

ported projects that were at least partly funded by government, while in the earlier period, peasants were expected to shoulder the entire burden of construction and were understandably less enthusiastic. On the other hand, chapters 3 through 6 present numerous examples of *eighteenth-century* collective action against seigneurs and *curés*.

The last two chapters of the book are essentially descriptive and cover subjects already alluded to earlier: the brief (1799-1813) period of activity of the Batiscan Iron Works Company and the Hale family's dream of settling Protestants in their seigneurie and creating around their manor house a picturesque landscape reminiscent of England.

*The Metamorphoses of Landscape and Community*, then, elicits a mixed reaction. Its contribution to the study of socio-economic change is slight and tends to follow outdated interpretations; in the cultural sphere, where Coates is visibly more at ease, the social perceptions of the members of this community are traced with considerable success. This last aspect represents a new approach to the rural society of pre-industrial Quebec and makes the book well worth reading.

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<sup>1</sup> W.H. Parker, "A New Look at Unrest in Lower Canada in the 1830s," *Canadian Historical Review*, XL, 3 (1959): 209-217; F. Ouellet, *Histoire économique et sociale du Québec, 1760-1850*, (Montreal: Fides, 1966), 639.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Serge Courville, "Le marché des subsistances. L'exemple de la plaine de Montréal au début des années 1830 : une perspective géographique," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 42, 2 (automne 1988) : 193-239.

J.K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff, eds., *Class and its Others* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

J.K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff, eds., *Re/presenting Class: Essays in Postmodern Marxism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

*Class and Its Others* and *Re/presenting Class* are essay collections assembled by editors associated with the journal *Rethinking Marxism*: J.K. Gibson-Graham (a pen name for the combined efforts of Katherine Gibson and Julie

Graham ), Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolf. Both collections have a unifying theoretical framework that combines Althusser's theory of overdetermination with Resnick and Wolf's own theory of class processes developed in their previous work *Knowledge and Class*. The editors claim that "overdetermination can be understood as a provisional ontology that operates to contradict and destabilize the essentialist ontology of the dominant forms of Marxism (and indeed of the entire Western intellectual lineage)" (*Re/presenting*, 5). This is a tall order and one they do not accomplish.

All of the authors represented in the collections subscribe to Althusser's theory of overdetermination and Resnick and Wolf's class analytic frame of anti-essentialism. While each of the essays deserve to be reviewed according to their individual merits this is made difficult by the editors' imposition of an overarching theoretical coherence on each of the books. One cannot do justice to all the essays so I examine the ones that best exemplify the approach. Despite my misgivings about the theoretical foundations of both works I found the premise and goals of these collections very exciting. In the introductory essay of *Class and Its Others* J.K. Gibson-Graham state they will "bring class and exploitation into visibility" and "end their sojourn in the theoretical shadows" (7). While I was not necessarily in agreement that class and exploitation had been in theoretical shadow I was excited to see what bringing them out of this shadow would look like.

The first two essays in *Class and its Others* are Cecilia Marie Rio's "This Job Has No End: African American Workers and Class Becoming" and Jenny Cameron's "Domesticating Class: Femininity, Heterosexuality, and Household Politics." The theoretical underpinnings of both is the idea that domestic labour, for pay in the case of Rio and within one's own house in the case of Cameron, exist outside of capitalism. The authors imply that thinking about class differently takes one outside of capitalist relations.

Rio discards both what she calls traditional Marxist analysis and multiple oppressions theory in order to "break free from the capitalocentrism, victimhood, and structural determinism privileged by the dominant discourses on domestic labor" (31). What Rio offers instead is a survey of existing literature on domestic workers that tacks on Resnick and Wolf's overdeterminist epistemology and anti-essentialist class analysis. One problem is that she does no case studies: she just inserts her theory into existing work. Rio argues that African American domestic workers enacted a class transformation from slaves to live-in domestics to independent commodity producers. This doesn't make sense as if they are earning a wage they are not independent commodity producers. She suggests that using an overdeterminist and anti-essentialist class analysis offers a new way of looking at domestic work. However her argument on how domestics undertook a class transformation rests on the very practices

and ways of seeing class that she rejects as essentialist. Rio notes that African American domestic workers organized to change their conditions and formed their own independent organizations and social clubs (35). Despite Rio's assertion that only her analysis accounts for this activity it is well within the purview of "orthodox" Marxism. In fact, Rio has to concede in her footnotes that "one of the more assertive unions was the Domestic Workers Union, headed by African American Dora Jones, which was part of the Communist Trade Union Unity League" (45, n.22). While I can agree with Rio that "African American domestic workers found creative ways to profoundly change the nature of domestic work" and that they developed "communal networks and local organisations which heightened the women's sense of autonomy and dignity" none of this is incompatible with a Marxist class analysis (43). In order to insist that her anti-essentialist class analytic is superior to traditional Marxism, Rio seems to be creating a straw person Marxism to argue against. She has to underplay the role of unions, communist and other, as well as workers' self activity, class consciousness, and class struggle, all the mainstays of traditional Marxist analysis and practice.

Cameron wants to get away from the representation of "domestic labor inequality, exploitation, and gender oppression as tightly and invariably bound together" (48). She casts women who do housework as self-appropriating domestic workers who "produce, appropriate and distribute domestic surplus labor" (57). Cameron argues that this alternative way of looking at domestic work leaves room for a class transformation. Language and representation are key to Cameron's argument. By creating a discourse in which the feminine domestic subject is in control and self-appropriating rather than exploited, Cameron argues that the possibilities of transformation are multiplied (60). The problem with this argument is that this transformation exists only in language. Regardless of what domestic work is called it is still unproductive labour that helps to reproduce the conditions for capitalism. Cameron's argument rests on the contention that traditional Marxist and egalitarian feminism have it wrong. However, she makes this claim by painting a caricature of these analyses stating that they only cast the woman as victim and leave no room for the woman as active subject. Cameron's alternative is to represent women as self-appropriating domestic workers, which she argues opens up a new way of seeing the problem. As a stay at home dad whose wife does the waged work I cannot see how casting either gender that stays at home as self appropriating creates a new politics of domestic work. We are still operating within the capitalist economy and are still unpaid for our work. Whether we are striving for egalitarian household relations or call our relations feudal, it does not change the material conditions under which we work and the article poses no solution.

Cameron's work also has a suspect methodology. Despite interviewing twenty-two women, she relies almost solely on one interviewee, Fran Cameron and uses Fran and her family with 'children' aged 17-25 as her major case study. All I could think of was why these young, and not so young, adults were being considered children who had all the chores done for them in the first place. Despite this quibble, a serious problem with the methodology is the generalizations drawn from one family's experience. A more theoretical problem is the author's focus on discourse, for "playing around with a variety of class readings" (48) offers few real strategies for emancipation from oppressions, gender or class, beyond changing the words used to describe it. Indeed the whole project of *Class and its Others* is to "produce a discourse of class ... to make visible economic relations that exist and could exist, to catalyze desires, to attempt to re-enliven the socialist imagination" (19). This attempt to re-enliven the imagination exists mostly in words, for "[i]t is a project beginning with a language, an open ended matrix that frees as well as confines" (19).

Not surprisingly this type of imagining works better as fiction. The best work in this collection is the fiction "Spring Flowers" by Susan Jahoda. It ties together all the themes in the collection: class, gender, sexuality, commodification of desire, and economic dependency. Jahoda introduces these themes through a story about a group of people living in non-traditional relationships in which notions of gender and sexuality are not fixed. This has a long tradition in fiction including Cherneshevsky's *What is to be Done*. Jahoda's story is innovative and interesting in its word play and use of metaphor. That the fiction works the best in an otherwise non-fiction collection illustrates what post modernism is best at, semantics, word play, a sense of reconstructing meaning with words. While this works well in fiction, I think it fails as a tool of analysis.

An example of how imagined spaces and word play is less successful when doing historical case studies is J.K. Gibson-Graham and Phillip O'Neil's case study of an Australian transnational corporation in *Re/presenting Class*. "Exploring A New Class Politics of the Enterprise" looks at the steel division of Broken Hill Proprietary (BHP). The article looks at two main incidents in BHP's operations. They examine first a corporate restructuring and then an environmental struggle. Their stated goal is to take a familiar story of capitalist restructuring in the global marketplace and "undermine this quite coherent and predictable representation by decentering the story of the firm from capital accumulation and simultaneously decentering the vision of enterprise and class politics from the capital-labor relation" (57). As I will show this decentering is not very successful and lends little to class struggle in theory or practice.

In 1981 BHP wanted to rationalize its operations and close its Newcastle steel plant. The authors focus on assistant general manager Robert Cherney

who convinces the company to keep the plant open by “only” laying off 5 000 workers. They refer to Cherney’s efforts in saving the plant as “heroic,” arguing that the general manager going against head office and trying to keep the plant open shows there are breaks in capitalism (62). However, this is not news to historical materialists. The idea of breaks in capitalist hegemony was put forward by Antonio Gramsci over seventy years ago and Gibson-Graham and O’Neil shed no new light on this idea.

The authors suggest that using Resnick and Wolf’s class analytic frame and focusing on distributive flows of capital rather than means and method of production would open up new possibilities. They argue that if workers, in a bargaining position, “considered the potential distributions of their surplus labor and sought to influence the direction flows – that is, if they inhabited an imaginative world not governed by the narrative conventions of the monopoly capital story, a world in which innovative distributive claims were possible – they might direct their political energies to novel and nonreproductive ends” (70). What they ignore is that workers in BHP were not in a bargaining position: they were being “rationalized.” As well capitalism is not just a story or narrative convention and workers inhabit a real world not an imagined one. The capitalist imperative for accumulation, commodification, profit-maximization, and competition is a very real thing that can not be wished away. A strategy that works only in an imagined world is not a strategy at all. Perhaps just as problematic is that the authors seem uninterested in workers’ views. Their analysis of the restructuring is primarily based on interviews with the general and assistant manager of BHP. They do not interview the workers or their union. This approach reveals an uncritical acceptance of the capitalist world-view which is at odds with a Marxist methodology.

The second case the authors explore is an environmental claim against BHP for dumping toxic mine tailings from their Papua New Guinea gold and silver mines into the local river. A coalition of environmentalists and indigenous Papua New Guineans sued BHP for approximately \$700 million, which included damages, the costs of dredging the river, and creating an alternate site for the tailings. The authors use this success as an example of a way forward for class politics. They claim that this coalition successfully fought for distributive payments from the company that included environmental and social costs. Gibson-Graham and O’Neil contend that “the OK Tedi villagers have created a new class position in the distributive class configuration of BHP” (73). The authors believe that the lawsuit also created new conditions of capitalist exploitation as BHP would no longer be able to pursue mining operations without paying attention to environment and social costs. Their evidence for such a claim is company spokesperson Jerry Ellis’ statement that “we got some things wrong ... we don’t want to do it again” (72). Once again the authors do not

interview the people affected, just company representatives. This is history from the top, certainly not a practice grounded in Marxism.

Even the authors recognize that their example “could be seen as a payment that was wrested from the corporation to guarantee its continued ability to attract other kinds of revenues” (74). They offer only the company spokesperson as evidence that it could be seen as anything else. The authors’ main argument is that this could be the basis of making a claim for distributive payments from a company. The idea is that citizens could group together and demand they get part of the profits as distributive payments. Their argument is a thinly disguised liberal pluralism in which workers’ and capitalists’ differences can be reconciled along with the communities. How this would be done is a mystery. The only way the aboriginals of Papua New Guinea secured compensation was through a lawsuit, and the workers of BHP had 5,000 of their members laid off. All we have from the case study is the management side, and the assurance that they will do better next time. Gibson-Graham and O’Neil omitted the voice of the workers in the plant and of the environmentalists in the communities studied in favour of management and their corporate spokesperson. It is therefore hard to accept their claim that they are opening up new possibilities of class struggle. Class analysis is supposed to illuminate how the system actually works, how it creates surplus value (or steals it), and how it reproduces itself. Marxists have always known that struggles might distribute profits a little differently – Marx argued that workers could win higher wages: “Exploring A New Class Politics of the Enterprise” offers nothing new.

As a practical tool of Marxist analysis, one that actually leads to a Marxist practice, the overdetermination model is not very useful. For example in “Development and Class Transition in India: A New Perspective” by Anjan Chakrabarti and Stephen Cullenberg in *Re/presenting Class* their analysis of India does not actually lead to a new perspective or practice. They argue that there are multiple class processes that need to be examined in Indian development. They state that bringing these processes into view allows a politics of class transformation to take place. They note that “any development model is predicated on a particular theory of economic transition and a particular vision of economic justice” (183). However the authors offer no way forward for India. They offer instead a vaguely defined goal of “fairness” in redistribution with more going to “doers” than “non doers” (200). The doers and non doers take us away from a Marxist definition of workers and capitalists and the classes in between and lumps all the middle, working, and lower classes together. Rather than make class clearer they make it vague, undefined, and ultimately, less useful. While their call for non-exploitative class structures and “fair” distribution sounds good, their “disaggregated micro-class analysis” does little to bring this about and does even less to clarify what their overdeterminist class analytic school of theory really stands for.

Both collections would likely appeal to anyone pursuing history using poststructuralism in their analysis. I hesitate to call either collection Marxist as they break so thoroughly with Marx and Engels and rely instead on Althusser as the arbiter of the nature of Marxism. Neither text reveal Althusser as a leading member of the French Communist Party or his Stalinist leanings which seems at cross purposes with their claims of anti-essentialism. I do recognize that the editors and authors in the collections are attempting to redefine Marxism. That I do not accept their redefinitions is largely immaterial to their project. As pointed out in the introduction to *Re/presenting Class*, “since it is not possible to establish ‘objective’ validity outside the frame of a particular analytic regime or project, the question of choice between different theories or entry points involves not which is more accurate or true, but the consequences of choosing one rather than another” (5). I would argue that the consequences of choosing their mode of analysis is to take a step backward in Marxist theory leaving class struggle muted and obscured by jargon and over analysis not to mention offering little useful for workers’ actual struggles. If the 1990s has taught us anything it is the actual, not imagined, brutal nature of capitalism. These collections may appeal to those wanting to know what is current in post-structuralist analysis, or what an anti-essentialist class analysis entails. Beyond that I could not recommend either book.

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Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson, eds., *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

To develop a collection assessing the status of American democracy is an ambitious project at best but one that is increasingly important as the U.S. and global capitalist interests dominate almost every political agenda. I read much of this collection during the first anniversary of September 11th and was constantly reminded by media reports of memorial events that there was little space for real, critical debate about this important milestone in the world’s most powerful democracy. Perhaps because of the September 11th context I was searching in this book for an analysis that would help me to understand how limited American democracy has become. I wanted some acknowledgement of how the discursive terrain has narrowed to virtually exclude all interests other than those of global capitalism. I wanted someone to address the increased polar-