said, "value . . . does not have its description branded on its forehead; it rather transforms every product of labor into a social hieroglyphic" (quoted in Smith 1994a, 60). The commodity form in which value appears, in other words, is inherently misrepresentative of its social content.

However, value does not merely express (albeit in dissimulated form) the equalitarian relation between private producers. Within capitalist societies, private commodity producers aim to sell their product for an increment over and above the value of the inputs required to manufacture that product. This presents an apparent contra-

diction, for how can a producer derive an inequality (an added increment of value) from an exchange relation predicated on equality? The answer, Smith argues, is found by turning to the realm of production, the centerpoint of Marx's analysis. For Marx, of course, capitalist production is based on an exploitative social relation between those who own the means of production and those who must sell their labor power to survive. Exploitative, because for Marx labor power has the special quality of being the only input into production with the ability to generate more value (surplus-value) than is necessary to reproduce it (constant capital only transferring previously existing value to the newly produced commodity). However, because again this exploitative relation appears as a relation between things based on equality (a wage for a day's work), its true nature is disguised.

This brings us, finally, to a third social relation of which value is expressive: the competition relation between rival capitalists each seeking to maximize his or her accretion of value. The details of how aggregate surplus-value is redistributed among competing capitals within the economy are exceedingly complex, as Smith carefully shows, entailing considerations of the formation of a general profit rate, the role of prices of production, the varying value compositions of individual capitals, and the like. For Smith, though, the main point is that intercapitalist competition in the sphere of circulation in the short term leads many capitals into bankruptcy while others prosper, while in the long term it leads to deep and periodic crises of capital accumulation, entailing economywide devaluation and job loss. Once again, though, because this competitive value relation appears as relations among commodities vying to be bought and sold in the marketplace, it is effectively disguised. In short, then, Smith's basic proposition on value is that it is in its very nature not to appear to be what it is, that is, the *contradictory unity* of relations of equal exchange *and* exploitative production *and* intercapitalist competition.

Production, Living Labor, and Ontological Structure

All this is fairly well-trodden ground (although also, of course, the subject of much controversy within and outside twentieth-century Marxism). Where Smith's argument becomes interesting is in the stress it places on *living labor*, and the site of *production*, as the origins of *all* new value (1994a, chap. 5). Lest one think that Marxists have always argued this, Smith shows that in fact they have not, pointing in particular to those of the "neo-orthodox" school of value analysis.⁵ On the one hand, this "school" rendered a valuable service in demonstrating how neo-Ricardians and some erstwhile Marxists had misunderstood Marx's category of abstract labor. Where these latter authors thought Marx to be offering up a physiological conception of labor

5. Smith derives the term "neo-orthodox" from the distance between these authors and a previous generation of "orthodox" thinkers, such as Maurice Dobb and Ronald Meek. Where the latter became preoccupied with questions of value magnitude, the "neo-orthodox" thinkers reinstated a lost concern with value form. In effect, Smith's neo-orthodox school is what Reuten (1988, 44) calls, in a more familiar idiom, the "abstract labor theory of value" school.

(abstract labor embodied), the neo-orthodox thinkers, such as Diane Elson, Ira Gerstein, Geoffrey Kay, Susan Himmelweit, and Simon Mohun, demonstrated the emphatically *social*, nonphysiological nature of abstract labor. However, Smith's point is that in so doing they risked *severing* abstract labor and value from production, making them, instead, merely an *effect of exchange*. This, Smith continues, is deeply un-Marxist for "by implicitly rejecting the social-ontological primacy of *production*, it involves the complete evacuation of Marx's problematic" (102).

His solution is to turn to the work of a number of "fundamentalist" Marxists, notably Anwar Shaikh (1981), in order to show that "abstract labor and value are . . . the results of commodity *production*. Both are *created* through the real activity of producing commodities before they can enter into the realm of exchange. Once in exchange, of course, commodity-values must then be *realised*, in money form. But this process of realisation is *distinct* from the creation, production, or formation of values in much the same way that the sale of a commodity is conceptually distinct from its production" (Smith 1994a, 109).

In particular, by refusing—unlike the neo-orthodox school—to collapse abstract labor into its representation as money, Smith argues that Shaikh is able to reinstate the overlooked notion of "socially necessary labor time" in order to show that abstract labor (and value) has an existence distinguishable from its appearance in money exchange.⁶ As Shaikh put it, the "labor involved in the production of commodities produces value, while exchange merely realises it in money-form" (quoted in Smith 1990, 110). In this way, Smith continues, Shaikh is able to give due weight to the critical moment of value production and class exploitation and thus to focus on what separates Marx's value theory from its bourgeois rivals and also what gives it its deep political coloration.

However, this insight counts as little more than an assertion—and here we come to what Smith sees as his second distinctive contribution to understanding the nature of value—unless it can be *shown* that value has an ontological existence (1994a, chap. 6). As Patrick Murray (1988) has demonstrated so well, this is, of course, problematic given that value must appear but, as noted above, it *must appear as something other than itself*. Smith praises Murray's account but also takes it to task for suggesting that value can "exist *only* as a 'tangible thing' or as a reflection of such things" (124). In Smith's estimation, this claim cannot properly ontologize value because effectively it reduces it to a phenomenal expression of concrete particulars.

He therefore turns to the work of Geoffrey Kay (1976), and especially that of Norman Fischer (1982). For Fischer abstract labor and value can only be considered as real—rather than ideally abstractions within a *three-tiered* ontological world view. Where positivist and empiricist ontologies are two-tiered (admitting only general laws and particular entities, Marx's—so maintains Fischer—posits *real structures*, or ab-

6. Cf. Reuten (1988) who proposes the notion of ideal precommensuration. This, incidentally, is also for Smith the key to linking the form and magnitude aspects of Marx's value theory: for abstract labor is *both* form (appearing in exchange as money) *and* magnitude (a definite quantity of socially necessary labor-time).

stractions, which "mediate the relationship between general laws and particular entities (Murray's 'tangible things')" (Smith 1994a, 125). Abstract labor and value, Smith argues, are precisely such structures. This is not to deny "that [they] . . . find particular expressions or concrete forms (in which, indeed, [they are] . . . apprehended as a 'property of the concrete')" but "it is to insist that [they have] . . . an existence that is independent of these concrete particulars *as well*" (126). Murray's error, Smith continues, is to give too much weight to the *particular* and thereby to underestimate how emphatically *holistic* Marx's ontology is. As Marx put it, "Within the value relationship . . . the abstract universal is not considered to be a property of the concrete sensuously real, but on the contrary, the sensuously concrete is considered to be the form of appearance of the abstract universal" (quoted in Smith 1994a, 125). Without dissociating or, conversely, collapsing into each other the social-structural and the particular, Smith argues that Marx is able to demonstrate their *dialectical unity*: the universal becomes the particular and the particular becomes the universal. This, Smith maintains, is what ultimately distinguishes Marx as scientifically "realist" (in something like Bhaskar's [1989] sense of the term) rather than positivist/empiricist, and what enables him to show that value has a real existence *distinguishable* but *not separate from* its particular appearance (Smith 1994a, 127).⁷ In this way abstract labor and value are established as quite real inner-related global abstractions which have an equally real, but—crucially—"ghostly" effectivity on laborers and capitalists alike within the world economy that gives rise to them (see also Wolff 1988).

The Persistence of Vision: Making "Leviathan" Visible

The incapacity to envision the economy can play into the hands of a reactionary . . . [particularism] that thrives precisely on the conditions of blindness to the determinates of contemporary social life.

—Buck-Morss, "Envisioning Capital"

Smith's conception of value as a duplicitous dimension that appears as something other than itself, coupled with his added insistence that value is produced solely by living labor in production and his further insistence that value is a virtual but quite real global abstraction, amounts to a triad of very powerful claims about the ontological properties of global capitalism. Here Smith's title phrase "invisible Leviathan" is particularly apposite because it captures the remarkable fact that the value relations constituting a capitalist economy are *ontologically real but at the same time really invisible*. That is, because of this peculiar "ghost-like objectivity," value rela-

7. I think the best existing account showing *how* such abstractions come into existence and have "real" efficacy has been written, ironically enough, by a non-Marxist, William Cronon. Cronon's account has the virtue of using a specific historical-geographic setting to prosecute its case (the rise of Chicago and its hinterland as an integrated regional economy and ecology), and his analysis of the rise of the grain market in particular offers a brilliant illustration of abstraction in the making. See Cronon (1991, chap. 3).

tions appear chiasmatically as forms that constitutively conceal their true origin, nature, and effectivity.

There is, of course, nothing necessarily pernicious about the ontological invisibility of relations and structures. But for Smith the invisibility of value relations *is* pernicious: pernicious in three crucial respects that impact decisively on their originator, living labor. First, it enables the frequently severe exploitation of living labor and the development of yawning divisions in class wealth by cloaking them in the "fairness" of the equalitarian wage contract. Second, under value relations living labor across the globe experiences the products of its own labor as despotic forces standing over against it, most notably and drastically in the form of economic crises. Third, since some places and working communities are able to siphon off greater portions of surplus-value than others, they engage in antagonistic competition which obscures the fact that they are in fact globally unified by their common production of and subjection to value relations. These three venerable points are, I think, among the most important implications of Smith's value-form arguments. As he puts it, summarizing the leading phrase of his book title, capitalism is "a structure of socio-economic relations that has usurped from conscious humanity real control over the socio-economic life process and imposed a set of laws that are both very powerful and deeply hidden from view" (1994a, 8). The term "invisible Leviathan" is thus clearly intended as a critical counterpoint to the notion of the "invisible hand" of the market whose beneficence is so vaunted by the forces of the New Right. Critical counterpoint because Smith is adamant that, far from being inevitable, "Leviathan" can and should be transcended: "To break this despotic power will require a conscious decision to return control of the mechanisms of production and reproduction to the conscious decision making of human beings collectively organised" (10).

The likelihood of such a project of transcendence will, as Smith correctly argues, be crucially dependent on the formation of a "strong and well organised working class" which, as he also rightly notes, "has been conspicuously absent from *all* of the 'experiments' of 'socialist construction' in this century" (10). But it will also depend on the role of Marxist intellectuals and political leaders as knowledge-bearing agents with the capacity to inform and organize that working-class constituency on a national and international basis. While this kind of vanguardism may sound terribly old fashioned, Smith is not alone among modern Marxists in believing it crucial to reviving working-class politics today. Indeed, in his opinion, "this failure [of twentieth-century socialist transformation] is one that ultimately falls most heavily on those ostensibly socialist and working-class leaders in the West who retreated from the program of social transformation and who justified this retreat by denying the veracity of Marx's value-theoretical critique of capitalism—almost always without ever having bothered to understand it" (10).

Herein, I would submit, lies the importance of Smith's own project of disclosing "Leviathan" through his fundamentalist reading of "Marx's value-theoretical critique of capitalism." If working people across the globe are to recognize their common interest in transcending capitalist value relations, then an indispensable precondition

is that they first be convinced of the *reality* of that common interest. In this connection the vital contribution of *Invisible Leviathan*, it seems to me, is to attempt to *make seen* the otherwise invisible relations constituting global capitalism, thus reaffirming the vital importance of *vision* for a critique of political economy.

This claim is not quite as banal as it might seem. The faculty of vision has been both abused and vilified by contemporary theorists right and left. I say abused because the Right has used theory to effectively narrow our cognitive purchase on economic life. As Susan Buck-Morss has recently argued in an essay on the way discourses of political economy since the eighteenth century have made the economy visible, the "minimalist vision" of what, like Smith, she calls contemporary "market theory" consigns to invisibility "the web of social interdependence produced by economic activity" (1995, 465). Indeed, by passing off the monadic activities of apparently asocial individuals and spatially separate communities as the "truth" of economic life, market theory encourages a selfish individualism and reactionary localism to reenchant the "empty" space of society, an individualism and localism presently seen, for example, in parts of Eastern Europe newly won to capital. In its place, therefore, she recommends a "philosophical, critical vision of the social body as it is produced by the global economy" to fulfill a "visionary need" to see "the social whole" (466). On the other side, however, critics on the Left (notably several feminists) have convincingly demonstrated the complicity among theory, vision, and power within the domains of radical thinking itself, which has thus had to reconsider its own cognitive strategies. Indeed, this critique has been forcefully directed against several modern Marxists, notably David Harvey whose *The Condition of Postmodernity* has come under fire for its assertive oculo-centrism in which, so Rosalyn Deutsche (1991) and Meaghan Morris (1992) claim, vision becomes a faculty of *exclusion* whereby Marxism adopts the Archimedean conceit of the perfect, total view of society.

However, important as this criticism is, I think it risks dissipating the cognitive "power" of critical theory altogether. Like Haraway (1991), I think that the Left simply *must* deploy the connective imperative between theory and seeing if it is to reclaim reality from the Right. *Invisible Leviathan* does just this, and Smith is to be congratulated for his valuable attempt to "envision the economy" (to borrow Buck-Morss's useful phrase). The key point, however, is to undertake such an envisioning in a modality different from that of Archimedean "modern" theories but without relinquishing the power of vision altogether for fear of marginalizing other aspects of social reality.

In this regard the reflexivity of Buck-Morss's own conception of "envisioning the economy" is particularly useful. To begin with, "the economy" of which she speaks does not preexist political economy and thus await "discovery" (1995, 439). Rather, "the discovery of the economy [during the eighteenth century] was also its invention" (440). The economy, in other words, emerges as what John Rajchman calls a "space of constructed visibility" (1991, 81). Explaining this, she continues, "because the economy is not found as an empirical object among other worldly things, in order for it to be 'seen' by the human perceptual apparatus it has to undergo a process,

crucial for science, of representational mapping. This is a doubling, but with a difference; the map shifts the point of view so that viewers can see the whole *as if* from the outside, in a way that allows them, from the inside, to find their bearings" (1995, 440, emphasis added).

Here, then, "the economy," as Louis Althusser once said in his theorization of a decentered totality, "is precisely not *expressed* at all," for the concept, "like every concept, is never immediately 'given,' never *legible* in visible reality: like every concept this concept must be *produced, constructed*" by the analyst (Althusser and Balibar 1970, 101).⁸ Thus, Buck-Morss's concluding call for a new theory to "see" economy as "a social whole" becomes a *strategic* and *ironic* intervention in the ongoing struggle to alter the workings of world-changing social constructions such as that Marx called capitalism: we see "the whole" *as if* from the "outside" in a way that allows us, from the "inside," to find our bearings. Derek Gregory suggests the possible productivity of this reflexive strategy when he insists that "there is no need to convert the critique of the gaze into a recoil from vision" (1994, 345). In this regard, Buck-Morss's most original point can be rendered thus. The struggle to conceptually "envision" the economy is both necessary *to lay claim to* that "reality" and, in turn, partly *constitutive of* that "reality," even though it can *never offer a final, decided vision of* that "reality." Aware of the dangers of claiming a view from nowhere, Buck-Morss, like Haraway, nonetheless wishes to strategically "reclaim" vision for political-economic critique. Theory here becomes "diminutive" or, in Haraway's words, "a little *si(gh)ting* device in a long line of such craft tools" (1992, 295), and I will shortly have more to say about what this way of seeing might entail for Marxism in my consideration of Spivak.

The Metaphysics of the Value Form: Capitalism, Labor and History

Economic life—the "economy," the economic realm, sphere, level, instance, or what-have-you—is in itself a . . . representation.

—Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*

Given the self-declared subtlety of his epistemological procedures, one might expect Smith's envisioning of the economy to operate in the kind of reflexive way advocated by Buck-Morss. However, I now want to argue that despite these epistemological asseverations, in practice Smith's modality of envisioning is resolutely "modern" and Archimedean insofar as it is predicated on a particularly restrictive reading of the value form. While this allows it to function as an effective critique of

8. This insight that the mode of production does not represent itself but must be represented was, of course, the basis for Althusser's claim that Marx's "immense theoretical revolution," when read symptomatically, could "see" reality aright.

the obfuscations of market theory, it does little to advance the cause of Marxism on the Left. In fact, I would suggest that it sets it back. Let me elaborate.

Most fundamentally, it is not entirely clear how one maintains the *tension*—which Smith, following Marx, claims he maintains—between theory as an accurate and "true" representation of the real and theory as nonidentical with the real (i.e., *as* thought and not the object of thought). As Alan Carling has put it, Marx here "stretches a kind of tightrope separating logic from history, and it is possible to fall off on either side. On the one side, it is possible to collapse history into logic . . . on the other side, it is possible to collapse logic into history" (1986, 58). In this regard, I want to suggest that Smith's ontological conception of value as an "internal" relation or structure amounts to a *theoretical imposition* onto the world he seeks to comprehend, *posing* as an adequate, accurate and exhaustive conceptual reflection of it. This has three dimensions. First, by assuming that value relations simply exist "external" to a theory of them, he naively implies that, when all is said and done, the veracity of theory can be checked against the "facts" of history. Second, I will suggest that by also assuming that value relations have a distinct or pure ontological existence separate from other social processes—that is, value as an "internal relation" presumably exclusive of "external" noncapitalist relations—Smith presents an impoverished ontology of social life, one that risks effacing noncapitalist relations and nonclass loci of identity. Third, and most important, I will also claim that in both cases Smith actually collapses history/ontology into theory/epistemology and therefore in fact fails to deliver on his subtle epistemological promises. All three criticisms apply, I think, at two related levels: that of social formation and that of social subjectivity. Let me take each of these in turn, then consider a possible rebuttal from Smith's perspective, following which I suggest how Smith inadvertently generalizes the shortcomings of his argument onto a wider geohistorical canvas.

Pure Capitalism

Smith offers little extended commentary on the ontology of internal relations he adheres to. Although, as I have said, the strength of this world-view is that it enables one to see how the apparently unconnected are in fact essentially joined, this strength becomes a signal weakness when Smith—like so many previous Marxists—connects it to a *restrictive* conception of what he calls "the *totality* that is the capitalist socio-economic system" (1990, 8).

There have, of course, been numerous conceptions of totality within the Marxist tradition. Smith's, however, is remarkably traditional. It is not so much that he believes that capitalism as an economic system is really, when all is said and done, all there is to social life. He does not, although I will suggest shortly that he ultimately approaches this position by default. But because *Invisible Leviathan* takes capitalism as an *analytically distinguishable* object (Smith discusses nothing else except "the capitalist mode of production") and because at the same time Smith's episte-

mology leads him to make confident cognitive claims about the real, in effect capitalism becomes *really distinguishable* in his account. This is where his conception of “internal” relations becomes limiting, because it abandons the challenge of making sense of social formations characteristically “overdetermined” in principle (as Althusser famously put it). To reiterate Althusser’s admonition: the economy is precisely not *expressed*, yet in effect Smith takes it to be so.⁹ Put differently, Smith’s value relations are “internal” because for him they belong to, indeed constitute, what he implies is a *bounded entity*, what Robert Albritton disdainfully terms “pure capitalism” (1993, 25; see also Diskin and Sandler 1993). As such “the economy” becomes falsely *disembedded* from social formations in which it is inextricably imbricated with a multiplicity of other practices and relations, leading Smith into what Andrew Collier dubs the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness” (1989, 27–28).

At the empirical level this theoretical disembedding enables Smith to adduce all manner of data to show that “capitalism” indeed exists (unsullied) and, moreover, that its gyrations (notably its crisis tendencies) can be explained by deploying the insights of the “law of value” (chaps. 7 and 8). One of course deeply sympathizes with this urge to make theory and history speak to each other: without this dialogue theory, in Christopher Norris’s pointed formulation, simply “turns against itself” (1990, 4). But Smith’s appeal to history is problematic. First, his dialogue seems more a one-way conversation. Despite his epistemological disclaimers, Smith’s substantive investigations in practice proceed as if there is no problem at all in the way theory grasps history: the theory is ultimately supported by the “facts.” He thereby ironically reinstalls a rather crude model of knowledge as the mirror of history in which the “real” is, in the last instance, taken to determine theory. The resulting impression is that capitalism—if not quite constitutive of history as a whole (for how can one ignore gender, “race,” sexuality, etc.?)—is taken to have *its own* discrete and distinct history which has a coherence and shape capable of being theoretically mastered and apodeictically (empirically) demonstrated. Second, Smith simply takes it for granted that “theory” and “history” really can be separated (only, of course, to be properly reconnected later by formulating successively determinate thought-abstractions). But this ignores Roland Barthes’s (1967) warning that “history” does not simply happen “out there,” achieving, in Robert Young’s withering words, “a ‘concrete’ existence outside theory, where it can lie in wait, ready to be invoked [for or] against it” (1990, vi). More emphatically, it sidesteps the suggestion made very powerfully by Timothy Mitchell (1988) and others, that theory (representation) corresponds to the *effect* of an “external reality” which paradoxically guarantees the certainty of representation itself. In short, history, both as an “external” realm and as one taken to

9. This, I take it, is one of the things Althusser was really getting at in his infamous claim that the lonely hour of the last instance never comes. As he put it, “the economic dialectic is never active *in the pure state*; in History, these instances, the superstructures, etc., are never seen to step respectfully aside when their work is done or, when the Time comes, as his pure phenomena, to scatter before His Majesty the Economy as he strides along the royal road of the Dialectic. From the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the ‘last instance’ never comes” (1969, 113). I will say more about this below.

have a discrete and determinate structure, is—contra Smith—an extremely problematic concept for his Marxism.

(Dis)cerning the Subject

If Smith’s declension theoretically and empirically into a regional conception of a “closed totality” (the term is Henri Lefebvre’s, 1955) is questionable, so too is the conception of social agency to which it is directly linked. To be sure, Smith is alive to the differentiation of that social actor who has a vested interest in dismantling the system it sustains: “the working class.” For instance, he discusses in some detail labor market segmentation, working-class fragmentation, and national and international spatial divisions within class consciousness (chap. 10). However, what remains throughout this discussion—indeed throughout the entirety of *Invisible Leviathan*—is a commitment to a *singular* working-class actor. This makes for a peculiar duality of focus, as evidenced in the following declaration: “the complexity of contemporary class structure is most apparent within the working class itself, which has become increasingly differentiated with respect to its roles in social reproduction” (1994a, 200). But this vacillation is ultimately overridden by an ontological affirmation that class-in-itself transcends—or should transcend—these internal differences. On this Smith is quite explicit: “but once it is grasped that *the* working class . . . constitutes a majority of the population of the advanced capitalist countries . . . Marx’s vision of workers’ revolution begins to lose its aura of ‘unrealism’” (196; emphasis added). Similar intonations about the proletariat pepper the entire text. Moreover, the chief barrier to socialist transformation, Smith continues, is the inability of this metasubject to become “conscious” of “its” production of and subjection to value relations and to transform this consciousness into concerted class struggle. For Smith, then, class-in-itself must become class-for-itself if capitalism is to be overthrown in a revolutionary struggle, which he sees as the only way to transcend the law of value—and, as I said earlier, Smith sees theoretical work of the sort he has undertaken as being crucial to such a transformation of consciousness.

However, as with his account of the economy, Smith’s conception of the subject is of an unsullied or “pure” subject. The problem here, once again, is not so much that the working class is taken to be the only insurgent social actor. Instead, it is that by cordoning off that actor in its own ontological space Smith studiously avoids the dimension of *plurality* that constitutes subjective being. This I take to be the meaning of Derrida’s argument that one “cannot construct finished or plausible sentences using the expression ‘social class’” (1993, 204). In other words, Smith’s is a version of what Seyla Benhabib calls the “philosophy of the subject,” that is, a “collective singular subject [that] does not behave as a *collectivity* that has decided to act together, but as a *singularity* that reappropriates what is legitimately its own” (1986, 132). In this sense, Smith’s account is unable to register, let alone do justice to, the *constellation of subject-positions* into which social subjects are multifariously called within both production

and everyday life.¹⁰ Moreover—and this is my second point here—it also prioritizes what Benhabib calls a “work model of action” in which social action and interaction pivot on the objectification and externalization of the laboring subject (132). The upshot is that other, highly important modes of social interaction (e.g., linguistic communication, symbolic interaction, nonwork relations) are implicitly marginalized.

Here Smith’s restrictive conception of internal relations and of the singular subject come together, and his reading of value reflects that limiting conjunction particularly well. Throughout *Invisible Leviathan* Smith uses the metaphor of “substance” to characterize value. In this, of course, he follows many other Marxists and indeed Marx himself. Smith, quite rightly, is at pains to show that the metaphor is not connected to a naturalistic presocial conception of labor or, as noted earlier, to a related conception of labor embodied. But, even freed from these conceptions, Smith’s substance metaphor is clearly intended to posit a ramified, if highly mediated, series of connections *beginning* with a *single subject* (living labor) at the (single) point of production, wherein those connections (abstract labor and value as social abstractions) return iteratively in an internally related *system* (“pure capitalism”) where causes become effects and effects causes in synchronic and diachronic interplay.¹¹ Value, then, here becomes the key mediating moment in the chiasmic chain of connections from production to exchange, the metamorphosing social substance that, like a golden thread, weaves its way from content(s) to form(s) and so shows that what appears as a multiplicity of different elements is really an integral, bounded, discrete totality.¹² As such, value functions to *close* the circle of both economy and subject in Smith’s account through the *coup de grâce* of abstraction which unifies the particular and the general. And the price is that putatively “noncapitalist” difference and heterogeneity are ultimately subsumed by the identity and unity intrinsic to value.

Real Abstractions (Again): Identity and Difference

Smith, of course, might reasonably counter these objections by arguing that the remarkable fact about capitalism is precisely that it is able, *in practice*, to abstract away all these differences. Hence, Smith might claim, the brilliance of Marx’s insight—reemphasized by Fischer—that value is both universal and particular *at the same time*, but where universality predominates over particularity. Indeed, quoting Lucio Colletti, he does just that: “individual labor powers are equalised . . . precisely because they are treated as abstract or separate from the real empirical individuals to whom they belong” (1994b, 127). But there are two problems here, one epistemological, the other to do with Smith’s ontological understanding of difference and particularity.

10. Paul Smith (1988, chap. 1) offers a lucid critique of this limiting of the subject in Marxist theory.
11. Incidentally, in this Smith might be said to be impeccably true to some of Marx’s own beliefs: favoring neither “structure” nor “agency” his overall position amounts to an effective endorsement of Marx’s famous claim that people make history but never under conditions of their own choosing (cf. Williams 1988).
12. This claim has obvious affinities with Mirowski’s (1989) brilliant excavation of the metaphorical constitution of substance theories of value, of which he argues Marx’s was a late and great example. However, one need not agree with Mirowski that in Marx value is the substance “conserved” to make the claim that it relies on and articulates a metaphysics of the producing subject, as well as a restrictive conception of “totality” in which everything seems to be a further form of a prior content.

Regarding the first, Benhabib offers an interesting interpretation of any appeal to real abstraction as a ground on which to contest the objections I have made to Smith’s account. She suggests that in *Capital* Marx attempts to combine two social epistemologies. The first is “social integration” or the interpersonal perspective of individuals in social relations (as evidenced by Marx’s copious empirical material on the condition of the working class), the second “system integration” or the impersonal, transsubjective, third-person perspective of the thinker-observer who can help those heterogeneous individuals see the systemic logic in which they are implicated. She argues, furthermore, that Marx thought that these two perspectives could be reconciled by focusing on the dual character of labor power (Smith prefers to focus on abstract labor in this regard) (Benhabib 1986, 102). For labor power is unlike other commodities in that it is not separable from its owner, it is not reproducible at will, and it, requires the consent of its owner to be used. However, she then goes on to show that Marx’s reconciliation ultimately founders insofar as the perspective of “system integration” is in the end the *dominant* one in *Capital*, thus displacing the difficult question of how social relational complexity affects the clean lines of his dialectical presentation (144).

Seen like this, Smith’s ontological claim that capitalism is all about what Reuten calls “form determination” (1988, 52) or what Sayer calls the “violence of abstraction” (1987, 144), while in some ways quite valid, surreptitiously silences the domain of lived social relations and of subjective differences by an equally surreptitious failure to make clear that it is a claim launched from a *particular epistemic perspective*. Smith thus dissimulates as simply a question of being what is necessarily also a question of knowledge and the positionality of the theorist. Indeed, *Invisible Leviathan* is clearly constructed from the perspective of Benhabib’s “thinker-observer.” While this usefully enables Smith to offer a “representational map” of the sort Buck-Morss insists is necessary for any economic theory, it should also necessarily temper the certainty of his presentation by *situating* it epistemically as one embodied attempt by him to “see” the economy “as a whole.”¹³ But Smith abjures moderation by suggesting that capitalism just *is* a system of violent abstractions and that Marx’s categories—its “conceptual reflections”—just *do* rightly represent them.¹⁴ Ironically, for all his scorn for dualistic thinking, Smith’s demotic rendering of the sophisticated epistemological procedure he claims to follow leads him into an equally dogmatic *monistic* position in which thought perfectly grasps “the” totality and thereby sacrifices its specificity to become effectively at one with its putative object. In this way—to reverse a well-known formulation of Marx’s—he falls into the illusion of conceiving thought as the product of the

13. Just as Marx, in *Capital*, volume 1, offered from the rarefied and desperately particular site of the British Library a remarkable map of the “laws of motion” of the *entire* Capitalist mode of production, a system he could not possibly as a single individual “see” but that he strategically insisted one had to envision *as if* it could be seen.

14. In this Smith is not alone. Both Tony Smith (1991) and Arthur (1991), for example, suggest that the dialectic of the value form in Marx mimics conceptually a capitalist reality in which universal forms do dominate sensuous particulars. In both cases the epistemological moment is effaced and the certainty of the concrete-in-thought affirmed. Aglietta inadvertently captures this position rather well when he claims that “in economics, the task of abstraction is possible because *a process of homogenization exists in the reality to be studied*” (1979, 38, emphasis added).

real concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself. I say illusion because, if anything, things are the other way around: it is precisely Smith's conceptual apparatus that at one level makes the world in its own image while pretending, rather, to mimetically re-present it. What might otherwise be considered a strategically necessary visual conceit—making "Leviathan" visible—thus becomes a plenary opticality in which seeing is knowing, and in which Smith ultimately claims to discover, rather than construct, a reality that stands outside theory.

Second, even if one could make a straightforward appeal to real abstraction as a demonstration of capitalism's effacement of difference, Smith's sense of "difference" is, I think, quite limited. For the key "differences" that interest him are those of "concrete individuals" in production. But Smith fails to give any sense that these different individuals, aside from being class subjects, are also ethnicized, gendered, sexed, and "raced" in complex, overlapping, and important ways that crucially affect their sense of themselves as actors and agents in history. In the absence of any consideration of these dimensions, Smith's rather anemic "concrete individuals" simply become empty markers that serve largely as a baseline against which to compare the violence and despotism of value relations.

Totality and Historical Humanity

Earlier, I mentioned that Smith ultimately risks implying by default that "capitalism" dominates, or becomes synonymous with, social life as such. Let me now conclude these critical comments on Smith's value-form analysis by explaining how his regional conception of a closed totality ("pure capitalism") and of a singular subject threaten to become exorbitant.

Aside from the numerous references to "the" working class, there is a second subject inhabiting the pages of *Invisible Leviathan*, which is really the same subject. That subject is "humanity." Consider, for example, the following claim: "if 'value relations' have exhausted their potential to contribute to the creation of human wealth and to meet human needs on a global scale, then it becomes incumbent upon humanity to seek out a new form of socioeconomic organization that can transcend these conditions" (9). Here Smith is obviously pointing to the way "capitalism" by virtue of its globality has brought most of the world's population under its sway. To this fairly unobjectionable sense of "humanity" Smith adds another: that *both* workers and capitalists are subject to capital's temporal and geographical vicissitudes (133–34). However, if both these uses of the term seem reasonable enough as shorthands, in the third place Smith seems also to give it an altogether deeper meaning. In parts of *Invisible Leviathan* and especially in a recent paper on Marx's early and late "humanisms," Smith talks about "humanity" as an ontological being, a real agent and actor in history. For instance, he talks in no uncertain terms of "human beings [as] . . . purposive, reflexive agents with the capacity to consciously transform their circumstances," and of *Capital* as an account of "a larger alienation—what might be called 'the collective alienation of the species' from an authentic human praxis" (1994b, 128).

Smith is not, to be sure, here abandoning Marx's oft-repeated claim that people are the historically specific product and producers of social relations for a transcendental conception of some presocial ur-subject. Instead, for Smith I take "humanity" to be the real result, once again, of capitalism's real abstractions. But it is precisely here that this "historical humanity," as it might be called, risks losing its useful meaning as a social abstraction/structure which does not *efface* axes of social difference and identity among living laborers (such as gender, nationality, "race," and so on) but *gathers them together* in a homogenizing way. Instead, because Smith gives such absolute priority to production, and because he closes off the space of capitalism, "living labor" becomes "the working class" which, in turn, becomes Smith's alienated "humanity" in a series of substitutions that inadvertently also make the *latter* a singular subject. As a corollary of this metaphysicalization of the subject, he thereby implicitly raises "pure capitalism" and value to the rank of system among systems and relation/structure among social relations/structures respectively, which through their intrusive universality crush all differences and are thus ontologically of greatest power and import. In this way Smith's global "Leviathan" and its human metasubject ultimately succumb to a *historicism* that sutures social life *as such* primarily around value relations. To the extent that various "noncapitalist" relations even enter into things (which in Smith they essentially do not), then they can only figure as "exteriors" to the internal space of the economy or, worse, "interiors" which are absolutely subordinate (to the point of invisibility) to the abstractions that force them and the subjects they mark willy-nilly within capital's stern embrace.

This is perhaps clearest in Smith's treatment of the "Third World." Appearing toward the end of the book (chap. 9), it is one of the few occasions he considers explicitly places whose complex, overdetermined histories are more than simply the sum total of capitalist value relations. Yet reading his all-too-brief comments on the matter one would never think so. To the extent that it appears at all, the "Third World" is only an aspect of global value relations and of global "humanity": that is, the only "differences" that matter about it are those pertinent to Smith's notion of international class struggle (1994a, 207–8). This is more than an innocent oversight because Smith's claim that "capitalism" is now truly "global" arguably *depends* precisely on ignoring and thereby *effacing* the vast multiplicities of other histories, other geographies, and other subjectivities. Let me elaborate.

Marx, Spivak, and Value 1

It is indeed the moment to re-read *Capital*.
—Spivak, "Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida"

Spivak, Marx, and Postcoloniality

I end my critique of Smith with these comments on the "Third World" because one major source of criticism of Marxism's universalizing and exclusionary tenden-

cies is, of course, the emergent field of colonial discourse analysis and postcolonial studies (which, incidentally, Smith does not consider in *Invisible Leviathan*). A number of authors have shown convincingly that Marx and Marxism are complicit with forms of Western colonialism in which the distinctiveness of "Third World" social relations and social struggles have been summarily effaced (Slater 1992; Serequerberhan 1990). This general antipathy to Marxism among postcolonial critics thus makes noted feminist¹⁵ deconstructivist Gayatri Spivak's continued commitment to it all the more unusual. Spivak has been lauded by admirers as a paragon postcolonial intellectual because of her highly sophisticated readings of the power geometries of colonial discourse and the paradoxes of trying to be "post" colonial. Yet these commentators have remained studiously silent about Spivak's Marxist sympathies, as if unsure what to make of them. Where they have expressed opinion, as in Robert Young's case, they have generally been dismissive. Young regards Spivak's Marxism as directly antithetical to her other concerns, concluding that it "functions as an overall syncretic frame. It works, in fact, in exactly the same way as [Fredric] Jameson's—as a transcendentalising gesture to produce closure" (1990, 173). In short then, for Young, Spivak ironically reinstates the very same universalizing impulse she otherwise objects to in "modern" Western theory. This conclusion—coming as it does at the end of a discussion where Young shows brilliantly "the carefully constructed disparateness of [Spivak's] . . . work . . . the discontinuities which she refuses to reconcile" (173)—is, for very this reason, difficult to swallow. Instead it begs the question: Could it really be the case that an author supremely attentive to the power relations inhabiting Western forms of institutionalized knowledge should compromise her own insights for a totalizing form of classical Marxism? And in turn it underlines the fact that, Young included, we still await a detailed and sensitive consideration of Spivak's Marxism. In the remainder of the paper, therefore, I want to provide some initial markers toward such a consideration by juxtaposing Spivak's reading of Marx with Smith's.

Spivak, Marx, and Value

The main object of Spivak's interest in Marxism, represented in a string of essays, has been labor value. I begin, then, by briefly exploring what it is about Marx's value analytics she finds so compelling. In what is perhaps her most forthright and accessible statement on the matter, Spivak says:

[V]alue is that mediating, and to quote Marx, the "slight and contentless" (*Capital*, Vol. 1) "inhalts" thing: the mediating and "contentless" differential which can never appear on its own, but is always necessary in order to move from labor to commodity . . . [I]f one attends to this "slight and contentless" thing that is the mediating possibil-

15. Going entirely against the grain of Spivak's densely imbricated writings, I say little about her feminism here since I want to concentrate on how her deconstructivist and postcolonial sensibilities impact upon her Marxism.

ity between labor and commodity and the possibility of exchange—and I'm not going to spell out the whole argument for you because this *is* Marx's basic argument—if it is attended to, then there is the possibility of suggesting that the worker produces capital, that the *worker* produces capital because the worker, the container of labor power, is the source of value. By the same token it is possible to suggest to the so-called Third World that it *produces* the wealth and the possibility of the cultural self-representation of the "First World" (1990a, 96).

This concise rendering of Marx's basic argument in *Capital*, volume 1, could just as well serve as a very basic summary of Smith's position too. The only "twist" that Spivak adds to the value argument is the claim that the "Third World" produces much of the wealth of the "First." But it is a very important addition, the point of which Matthew Sparke captures very well. As he says, "for [Spivak] . . . it is precisely Marxism which helps place in the foreground the manner in which the local is implicated in global economic and political processes. It thereby serves as a reminder of the *ongoing constitution* of a premodern world of poverty, famine, ill-health and superexploitation, and it likewise helps focalise the capitalist linkages underwriting the parochial privilege of postmodernity" (1994b, 111).

The final rebarbative remark is, of course, to those extreme versions of postmodernism (and poststructuralism) that so undermine the cognitive power of theory as to render the violent realities of global economy all but invisible. But it applies equally to much of the postcolonial writing with which Spivak otherwise associates herself. For, as her comments on the cultural self-representation of the "First World" imply, she strongly resists those who would hypostatize the former as irredeemably separate from the "Third World." Equally, postcolonial critics eager to locate subaltern struggles unique to the "Third World" run the serious risk of losing sight of an international political economy that binds the "West" and "the rest" into an unequal relationship of destructive creativity. And, equally, they risk dividing those in both parts of the world who, as Smith argues, share a *common* subjection to capitalist exploitation: working people.

I use the optical metaphor ("losing sight of") deliberately because Spivak, again like Smith, puts great stress on *vision* as the key faculty for focalizing the real relations between apparently different and separate peoples and places. As she says, addressing "the worker," "just know that *you* produce capital, and you can only know this if you forget about your concrete experience simply as what gives you *a picture of the world*. Think it through and you will *see* that you are producing capital, and that no one is giving you anything like money or wages in exchange for something" (97; emphasis added). For Spivak, in other words, without the capacity to "picture the world" through the concept of value, economic exploitation within and between places is "hidden from sight" and *therefore* lost to public discussion and contestation (1988a, 167). So far so good, except that in so closely paralleling Smith's conception of value and his desire to envision the economy Spivak's Marxism may seem just as "modern" and therefore just as objectionable as his, thus sustaining Young's plenary objection to her work. I say "seem," though, because I now want to suggest

that Spivak's deconstruction of the value form, when examined closely, in fact critically reconfigures such modern conceptions by ambivalently prising open value.

The Textuality of Value: Reading Marx

The textual metaphor is very appropriate here because, as I mentioned in the introduction, reading is as central to Spivak's speculations as is visualization. While, like Marx and Smith, she is fascinated with value's "ghostlike" constitution, its status as a "vanishing semblance," the fact that it "can never appear on its own" (1990a, 96), Spivak *also* wants to unsettle the visual field by focusing on the *textuality* of theory because she is equally insistent that unreflexive envisioning can be as dangerous as it is illuminating. Clearly, then, this is not an argument against *some* version of value relations: Spivak is aware that without the intertemporal and spatially extensive phenomena of value, global "capitalism" would simply be irrational at base. The real question, then, and the one Spivak raises, is of what that value consists and how one might envision it. In short, is it possible to read value *differently* from modern Marxists like Smith yet in a way that retains some of the more insightful aspects of Marx's value form analysis?

In the most general sense Spivak's point is that there is no nontextualized way of looking at reality.¹⁶ What does this mean and what are its implications? Spivak's notion of textuality has a double meaning, one document-centered, the other more worldly (1988a, 293 n.6). On the one side, she is concerned with Marx's texts as what she calls "bit(s) of technology" (171). By this she means that the *Grundrisse*, *Theories of Surplus Value* and, preeminently, *Capital* resemble what Bruno Latour calls "inscription devices" (1986, 3): they actively bring worlds into view through textualization. But she simultaneously insists that the necessary consequence of this is that those worlds can never be perfectly brought into presence. This is where Spivak's notion of the textuality of Marx's works marks a departure from Smith's way of seeing. For her point is that the chain of arguments Marx constructs are "textual" in the sense that they are open and harbor *discontinuities* within them, even though Marx necessarily disavows this in the attempt to fix the meaning of his text so as to make its message "scientifically" truthful and clear (1988a, 158). As Derrida has repeatedly argued, it is the very nature of writing to make impossible the absolute fixation of meaning in any given context even though we proceed *as if* such fixation is possible. Spivak's tack, then, is to investigate what Marx's texts close off in their valuable attempt to envision capitalism.

On the other side, Spivak connects this "bookish" sense of textuality to a more general one, "the Text," or what in her consideration of Marx she specifically calls

16. For an elaboration of this conjunction of opticality and textuality with regard to Derrida's work, see McCumber (1993). McCumber rightly points out that the question of vision has never been particularly explicit in Derrida's writings, but he does offer a useful attempt to tease out Derrida's latent concern with visuality as part of his critique of metaphysics.

"the textuality of the economic" (1987, 43). Where Smith, as I have said, takes the global economy as really distinguishable, Spivak's point is that the economy, like social life as such, is "woven by many, many strands that are discontinuous, that come from way off, that carry their histories within them, and that are not within our control" (1990b, 120). This, let me be clear, does not amount to the ludicrous suggestion that books are all there is."¹⁷ Her point is more subtle than this. Like Derrida, she is insistent that there is no transparent access to an "extratextual" realm of the "real world." This does not *reduce* that world to some vaguely generalized notion of textuality. Rather, it problematizes how we understand the world by stressing how the "so-called 'outside' of the . . . text is articulated with it in a web or network" (1987, 31). This has two dimensions. First, Spivak wants to reverse and displace the text-world/epistemology-ontology/theory-reality distinctions characteristic of modern theory. This is not a rejection of questions of representation, knowledge, and truth—as Derrida has insisted elsewhere "*we must have truth*" (1981, 105)—but a questioning of the conditions of their possibility. Second, Spivak also wants to put in question *how* economic and social relations are made visible through these distinctions. Once again like Derrida, she resists the implication that worldly relations and objects can be neatly disentangled one from another and represented as bounded, discrete entities through bounded discrete concepts. To reiterate: "they are woven by many, many strands . . . that come from way off."

When Spivak rereads Marx on value, therefore, she is not simply deconstructing a concept in a book. But neither can she be simply said to be investigating a "real abstraction" or structure existing pristinely "out there" beyond the textual inscriptions that make it visible. By both problematizing the text-world distinction and the notion that the world can be separated into so many parts or relations to be punctually represented, her critique of value might be said, instead, to be skeptical of its object even as it seeks to read it in more cognitively and politically productive ways. In these two ways, then, Spivak abjures the traditional project of epistemology and ontology that frames Marx's account and that of many modern Marxists like Smith. As I have argued, this is not an abrogation of the responsibility to make claims about the world but, rather, an attempt to make those claims more sensitive (see Sparke 1994b). This sensitivity, as I will now show in relation to Marx, is perhaps most obvious in Spivak's stress on the interpretive act of *reading theory*. First, Spivak's readings of Marx are de-constructive rather than de-structive. That is, she is concerned to "produce a reading which is politically more useful, rather than a reading that would simply throw away an extremely powerful analysis because it can be given a certain kind of reading" (1987, 57). Second, the corollary is that her readings are immanent to Marx's texts. That is, they chase out what haunts them from within—rather than produce a facile reading that rubbishes theory by introducing a shopping list of "external" elements it simply "ignores." They are what she aptly calls "forced reading(s),"

17. As she says, "'The Text,' in the sense we use it, is not just books" (1990a, 120).

readings which “open the path of a question rather than close the door with a decidable consistency” (1987, 57).¹⁸

Marx, Spivak, and Value 2

Questioning is the piety of thought.
—Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology”

The Question of Value

In one of her early essays on value, “Speculations on Reading Marx: After Reading Derrida,” Spivak draws an analogy between Marx’s understanding of money and Derrida’s of writing. For Marx (at least in *Capital*), Spivak argues that “money is the functionary of the improper” (1987, 34). It is “improper” in that, in Marx’s words, “from its servant-shape, in which it appears as mere medium of circulation, it suddenly becomes the lord and god in the world of commodities” (quoted in Spivak 1987, 33). More important, by thereby taking on the “rusing character of a sign that conceals the presence of a thing it means” it is also improper, in that it duplicitously represents what Spivak calls “that origin-and-end term, use value” (32, 54). Use-value here becomes that “positive thing which is to be subtracted from the undifferentiated product” (Spivak 1987, 40)—it is the “real real” in Marx, as Paul Smith (1988, 11) puts it, that which is subject to the violence of abstraction and whose most subversive particularities are those concrete individuals in production. On this reading, then, use-value takes on a role akin to that of speech in Western philosophy: it is the ground on which Marx’s critique of capitalism rests, positing “a proper situation of self-proximity or self-possession against which to measure our own fallen state” (1987, 32). This, it is quickly apparent, pretty much captures Smith’s position too. For, as I argued, the normative thrust of his account rests on the claim that the most important use-value—labor power—is subject to abstract value forms it creates, forms that must therefore be replaced with an economic system that will allow living laborers to control their destiny and express their concrete individuality.

Against this, Spivak proposes to “put the economic text ‘under erasure,’ to see, that is, the unavoidable and pervasive *importance* of its operation and yet to question it as a concept of the *last resort*” (1988a, 168). Specifically, she argues that far from being “proper,” use-value is precisely what *disrupts* the chain of value connections Marx constructs. This is her argument in her widely known (but not widely un-

18. Note also that this is very far from reinscribing a “symptomatic reading” in which a text’s “true” meaning is uncovered: as Spivak (1988a, 202) says, reconstruction is not “a formula for correct cognitive moves.” I am also happy to admit here that Spivak’s texts are *very* difficult and resist any easy summarization. What follows is thus very much my own interpretation and not in any way an attempt to read Spivak definitively. More specifically, I am not implying any determinate, linear trajectory to Spivak’s various essays on Marx. The logic of argument braced here is simply my own attempt to pick out what I see as central themes of these essays and present them in a coherent manner.

derstood) essay “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value.” There, she contrasts what she calls Marx’s “continuist” reading of value with the “discontinuous” account implicit in it (1988a, 155). In his “continuist” reading Marx posits a definite and clearly identifiable origin for the value chain to get going (use-value, particularly the use-value of labor power) and an end (capital and capitalism) wherein the end is simply a different form of the origin and where the whole chain is closed. This, as I argued, is Smith’s reading too. However, Spivak’s point is that if one considers it closely, use-value is actually what lends *indeterminacy* to the entire value chain. Where Marx seeks to vanquish indeterminacy through a seemingly impeccable logic of dialectical contradictions, she suggests, on the contrary, that indeterminacy is never entirely exiled.¹⁹ Marx’s value chain in fact continually enacts its own deconstruction.

Her argument pivots on the fact that for Marx use-value is both “inside” and “outside” the chain of value determinations. It is inside because, clearly, use-values take on a value form within capitalism. Yet it is never *entirely* inside, because Marx’s point is that value relations under capitalism treat use-values as if they were *just* value things. That they are more than this is the lifeblood of Marx’s idea that labor power differs from the common crowd of commodities insofar as its holder is a sentient being who precisely cannot be so reduced. But if, as Spivak suggests, the normative power of Marx’s thought derives in large part from this urge to undo the “suppression of heterogeneity” (1987, 52), the paradox is that this heteroclit realm of use-value is ultimately always and necessarily *deferred*.

The paradox is clearest, she argues, in *Capital*. Marx was particularly concerned that its mode of presentation be clear and accessible to its intended audience, “the working man” [*sic*]. But in attempting to offer that audience a definitive map of the capitalist system the difficulty that text faces, Spivak argues, is its necessary *complicity with its object of investigation*. For all its tacking back and forth between dialectical presentation and the rich empirical material on the condition of the working classes, Spivak suggests that ultimately *Capital* “must use the same method that makes the object of . . . [its] analysis an evil”—for logically there must be “something in common between the method of analysis [reduction] and the property of capital” (55). And here is the problem. For, she continues, while Marx “is obliged to present his own participation in capital’s method as no more than a necessary methodological hazard” (51), it is not at all clear how Marx can find a space to *escape* that participation.

If I understand her correctly, two things follow. First, and most profoundly, *it is impossible to adequately represent or describe use-values*, even though Marx consistently tries to do so. Use-values, be they things or labor power, are irreducibly heterogeneous. They become specific use-values only in specific contexts of use, and since those contexts can change so too can the use-values themselves. As Spivak puts it, “use value is not a transcendental principle because it *changes* on each occasion

19. This contrast between the contradiction and indeterminacy has affinities with Ernesto Laclau’s distinction between a closed dialectical “contradiction” and an open contingent “antagonism,” where the latter entails that social objects and relations are only “partially constituted and also partially threatened” (1990, 27).

or heterogenous case" (1986, 93; emphasis added). Thus, as Thomas Keenan notes, "dependent on the particularities of its context(s), whatever self-identity [a use-value] might pretend to have across those different uses is ruptured, emptied out into its possible iterations" (1993, 160). For Spivak this undermines Marx's desire to posit use-values as a benchmark against which to critique the duplicity and despotism of capitalist value abstraction. Rather than being an ultimately self-evident given that can be defined and controlled, Spivak's argument suggests that it is ultimately not at all clear what use-value is because by definition it resists any general categorization.

This is registered most conspicuously in Marx's need to somehow represent or name use-value, particularly living labor (the ultimate origin of value), in the interests of revolutionary change. Here, although Marx is aware of the diversity of classes, his inadequate descriptor, "the working class," seems only to defer the day of concrete individuality by insisting on the necessity of a prior trial by class-for-itself. Difference is postponed. This, I think, is why Spivak believes that considered closely it is "use value that puts the entire textual chain of value into question and thus allows us to glimpse the possibility that [value] . . . may be no more than a way of holding randomness at bay" (1988b, 162). It thus follows that what value "re-presents" in Marx—as a "real" abstraction which is a re-presentation of something else (use-value, concrete labor) and as a concept fashioned by Marx to re-present/make visible that representation—is, in effect, everything, the entire heteroclit world of living labor, and therefore *nothing*. Here, as Keenan perceptively puts it, Marx "constitute[s] . . . the nothing as a something that could be substituted for" (1993, 181).

But we can push things a little further. A second point that follows from Spivak's argument is that *even if* the concrete particularities of individual workers could be grasped in all their heterogeneity they would always *exceed* any attempt to bring them within the embrace of any limiting concept such as class. For Spivak value is the "prism" through which a complex, intersecting, but often discontinuous array of individual and group identities and activities in production and place are brought into a social relation: it is always already infused with its "exterior." In short, Spivak (1990a, 104) argues that value is therefore a *catachresis*. It has—contra the late Marx—no *literal* origin and referent, such as "the true worker" or "living labor" because such categories are in themselves only further catachreses—they are always exceeded by that which they claim to represent.²⁰

Value: An "Unrepresentative" Re-Presentation

This, then, is the itinerary of impropriety and dis-continuity Spivak reads in Marx on value. Although it may seem initially to be a destructive itinerary that simply undermines Marx's intended argument, Spivak will show its positive implications.

20. Derrida's (1994) recent discussion of use-value and value in *Specters of Marx* has some obvious affinities with Spivak's reading of discontinuity and impropriety, not least because Spivak drew some of her inspiration from Derrida's discussion of the "proper" in his famous essay "White Mythology" (1982). See also Parker (1985).

Interestingly, she does so through *Marx himself*: a second, less systematic Marx, if you will, who functioned as a sort of skeptical counterpart to the social "scientist" of *Capital*. This is the Marx, preeminently, of the "unsystematic," "empirical" writings, especially *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.²¹

In that complex and baffling episode of French history, the birth of the Second Empire, Marx seems either to inadvertently admit his inability to narrate the flux of events or else, conversely, to admit his own role in "worlding" them, that is, forcibly "gathering them up" (as Lyotard might say) into conceptual thought and mastery in order to at least make *some* sense of them. This, Spivak shows, becomes particularly apparent in Marx's discussions of the class consciousness of small peasant proprietors. Marx tries to show how these proprietors, lacking any preexisting "class consciousness," came to find their "re-presentative" in Napoleon III. But in so doing, Spivak argues, he reveals the necessary "social indirection" involved in "staging" the peasants through a proxy, the emperor. This indirection, she continues, reveals the "necessary gaps between the source of 'influence' (. . . the peasant proprietors) and the 'representative' (Louis Napoleon)" and, most subversively for Marx's economic theory, implies "a critique of the . . . subjectivity of a *collective* agency" (1988b, 277). That is, it turns out that the only *identity* of this collective subjective agency is in fact its *difference from itself*, ironically obliging Marx to "construct models of a divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other" (276). Despite himself, therefore, Marx demonstrates that "one cannot, in fact, identify the product of an epistemological cleansing and the constituency of social justice" (277). As Jeffrey Mehlman has eloquently shown, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* "is above all the site where . . . heterogeneity, in its unassimilability to every dialectical totalization, is affirmed" (1977, 13). Or, as Christopher Norris puts it more emphatically, "such is the confusion of identities, class-roles, narrative sequence, historical epochs and so forth that this welter of profligate representations exceeds all the bounds of intelligible form" (1990, 33; see also Blanchot 1986).

This rebounds on Marx's more "scientific" texts like *Capital* and returns us to the question of use-value and concrete labor. According to Spivak's diagnosis of Marx's continuist reading, ontologically value is a chiasmatic (mis)representation of concrete labor ("the working class") but is also, epistemologically, simultaneously a concept that *constitutes* or worlds this referent and constituency while surreptitiously disavowing this worlding by ignoring the textuality of theory. As de Man put it, "something monstrous lurks in the most innocent of catachreses . . . the word can be said to produce of and by itself the entity it signifies" (1978, 21). At first glance this

21. I want here to register an important point made to me by Eric Glynn. Contra both Smith's and Spivak's reading of the value form. Glynn suggests the possibility that Marx continually rewrites and reconceptualizes the value form—as articulated in *Capital*, volume 1—in volumes 2 and 3. That is, rather than being mere "quantitative" refinements of Marx's basic "qualitative" arguments of volume 1, *within Capital itself* Marx ends the three volumes with living labor decentered and richly complicated. I agree with Glynn that, by confining her focus to volume 1, Spivak misses this important possibility which I do not, alas, have the space to explore here.

diagnosis appears destructive of Marx's analysis, apparently undermining his claim that value is real entity that must be critiqued and one, moreover, that when realized (mis)represents the efforts of a real collectivity. However, I would suggest that seeing value as a catachresis does not necessarily issue in the evacuation of Marx's problematic. Instead, it can be turned to positive political use to the extent that it *problematizes* the classical notion of an international working class as the origin and referent of value.

Colin MacCabe, I think, captures this extremely well. He suggests that Spivak urges us to think of value *not* as a re-presentation of the labor of a coherent, describable actor, "the working class," but as that which, within the circuit of capital, *consumes* the use-value of labor power.

[W]e have to understand Marx's account of value not as indicating the possibility of labor representing itself in value but as an analysis of the ability of capital to consume the use value of labor power. By concentrating on use value as the indeterminate moment within the chain of value determinations, Spivak breaks open that chain . . . [making] labor [power] endlessly variable both in relation to technological change and to political struggles (1988, xv).

This change of emphasis has subtle but profound implications for Marx's value analytics. On the one hand and importantly, it allows us to retain a focus on value as a real social entity. But, on the other hand, it enables one to problematize and prise open the value concept in its classical formulation. The key to this is MacCabe's insight that for Spivak capital consumes the use-value of labor power. By approaching value from the side of capital rather than from the side of a putatively punctual, definable "origin" (*the working class*), Spivak is drawing attention to the way that value relations *gather up unassimilable diversity* into an exploitative global political economy *without*, in turn, then trying to represent those exploited constituencies too quickly and hastily.

This double gesture both embraces and problematizes the "modern" legacy in Marx's work. Spivak, in the political interest of making truth claims about the world, sutures international economic ties around exploitative value relations using Marx's theory and seeks to make those relations visible. But as a way of calling the certainty and exhaustiveness of those claims and that theory into question she refrains from *naming* the constituency of economic exploitation that value represents. The pay-off has, I think, been very well captured by Alys Weinbaum when she comments that it is value "that *opens up the abstraction necessary to anti-essentialist thinking*" (1994, 100). As I understand it, this is an encouragement to envisage a form of Marxism and of anticapitalist struggle in which the reality of international economic exploitation is *affirmed* but the classical constituency of economic insurgency, class, is *deconstructed*. Because value is a catachresis, because labor power is endlessly variable, because "workers" are multiply marked and heterogeneous across space and time, one cannot penetrate the veils of fetishism to uncover and *represent* the subject of exploitation *tout court*. Rather, even as exploitation within an international

political economy is critiqued, representing and speaking on behalf of the exploited is complicated (cf. Gibson-Graham, 1993). Let me now conclude by returning to Spivak's favored example of those who cannot be grasped or represented in any easy way: places and peoples in the "Third World."

Conclusion: Building for Difference within Unity

What about us? . . . The splendid decadent, multiple, oppressive, and more than millenial polytheistic traditions of India . . . ?

—Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value"

If representation were a straightforward business, one could simply "add in" these various "nonclass" or "not-simply-capitalist" elements and thereby make Marxism a more powerful metatheory. In Spivak's case, one would therefore presumably "incorporate" "Third World" considerations, taking note of the peculiarities of non-Western "workers." But things are, of course, not so simple. Indeed, a number of authors have pointed to the dangers of such an apparently generous postcolonial gesture of attention and inclusion for it risks merely replicating the same will to truth, certainty, and cognitive appropriation that always marked the project of Western colonialism itself (Turner 1994).

In this the positionality of the investigating subject is vital. If, throughout this essay, I have insisted that envisioning capitalist value relations is indispensable, I have also stressed the active role of the investigator in making things seen. Spivak's strictures concerning representation become crucial here because they demonstrate the power and the risk of theoretical and empirical work of the sort Smith and other modern Marxists undertake. As she demonstrates in her controversial essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" there is no means of representing the consciousness of the oppressed and exploited that escapes the founding assumptions of the culture and society in which the investigator is implicated. The female subaltern is always spoken for. This is, as she says, "the predicament of *all* thought" (1988b, 204). But it should not, fortunately, be seen as what Sparke calls a "complacent abdication of responsibility to speak for others" (1994a, 115). If value represents, then the subject of economic exploitation can only be disclosed through space- and time-specific analyses of subject-constitution, analyses that break down the monolith of capitalism and class but that *also* do so with a constant vigilance concerning what Young calls the "constitutive and complicating role of the investigator in the formation of knowledge" (1990, 204). This is more than an academic matter because, as Marx realized in his famous theses on Feuerbach, representation and practice, knowledge and action are intimately connected. Like Marx in his more chiliastic moments, Smith's vision of working-class revolution misses the details in its assertive generality. If modern Marxists' normative-utopian prescriptions are not to become others' nightmares then they must attend to the aporias that necessarily inhabit them (see also Cullenberg 1992; Gibson-Graham 1996).

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Communism and Postmodern Theory: A Revaluation of Althusser's Marxism

Philip Goldstein

The work of the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser exercised an extraordinary influence during the 1960s and early 1970s but suffered a sharp decline in the late 1970s, well before he strangled his wife Hélène Rytman and ended his career in relative obscurity. This surprising decline persisted into the 1990s, when the success of his autobiography *The Future Lasts Forever* and several new studies of his work restored his influence somewhat.¹ What explains this extended decline is the bitter legacy of Soviet communism, the postmodern import of his later work and, of course, the murder of Hélène.

In the autobiography he explains why on that fatal weekend he inadvertently strangled her and was declared a legal *non-lieu*. Born in Algeria, raised Catholic and celibate, and living in Paris, he studied philosophy, married Hélène, joined the Communist party, and acquired high academic status. Not satisfied, he engaged in real and imagined sexual affairs, with which he tormented Hélène, and suffered from bleak depressions, which often sent him to a mental hospital. Skeptical reviewers from *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, and other popular journals claimed that, despite these psychological troubles, the courts would have tried him for murder if the French intellectual establishment had not protected him (see, for example, Kurzweil 1994, 514; and Steiner 1994, 86). In addition, to explain why he joined the French Communist party and defended scientific Marxism, he describes his parents' and grandparents' beliefs and wishes, his Catholic religious training, and important texts, teachers, philosophical figures, psychoanalytic doctrines, communist militants, and sociohistorical developments. Several reviewers suggested, just the same, that