

## An Interview with Richard D. Wolff

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**Interviewer's Note:** The following interview was conducted, via electronic mail in the early part of 1994, with the goal of providing some basic understanding of the activities of Richard Wolff and his colleagues in the field of economics—work which has been highly useful and provocative for many of us on the left both within and without the discipline. Wolff is one of the founders of the Association for Economic and Social Analysis (AESAs), and a member of the editorial board of the important journal, *Rethinking Marxism*. Much of Wolff's work has been co-authored with Stephen Resnick, and both are professors of economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Particularly important has been their book *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy* (U. Chicago Press, 1987); and they are now working on a book about the political economy of the Soviet Union—a tantalizing piece of which, "State Capitalism in the USSR?", can be found in *Rethinking Marxism* 6:2 (Summer 1993) 46-68.

**PS:** First I want to ask you to give an overview of the activities of AESA and *Rethinking Marxism*, saying what you think the general tendencies are within these projects and what you and they hope to achieve.

**RW:** AESA is now big enough to be quite diverse, so please allow for that in broadly interpreting the "central themes" that do, I think, describe our trajectories. We are Marxists in the sense of belonging to a movement of thought and action profoundly critical of capitalism and favoring fundamental social change toward an alternative class structure and social system characterized by the celebration of cultural diversities, the collective production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labor, and the commitment to fully democratic political processes.

At the same time, we recognize and respond to the current "crisis of Marxism" as earlier Marxists did to the crises of their time. That is, we struggle to take Marxism in new directions, building on what was, but also building critically in the sense of jettisoning what now seems undesirable within the broad Marxian tradition. In our case, this means that we oppose the modernism so deeply rooted in so much of the tradition. What this means is that our project entails the presumption that modernist modes of thinking within Marxism have generated all sorts of problems we wish to resolve, failures we wish to avoid repeating, and missed opportunities for new and better theoretical and political programs

that we want now to pursue. Hence, much of our work involves re-examining Marxism to identify its modernist moments; to problematize them in the sense of asking what their roles have been within the history of Marxism (theoretically as well as practically, etc.); and to juxtapose them with what we locate as the postmodernist moments that also characterize the Marxist tradition. The point here is not some sort of “cleansing action” of rooting out modernism in favor of postmodernism (although it sometimes looks like that to those Marxists committed to modernism); rather it is the opening of a postmodern critique-cum-reformulation of Marxism that we are engaged in—one that will have, no doubt, its modernist moments but self-consciously so, and that will make an enormous difference.

Another, somewhat simplistic way of saying the above is this: we wish to critically interpret and to import into Marxism the valuable insights gleaned from the postmodernist critiques of modernism that have developed across the twentieth century outside of Marxism. We work hard at approaching Marxism as a collection of discourses in complex relations of alliance and contestation with non-Marxist discourses; and we seek to interrogate those relations to the end of fashioning new and socially powerful Marxist discourses and actions for change.

We also and simultaneously work on a theme of reformulating Marxism around a kind of class analytics and concrete class analysis that has been ignored or marginalized for much of the history of the Marxist tradition (with, in our view, all sorts of bad results). Put briefly, this theme holds that pre-Marxian concepts of class (articulated in terms of property—haves-vs-have-nots—and/or power-dominators-vs-dominated) have retained their hold on Marxists and non-Marxists alike to the detriment of the radically new and different class concepts and analytics that Marx introduced. Now, Marx himself wobbled on his own innovations, thereby helping to enable their loss in favor of the older notions of class as a matter of property and/or power. In our view, class is a matter of surplus labor: how each kind of society organizes who produces and who gets such surpluses, how they’re produced, and what is done with them. Class understood in this conceptualization, although it’s related to matters of property and power, is itself a different matter. Attention to societies’ class structures in this surplus labor sense yields altogether new and different readings of history and the current conjuncture. It is to such readings that a good deal of AESA/*Rethinking Marxism* work is devoted.

The postmodernist and class-as-surplus-labor themes become joined within the framework of a systematically anti-essentialist notion of social connection and social causation. Class is thus not for us a final cause of anything. Our work instead stresses the need to interweave class and all non-class aspects of social totalities in terms of their irreducible roles as simultaneously causes and effects of one another; here we take Althusser’s notion of overdetermination considerably further than he could, and

conjoin it to our new readings of class in ways he did not.

The goal of all this is a renewal of Marxism that is dependent both on the tradition in which we are situated and upon perceptions of Marxism’s failings that demand attention. The very globalization of capitalism and its dire consequences suggest to us the validity of Marxism and the validity of the project to renew, strengthen, and transform it; Marxism remains, for us, the single most developed, rich, international, and diverse tradition of criticism and supercession of capitalism that the world has.

**PS:** When you talk of opposing the “modernism” of much Marxism, you appear to be talking about what you see as the essentialism of that tradition. To what extent are those two terms synonymous for you?

**RW:** For many purposes—although not all—those two terms can and do function as very close in our depictions. That follows from the purposes of our Marxist critique of the tradition. One such purpose is to revive and develop long-dormant or repressed strains of the tradition (its various eruptions of anti-essentialist or postmodernist moments). Another purpose is to appropriate for Marxism important breakthroughs in thought and action that have occurred outside of Marxism—and critically transforming them in the process. Anti-essentialism and, even more, postmodernism are, for us, sets of such breakthroughs which we can change or interpret in ways that enable a productive incorporation of them into a thereby changed Marxism. Because this point is often misunderstood, let me stress here that anti-essentialism and postmodernism strike us as not only lines of argument and analysis but also terrains of struggle over how to interpret, use, connect those lines with other arguments. Marxists will struggle with one another as well as with non-Marxists and anti-Marxists to interpret, use, and connect the lines in alternative ways with alternative social consequences. We want to actively engage that struggle.

By contrast, much of the Marxian tradition either dismisses anti-essentialism and postmodernism as more or less another passing fashion in bourgeois thinking, or denounces them as anti-Marxist, anti-activist celebrations of quietistic undecidability, nihilism, etc.—or both dismisses and denounces at once. We think that to be an inadequate set of responses which unnecessarily cedes the terrain of these theoretical breakthroughs to non- or anti-Marxist interpretations and uses without much struggle.

However, when we struggle critically to incorporate insights from anti-essentialism and postmodernism into Marxism we come face to face with the deep roots of and wide support for the tradition of essentialist arguments (or the network of ideas that may be termed modernism). Hence to appropriate from postmodernism what can be useful and productive for the Marxism of the future, we have no choice but to critique

critique the tradition of modernist Marxism that is the internal obstacle to that appropriation.

By essentialism/modernism, we mean the network of ideas that interconnect and interdepend to affirm that:

1. the essential determinant of social change is the economy
2. the essential determinant of the economy is the class structure.
3. the essential determinant of the class structure is the twin struggle of people with nature and people with one another, etc.
4. society has a logical order decomposable into causes and effects that science can determine.
5. Marxist theory claims to have captured that order whereas alternative theories have missed it, or worse, hide it.

The anti-essentialist or postmodernist moments in the Marxist tradition can be grouped around those arguments—starting with plenty offered by Marx and Engels themselves—that broke from the essentialist lines of reasoning (1, 2 and 3 above) in social analysis, or broke from the modernistic scientism in epistemology (4 and 5 above). Our work has been to recuperate and extend those moments into a new and, in that specific sense, postmodernist/anti-essentialist Marxism.

PS: Obviously a huge part of the importance of your efforts has been to promote a view of class processes not only in non-essentialist ways, but also in non-determinist ways. That's where the quasi-Althusserian notion of overdetermined totality serves you well, and where your work strongly counters some of the cruder dismissals that Marxist theory has been subject to. But could it not be said that you manage this only at a cost? That is, you say that what's unique about capitalism is the imbrication of its production of surplus value, its deployment of surplus labour, and what you call its fundamental class process; and this leads you to conclude that within capitalism there are specifiable "nonclass" functions and processes. How would you respond to the argument that *any* and *all* functions and processes within capitalism are in the end devoted to the production of surplus value and are also therefore all ultimately class processes?

RW: To say that all non-class processes within a social totality (cultural processes such as thinking or writing, political processes such as voting and legislating, economic processes such as exchanging or lending, natural processes such as eating or photosynthesis) contribute to or are "devoted" to class processes strikes me as a peculiar, problematical statement. If it means that class processes are the ultimate cause, goal, determinant, telos, etc of all the non-class processes, my anti-essentialism would reject the statement outright. If it means that all non-class processes are connected to, participate in the overdetermination of, shape, influ-

ence, etc. class processes, then I would agree. But my agreement would be merely a way to negate the determinism that holds class to be some essential cause or governing essence of non-class aspects of social life.

The problem that always remains for anti-essentialists is the positive task of analysis and action that follows once the negation of determinist logics has been achieved. In other words, we anti-essentialists cannot organize and justify our thoughts and actions around some claim to have got our minds and hands on *the* essential cause of social complexities. Nothing like that exists for us. So our thoughts and actions lose the groundedness so long and so deeply claimed by our essentialist opponents. (A parallel here might be sought in the problems encountered by those who sought rules of social behavior but for whom God no longer offered *the* ground for them.)

So we proceed to presume that one can usefully divide the myriad of social processes into two groups—an initial step in analyzing any complex group being the analytical formation of sub-groups. Our Marxist way of proceeding is to make the dividing line fall between the processes that directly entail the production, receipt, and distribution of surplus labor (class processes) and all other processes (non-class processes). The point of so drawing the line is to focus attention on class processes. By making the initial differentiation (within the set of differentiations that comprise any theory) a differentiation based on class, we establish the basis for a systematic class analysis of society. We do that because we want to construct that particular kind of analysis and because we want to expose and transform the class dimensions of society—that's a priority for us. We do not proceed in this way because of any epistemological claim that class is *the* way to draw the dividing line. We recognize an infinity of other ways that others (Marxists and non-Marxists) have drawn or could draw such lines, leading them to elaborate correspondingly different sorts of social analyses connected to their different sets of priorities.

To divide the processes (or aspects or dimensions) of a social complexity into subgroups does not deny that the latter are connected to one another. However, nor does it require the assertion that any one subgroup determines another (or all others) in some linear or cause-and-effect system. It is possible to affirm—as we do—that the relationship between the subgroup chosen for focus (for us, class processes) and all other non-class processes is one of mutual overdetermination. Non-class processes combine to overdetermine the class processes of a society, just as the class processes participate in overdetermining all the non-class processes. No quantitative ranking of determination is required—and we categorically reject such ranking. Of course, for others, such ranking is essential; that is, they search for and "find" what they feel are *the* dominant or determinant or essential causes in relation to which other social aspects are effects, etc.

If causal primacy is rejected, if class is no “more” a social determinant than any of all the other, non-class processes, how then do we warrant our focus on class? Our answer is conjunctural. Or to put the point in other words, our answer requires us to present an account of the overdetermination of our personal theoretical and behavioral priorities. We construct specifically class analyses because we are offended by the repression of the consciousness of class processes in our cultures. We construct our class analyses because the sets of social changes that strike us as needed, as beautiful, and as just, include changes in how surplus labor is produced, received, and distributed. *Yet this conclusion is not accepted or understood by others who might be our allies if persuasive class analyses were presented to them.* There are thousands of reasons why we, confronted by the social complexity of our lives, come to a Marxian theory focused on anti-essentialism and class processes (and why others come to different sorts of Marxian as well as non-Marxian theories).

If our anti-essentialism were to be questioned, the same sort of response would be in order: there are myriad reasons why we, here and now, find essentialist connections (among aspects of society or among elements of a theoretical argument about society) unpalatable and so proceed against them.

But, to return to your basic question: there is no need to close the distance between class and non-class aspects of society (a distance full of the irreducible open-endedness of how the interactions among the processes across that distance can evolve) by asserting that one side (one sub-group of processes) controls the others (such that the latter are “devoted” to them). Indeed, to do so, to make that theoretical move, strikes us as very like the modernism/essentialism of traditional Marxism from which we seek to break. Indeed, yet another reason for that break is our strong feeling that revolutionary social change will be enhanced by so doing. Political quietism is the opposite of what we want. But we reject any essentialist linkage that suggests that effective revolutionary action can only be or must be based on essentialist theories of society. Given the impasses to which revolutionary movements have arrived in so many places these days, it would seem that the burden has shifted onto the shoulders of those who wish to continue with the essentialist systems of social analysis and revolutionary strategies that they have championed for so long.

PS: One “nonclass” process that your work identifies is the state and the formation of state power—these you separate quite radically from the production of class. What does such a separation enable, as far as you’re concerned, in terms of the issue of action against or resistance to the state (obviously, an abiding Marxist concern)? Perhaps a more hostile questioner than I would put the issue this way: in this separation we see the familiar distance between the political and the economic as it’s con-

structed in bourgeois knowledge production. How would you respond to such a statement?

RW: I recognize the bourgeois, apologetic usages to which such separations have been put (chiefly [a] to keep democratic demands inside a strictly delimited political realm of voting, law, etc. and out of the realm of control over the production and distribution of goods and services; and [b] to keep discourse about and policies for economic crisis, waste, and injustice strictly within a delimited economic realm that keeps the basic contours of power unchanged). However, the separation we stress has utterly different objectives and works in completely different ways.

As to our objectives: democratic discourse has been successfully kept away from the issue of class for centuries; thus, one of Marx’s central goals was to integrate into the agenda of democrats a consciousness of and an attention to something they had missed, namely the social structures of producing and distributing surplus labor and their influences upon the rest of the societies in which they occur. Even when democrats had addressed class, they had defined classes in peculiarly political terms. Classes were defined in terms of power (who wielded authority over whom), or in terms of property (who had the power to deny whom access to what objects). These were both power/political definitions that simply overlooked the issue of surplus labor around which Marx, we think, organized his intervention and built his distinctive contribution to the broadly conceived radical agenda.

Our separation of class from power is above all aimed to remedy the overlooking, the missing, or the subsumption of the surplus labor issues as if they did not matter or were somehow just derivative of power issues. By making a definition of class that is not power-based, not political, but rather strictly oriented toward surplus labor, we intend (1) to refocus our readers toward Marx’s distinctive contribution in this area, (2) make the case that the achievement of radically democratic political aims (which we enthusiastically share) requires specific changes in the social structure of how and by whom surplus labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed and so forth. This is very different and opposed to the intentions of bourgeois theories that operate their separations of the economic and the political.

Moreover, we separate very differently from how they do. We separate precisely in order to understand how these two sets of aspects (processes) of social life participate in overdetermining one another. That is, no wall divides the realms (as in contemporary divisions of academic faculties between economics and politics—where, of course, *both* deny the existence and analysis of class in surplus labor terms altogether). Instead, our logic of overdetermination, by refusing any quantitative ranking of social importance, determinating influence, etc., imposes on theorists and social activists the necessity of investigating how class and non-class

aspects of social life intertwine to condition and shape one another. That is a necessity for understanding and changing capitalist society; and it is a necessity if a socialist/communist order is to be established whose class and non-class aspects reinforce rather than undermine one another.

Thus, to be provocative for a moment, we would make the case that early democratic breakthroughs in a number of modern revolutionary upheavals could not endure for long, in part because the revolutionaries were focused on issues of power (property included) to the exclusion of concern with the specific structures of the production and distribution of surplus labor. The absence of the latter concern enabled structures of surplus labor to endure which then reacted back upon the democratic polity to undermine and destroy it. Our book on the USSR, now nearing completion, tries to make this case.

Unlike bourgeois theorists entranced by essentialisms—where, predictably, the political scientists find the essence of society and history in political aspects, while the economists do likewise with economic aspects, and each tries to incorporate the other as a special case of itself—our pointedly anti-essentialist framework requires the constant integration of class and non-class aspects as each other's constituents/overdeterminants.

Thus we share a concern with the state: its transformation and its "withering away" are our objectives. But not the *essential* objective, because nothing can be. Nor is it a matter of merely supplementing political objectives vis-a-vis the state with "economic" objectives vis-a-vis class structures. Rather, it is precisely a matter of grasping and strategically addressing how state and class intertwine in contemporary capitalist social formations: how they contradictorily both reinforce and undermine one another so that we can find strategically logical points to focus our transformative activities on. Indeed, not only politics and economics but also culture needs to be integrated into this sense of the contradictory interactions that provide revolutionaries with their opportunities now. In this context, our task is to make sure that class, in the surplus labor sense, obtains the attention it has so long been denied (to the detriment of revolutionary efforts) and that this attention is contextualized in an anti-essentialist, overdetermined way. Those concerns govern our "separation" of the economic and the political and differentiate it from separations done by others and especially our ideological/political opponents.

PS: The project of an anti-essentialist Marxism has been brought to the fore not only by you and your colleagues but also notably by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe—their work giving rise to the notion of a "post-Marxism." It's clear, though, that their anti-essentialist analyses don't land up with any kind of retrieval of class or class processes; and indeed, their work seems to me to elide the category of the economic

altogether. But given that you and they both largely operate under this banner of "anti-essentialism," can you say how you relate your own work to theirs?

RW: First I should mention that there have been articles in *Rethinking Marxism* that go into considerable depth to offer critiques of their approach from our perspective, most recently an article by Jonathan Diskin and Blair Sandler, "Essentialism and the Economy in the Post-Marxist Imaginary: Reopening the Sutures," *Rethinking Marxism* 6:3 (Fall 1993), 28-48. And of course, Laclau himself is a member of *Rethinking Marxism's* advisory board.

The relationship is complex. We share with Laclau and Mouffe a profound anti-essentialism as an expression of our antipathy to the destructive essentialisms we think ran rampant within the Marxist tradition over the last 100 years. We agree with them that that tradition has been breaking up since at least the 1960s—as evidenced by the events of 1968/69, the Sino-Soviet debates, Eurocommunism, the ascendancy of Gramscian motifs, Althusser's theoretical innovations, the collapse of Eastern European regimes, and so on. We agree with them that Marxists now *have to* take positions on which tendencies within the tradition are worth preserving and how best to do so (i.e. in what ways such preservations will also be transformations and extensions). And finally, we share with them a desire to appropriate, for the Marxist tendencies we champion, the critical breakthroughs in bourgeois theories that can usefully be lumped under the heading "post-modernism." Of course, such Marxist appropriations entail major critical transformations: it is some sort of postmodernist Marxism we are after.

Where we part company with Laclau and Mouffe has to do with how and where they take postmodernism into Marxism. At the simplest, summary level, we eschew notions of post-Marxism. We are Marxists and happily so. We see a long standing presence of the kinds of Marxism we are developing within the tradition—what might be termed the many postmodernist moments in a Marxist tradition in which modernism was hegemonic. Our task is the recuperation and development of those postmodernist moments aided by work done in and on postmodernism outside of the Marxist tradition. But Marxism of the sort we understand and work with has never yet been dominant within the Marxist tradition, so post-Marxist would be a misnomer for our project. It is the Marxist tradition we seek to take in new directions now that the old directions have been exhausted, the old tradition broken up.

Laclau and Mouffe seem to me to ride the pendulum swing all the way to the other side. Where traditional Marxism celebrated the essential and socially determinant role of economics (in base/superstructure and other similar metaphorical constructions), they go to the other end and celebrate the virtual evaporation of economics from critical social analysis.

Where traditional Marxism justified and informed organizations that were highly centralized, repressed internal differentiations, and promoted key contradictions said to determine society and cause history, Laclau and Mouffe celebrate micro-politics as some sort of organic flowering of all the differentiations that were repressed before. Where traditional Marxism intoned the mantras of collective property and centralized planning, Laclau and Mouffe counter intone “democracy.”

We don't want to do any of this. For example, our appropriation of Althusser's breakthrough conceptualizations of “overdetermination” goes precisely to the point of rejecting economic determinism but not in favor of “democratic” or “micro-level” determinisms. The point is rather to conceptualize a Marxism that insists on the relevance of class but in the non-deterministic context of exploring how class and non-class aspects interact to produce the societies we wish to transform and those we wish to construct. Yes, centralized, modernist political theory and organization is unacceptable—but no more so than the fantasy that capitalism will be overcome through some magical uprising of countless micro-political movements that somehow coalesce to confront and overcome the very well organized capitalist establishment. The trick is rather at once to acknowledge and accommodate all the differentiated groups and interests that *might* coalesce into a hegemonic anti-capitalist force *and* also to work at the project of crafting the means for effective, activist unity among them against the common enemy.

And, finally, we entertain deep suspicions about the mantra of “democracy.” Democracy cannot function for us as the substitute for what “socialism” or “communism” was for traditional Marxists and others before. It is not *the* essential solution. The USSR would not have solved its myriad problems had only more democracy existed there. Nor China, nor other Communist Parties, etc. Democracy is no magic bullet. Its social impacts are contradictory, in differing ways enabling and hobbling social change. Just as collectivizing the means of production was contradictory, central planning was contradictory, and so on. We do not see progress in exchanging economic determinism for democratic determinism. We remember Marx's caustic comments on the social function of so many of the “democratic urges” in his time; they retain much of their validity today. The statements of Laclau and Mouffe often read as though they do not share this perspective with us at all.

Democracy in the polity, like communism in the class structure (in our sense of collective production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labor and its fruits) are goals we pursue. They are different. In some contexts they reinforce one another more than they threaten one another; in other contexts the reverse is the case. Our goal is to elaborate that kind of Marxism which seeks to construct the economic, political, and cultural contexts within which democracy and communism provide conditions for one another's enduring existence.

No absolute wall separates us from Laclau and Mouffe; they are searching, as we are, to construct the new directions for Marxism under the new conditions. We have learned from them and hope they can and will learn from our deployment of overdetermination and class (qua surplus labor processes). That convergence and divergence attend the relation between our efforts and theirs is hardly surprising. But since it is too soon to tell what the broad contours of Marxism's next major phase will look like, the debates continue amongst us. And not the least contradiction these days is that, while Marxism is relegated (by governments, journalists, and academics) to the status of the historical past in the popular mind and the police mind, the space is thereby opened for us to debate freely and creatively how best to usher in Marx's “old mole” when it again rears its head to upset the capitalist celebration.

**PS:** As with the work of Laclau and Mouffe, a goodly number of the terms and concepts with which you work are perhaps less familiar in the discipline of economics than they might be in the humanities, and it's been clear so far that you and your group have made considerable effort to articulate with people in the humanities, particularly those in the so-called field of Cultural Studies. In relation to that articulation—which can perhaps be described as an interdisciplinary one—what role do you think the general area of Cultural Studies should be playing in all this (not, that is, what you think it actually does do, but more what you think it ought to do to help)?

**RW:** In economics, perhaps more than in the other social “sciences,” there is a deeply and widely pervasive insularity, a self-consciousness of being “hard” like the natural sciences are thought to be. “Science” is taken to mean a set of mechanisms and methods whereby truth (in the absolute singular) is the achievable goal, something conceived as infinitely different from as well as more desirable and satisfying than the maddeningly equivocal, forever incomplete, inescapably partial and relative propositions advanced in and by the humanities and other “fuzzy” social sciences. This self-image, rooted in a very traditional philosophy and epistemology, needs critical attention and interventions from activists within the field of Cultural Studies. This is needed urgently now.

The epistemological, scientific absoluteness of economics is a major foundation for the hegemony exercised by the conventional theories which go by the name of “neoclassical” economics. They endlessly represent themselves as the “truth” of economic reality, the mirror representations of how “the” economic reality functions, and hence the necessary basis for any “rational” set of economic institutions (e.g., private property, markets as the mechanisms for distributing resources and products socially, state policies for the regulation of such property and markets). Nowadays, these purveyors of “economics” (note that the

very name of the discipline connotes singularity, an agreed body of analysis, etc.) interpret the events in the former USSR and Eastern Europe as yet another definitive "proof" of the irrationality and unworkability of any institutions or policies other than those established in and by neoclassical theory as the "optimal" (sic: this is a central word for neoclassical theory) available to any and all human communities.

What Cultural Studies' interventions could—and, I hope, will—do is to criticize the currently hegemonic neoclassical economics and the capitalist institutions it anoints as "optimal." The criticism might begin, for example, with an insistence (or, if preferred, an hypothesis) that economic theories (plural) are themselves inescapably cultural artifacts. They are texts that are born, change, and die in concrete historical circumstances like other cultural artifacts. They are multiple in number, contradictory among themselves, and in contradictory relationships with other cultural and also non-cultural aspects of any social totality in which they occur. Each theory is itself multiseismic in endlessly shifting ways.

In short, a sustained assault by Cultural Studies on the self-image of economic science could help enormously to support and strengthen the forces within economics that are already at work questioning, undermining, and displacing its simplistic modernism. And this would, if successful, transform the entire discipline by opening up its long-repressed agonistic field of contesting conceptualizations. Economics might then become itself a field aware of the multiplicity of its truths, conceptual frameworks, policy implications, etc. The terrain of economic discourse would, finally, mature to where Cultural Studies has already arrived: a self-awareness informing at least a significant number of its practitioners that they are alternative, contesting proponents of alternative imaginations of self, selves, and the social totality encompassing them.

There is an irony here that might well offer one door through which such an assault by Cultural Studies might enter the fields of economics and the social sciences more generally. Neoclassical economics begins with an admittedly cultural phenomenon: namely, the ordering of individuals' desires ("preferences") for work as opposed to leisure, for current as opposed to future consumption, and for buying this rather than that commodity. It is admitted that "culture" shapes such desires (although strict rules about the structure of such desires are imposed since they are required if mathematical manipulations are to reach those "optimum" states the theory ends with). It is never admitted that "culture" may also shape the particularly neoclassical manner of thinking about economics.

Cultural Studies folks have, in my experience, often displayed a tendency to avoid economics, to somehow endorse, if only implicitly, the notion of economics as an inaccessible realm of "difficult" truths encoded in mathematical raiments impervious to the weapons of cultural criticism. My point is that the raiments are, of course, fictive—another

un clothed emperor awaits the critical exposure of nakedness. The hegemonic neoclassical economists have assaulted Cultural Studies to use it for the purposes of constructing their theoretical celebrations of capitalism. What critical economics needs from Cultural Studies is a counter-assault, one which openly does theoretical work on (and thereby in a way subordinates) economics into its realm of cultural objects.

Where this is accomplished, the transformed philosophical, epistemological, and methodological terrain will enable Marxist and other critical economics to resurface, develop, and contest in a radically altered atmosphere. Not only will that alter the life of the discipline of economics (and many other social sciences that take a lot of their cues from economics). It will also alter the countless politicians' discourses, journalistic accounts, and other texts that depend on neoclassical economics much more than most acknowledge or understand.