

The Vanishing Point: Humanity, Vision, and Value Theory in the Age of Economic Globalization

Riaz Tejani

Theorists of value in the Marxian tradition have placed heavy emphasis on the metaphor of 'vision.' Vision is the sensory experience that allows things to be converted into objects, collected items to be read as texts, and putative structures to be read as such by way of heuristic representation. Additionally, vision allows nature to be converted into capital, exchange to be seen as participating in an 'economy', and representations of that economy to be read (i.e. per cultural studies) as 'texts'. The pursuit of vision as the inaugural metaphor in many "scattered speculations" on capital have, however, only partially completed the task of a Marxian critique of modern social relations. To terminate at the conclusion that capital operates on a particular mode of looking and that it is the reproduction of this kind of vision that ideology keeps as its *raison d'être*, is to neglect one remaining implication: *to fail to envision the economy in the manner that allows its reproduction is to fall outside of 'society' and thus humanity itself.* In this paper I capitulate three examples in which Marxian theorists indulge the specular component of value theory. Subsequently, I engage several authors who have illuminated the question of the production and reproduction of notions of value, notions that are in their different ways equated with culture, ideology, myth, or desire. Finally, my discussion makes recourse to the 'crisis of value' as experienced at the global level. While economic globalization certainly does not instigate this crisis, it is one very important dimension of it. Therefore, the kind of crisis wrought by Capital encounters with various forms of local culture illustrates potential outcomes of the failure to

envision value according to standards necessary for Capital's own reproduction. In sum, I wish to argue that the failure to espouse value in accordance with the reproductive tenets of Capital renders actors (who cannot then be called human subjects) beyond the pale of humanity. That is, to fail to adequately value is to fail to be subjectivized. It is not that value exists *a fortiori* in pristine form to be recognized by those prescient enough to be deemed human. It is that value becomes legible from very narrow subject positions, and thus the reproduction of value is inextricable from the reproduction of subjects.

The import of vision is central to Castree's (1997) argument about a possible "third way" between hard-line Marxists' emphasis on systematic political economy and so-called postmodern Marxists' emphasis on overdetermination and difference within any putatively closed system. Castree's third way is to look at heterogeneity within value theory through a kind of incision made by Spivak. The latter moves to view all economic representation as text, and thus as available to multiple readings (Castree, 1997: 69). Through the incision this makes on the surface of all value renderings, Castree argues that the potential to envision value multiply is the basis for a synthesized modern/postmodern Marxism. He states:

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* (1997: 48).

By taking on the question of value, Castree tells us theorists can delineate by way of economy an entire cosmology that allows something to qualify as real or not. The very constructedness of reality is betrayed accordingly by the question of value. And, no doubt, the neo-liberal policies of those responsible for architecting globalized "free-markets" do indeed conceal the contradictions latent in the mode of production they

seek to disseminate; a change in vantage is also a change in perception and thus Castree is right in suggesting that the specular is the level on which to begin to unmask those contradictions.

One problem with this argument, however, is its neglect to account for its own timing. What about the current moment makes such an argument possible? While several of the so-called postmodern Marxists would likely say that the kernels of a postmodernist position can be located in Marx's more humanist writings such as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, there remains the fact that its elaboration did await some very fundamental changes in both the material and ideological arrangements of Capitalist production. The most obvious implication of this caveat is that the historical inability for the "visualizing power" to curb or alter the progression to further stages in Capital might be related to the consequences such re-envisioning would bring to its agents. Castree's argument neglects to consider the ramifications of alternative visions; these might include social marginalization, politico-legal persecution, and gross violations of so-called human rights. The modern and the postmodern, then, may not be so easily reconciled. It is only relatively recently and specific culturally (even still rarely on that account) that one can find in broad daylight politico-economic dissent, by which I mean overt challenges to the organization of social reality. And it is likewise possible that the key concept of *heterogeneity* in postmodern theory is merely a multiplication of the existing subject positions (i.e. technologies of multiple selves in fashion, cyberspace, etc.) that have fostered the rise, spread, and evolution of Capital social arrangements. I am not convinced, therefore, that the heterogeneity of value opened up with recourse to the specular provides a workable "third way" if by that we mean anything other than a reformist conciliation.

Additionally, though perhaps more capriciously, is the possibility that Castree is able to commit such an elision because he rests too heavily on a red herring. By relying upon Spivak, the most vociferous of speaking subalterns, he may transmit the impression that the subaltern is well disposed to offer a re-envisioning of value. Without a doubt, *certain* subalterns are accordingly well endowed. These include most obviously the intellectual circle of the "Subaltern Studies Collective" including Guha, Chatterjee, and others. But—and this is what makes their positions dubious ones from the start—the relatively powerless in whose name they attempt not to speak but to theorize are as powerless to cor-

roborate their spokes-intellectuals as they are to refute them. The subaltern, then, is not just a voiceless mass of Third World subjects; it is a category partially reified by the efforts of those who theorize their condition. Castree may be right in pointing toward the margins for a fresh look at the question of value, but he may not have found the margins he was looking for in the work of Spivak. Speaking in the name of the margins, subaltern studies has the outcome therefore of *difference*, of differing that which it means to represent (see Derrida). A look at what I am calling the “real” margins—real perhaps in the sense that their inhabitants do not have the symbolic power of a Spivak, Guha, or Chatterjee—may reveal actors with their own dissident notions of value and who are circumscribed outside the social field of a global system that entertains some but not all discussions on the notion of value (see Lacan). What I am calling here the “guru-ification” of the apparent margins, the ascription of almost shaman-like prescience to the subaltern, may be counter-productive.

A second issue with respect to vision in the functioning of Capital was anticipated above in Castree’s use of Spivak on text. The *representation* of economy in textual and graphic form was central to the development of the Capital system. This point is not my own, but rather comes from the interesting work of Buck-Morss (1995). Representations of the Capital economy passed through several phases including the ‘physiocratic’ in which the economy is depicted as an organic body that demands the same kind of homeostatic flows as a human or animal body (1995: 443-4). A product of these efforts was the representational form of economic maps or pictures. The importance of mapping lay in its effort to envision the economy as though from the outside looking down on, or in on it. Buck-Morss explains:

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 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 a specific position inside, to find their bearings. Navigational maps were proto-

typical; mapping the economy was an outgrowth of this technique (1995: 440).

This effort to depict an economy in graphic form better allowed for both its assessment and manipulation. Representation of a supposed system (i.e. discourse) is, Foucault reminds us, precursor to its domination. Thus, the discourse employed by liberal economists in the Capital system including such representational techniques were crucial to their ability to subordinate entire classes below the property-interested bourgeoisie. For this reason, the attention Buck-Morss directs to the representation of capital is crucial.

Nevertheless, representation of the whole system 'as if' from without is not unique to the physiocrats and actually underpins much of social theory. Levi-Strauss' representative models of kinship, myth, and exchange, were at the foundation of structural anthropology and have been criticized by Bourdieu (1977) for depicting systems objectively as if they were wholly apparent to the actors participating in them at the time of their participation. Likewise, decades earlier, Marx in *Capital* introduced a structuralism whereby the economic subject could envision him/herself in a total system of sociality premised upon the arrangements of production. Prior to that intervention the economic subject was simply one that, by its own labor or using the labor of others, produced. After *Capital* the economic subject is envisioned to be one that reaps the material/social rewards of production—generally not the laborer her/himself. However, the contradiction entailed by the non-producer serving as the subject of economy was also the target of a critical assertion that reality had become inverted, that the worker was in fact the *real* economic-historical subject. Thus, the ability to envision the economy as a closed whole from without was central to the ideological struggles over material conditions. The plane on which the Marx-inspired struggle began was indeed the specular; it was an all-new structural map of what *Capital* looked like from outside in order to give agency to those caught on the inside.

Finally, in order for *Capital* to convert raw material into use-values, it had to approach its material as in the first place "raw". It had to envision nature as an object contrary to the pre-modern visions of nature as subject alongside man. Berger's (1980) text "Why Look at Animals?"

describes the evolution of humankind's approach to the animal world (which we, significantly, sometimes call a "kingdom"). Whereas in pre-modern times humans could as likely be the object of the animal's gaze as the subject gazing upon it, the advancement of biological sciences relieved the animal of its ability to look back upon humans and thus, depicted in art and in literature of the day, the animal is relegated to the "wilderness" further and further from everyday human practice (1980: 15). This distancing of animals into the wild does not correspond to humankind's organic evolution out of a state of nature. Rather, as culture becomes further rationalized, so too does a notion of nature as distinguishable from the domain of humans. Thus, and Berger makes this clear, "nature is also a value concept" (1980: 15). It is viewed as much through the prism of cultural institutions as society itself is. Indeed, anthropologists such as Mary Douglas (1984) have made a strong case that in so-called primitive cosmologies there can be found symmetries in the way the social and the natural worlds are envisioned. Thusly, indigenous tribes were found to metaphorize social hybridity (neither in group nor out group = pangolin) with hybridity found in the animal world around them, thus ascribing similar characteristics to transients of both spheres. With the development of Western science premised upon Cartesian rationalism that cleaved mind (culture) from body (nature), animals come to be objects of the latter order viewed by the former. In this way animals become materials for production in the twofold sense that they are both tools of operation and they are the crude matter on which production operates. Berger writes, "In the first stages of the industrial revolution, animals were used as machines. As also were children. Later, in the so-called post-industrial societies, they are treated as raw material. Animals required for food are processed like manufactured commodities" (1980: 11). The way in which human beings looked upon nature, with a greater degree of scientism after the European enlightenment, allowed nature to be objectified in a way that represents a distinct rupture from any previous modes of production.

But this shift is not as straightforward as I have so far recounted. In theory, the circumscription of "society" surrounded by a ring of objectified, raw nature should give rise to a universal notion of humanity: 'all that which is not animal, plant, or elemental, is human'. Instead of this conclusion, the objectification of nature is accompanied by two developments in the realm of human social relations one of which Berger men-

tions, the other he does not. The first is the rationalized objectification of human labor. This development, often attributed to Taylor's influential "time-motion studies", reduced the human body to a mechanical, productive instrument in the labor process.

This reduction of the animal, which has a theoretical as well as economic history, is part of the same process as that by which men have been reduced to isolated productive and consuming units. Indeed, during this period an approach to animals often prefigured an approach to man (1980: 11).

This reduction of the human to machine in the labor process effectively divided the human population of modern societies into at least two categories that can both be placed under the heading "class". One class, the proletariat, plays its role in the production process by reducing its movements, its bodily technique, to the bare minimum required to procure the commodity. The other, the owning bourgeoisie, is freed, I am suggesting, from physical production to pursue whatever body techniques its "culture" deems necessary and politic. Historians of culture have portrayed the ramifications of this division, one of which is the rise of the "moral panic". In cases where the laboring class appears to engage in bodily movements that far exceed the normative minimum needed for optimum production—I am thinking for instance of swing, jazz, rock and roll, and hip hop dancing all of which arose first in the working class African-American population and were only later co-opted to the mainstream—a moral panic ensues and the bourgeois Right swings in to decry the irrational behavior of its impecunious counterpart. Meanwhile, the popularity of "charm schools" after the cold war in which bourgeois youth women were educated in the vestigial tradition of "manners" did not seek to minimize bodily movements at all. They rather had to rehabilitate behavioral patterns that American industrial society had already been forgetting—ostensibly for their futility. The hiatus between the moral panic arising from the excessive movements of one segment of the population on the one hand, and the intense efforts to rehabilitate baroque patterns of behavior for another segment on the other, is one

ramification of the shifting vision of the labor-yielding human body as an instrument in the production process.

A second ramification of the objectification of nature is more directly related to anthropology. The enumeration of surviving "archaic" societies (i.e. ones not yet colonized by the logics of Capital or Socialism) allowed administrators of the colonies and postcolonies to deem those societies as closer to Nature and thus further from Culture. I capitalize 'nature' and 'culture' here because from the vantage of an administrator in the modern era there would be only one Nature and thus only one Culture—the culture of the metropole. Objectifying nature as the raw material of production, the logic of Capital would more likely place societies 'closer in nature to Nature' in the category of raw materials. In other words, and to take a less-than-hypothetical example, the indigenes of the Amazonian rain forest might be considered by a lumber or mining firm as but another "natural" obstacle to the extraction of wealth from the feral environment. If the former example of movement and repression could be considered the embodiment of class, the one I mean to emphasize here is the embodiment of race. To be racialized in this sense, following the implication of Berger's chapter, is to be placed on a continuum between culture and nature. Members of both the working class and racialized groups had to be envisioned, objectified as such, and Berger's chapter indicates that the beginnings of this process may have roots in the distancing of humankind from animals.

The preceding sections of this paper have explained that 1) the economy must be envisioned, 2) that this vision comes to be represented in the form of maps 'as if' from the outside, and 3) that ways of looking allow both nature to be utilized as material for production, and groups of people to be excised from culture and relegated to a position close to nature. All three of these points suggest plainly that to be a subject of the Capital economy is to be able to envision it properly. To envision it "properly" is not, in fact, to view it as the authors above have; they are themselves critics who, by pointing to specularly, mean to emphasize "social constructedness". Rather, "properly."

envisioning Capital means not envisioning it at all, at least not in any way reflexive enough to tell the subject he/she is doing a specific job of looking. The subject is not to know that if he or she is a subject, it is only because of the commensurability between his or her way of looking and the Capital system before his or her eyes. In this regard, it would seem

that vision is merely a metaphor for the successful end result of ideological formation. But with reference to the empirical observation of nature, as well as the cartographic enterprise of the physiocrats, the above discussion shows the literal salience of vision in the articulation of value. Ideology does not offer one the faculty of seeing, but rather conceals that act insofar as it is done properly. Vision is not a subsidiary result of ideology, but that subjective act which ideology seeks to mask as objective.

Indeed, as Althusser writes, “ideology has no history” (1971: 159). The affinity between a subject’s way of looking and the object he or she gazes upon is thus beyond the scope of history, culture, sociality. How does this occur? Several theorists provide answers. Althusser himself draws attention to so-called ISAs, *ideological state apparatuses* which amount to social institutions such as the church, schools, and media, which serve to transmit “proper” visions of political-economy to supplicants in the form of culture. The ISAs are engaged in, put crudely, the reproduction of the conditions of production. They pass on the ruling ideology to subjects-in-formation using both the carrot and the stick—ideology and repression. Althusser comments:

...it is essential to say that for their part the Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly *by ideology*, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic. (There is no such thing as a purely ideological apparatus.) Thus Schools and Churches use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to ‘discipline’ not only their shepherds, but also their flocks. The same is true of the Family....The same is true of the cultural IS Apparatus (censorship, among other things), etc (1971: 145).

The pedagogical work of the ISAs is never completed. As Althusser writes, even the shepherds are in need of constant discipline. By constantly forming subjects who are never fully formed, the apparatuses of ideology also ensure that their order cannot be upended. This ongoing process Althusser calls *interpellation*. Interpellation, as its etymology suggests, quite literally means the act of calling upon (1971: 174). But, it is the calling upon of subjects who do not come into existence until the

moment of their being called upon. Hence the subject of the Capital economy, the producer understood as either laborer or owner of the means of production, only exists as that subject from the moment he/she buys into the ideology that affirms his/her place in it. As it happens, the moment of "buying in" occurs very early on: from birth individuals are trained, educated, in the correct modes of recognizing value, recognizing abjection, etc. In the Bourdieuvian sense, this amounts to the transmission/uptake of "social capital" (1977). In terms more familiar to this discussion, it amounts to an education in the proper ways of envisioning value. For instance, the instillation of "good taste" in a young West African woman, which might include an education on the fineries of luxury items such as champagne or gemstones, is also the instillation of value or "good values". She is from then on interpellated as a bourgeois subject not on arrival in the metropole France, but from the very beginning in the postcolony itself. It is precisely on these lines that colonialist ideology and bourgeois ideology overlap and often slip in and out of one another. Ideology and the social apparatuses that transmit it to subjects always in formation are one manifestation of the reproduction of production.

A second example is the commodity form itself. The product of Capital, it has been argued, is not use-values, but rather surplus-value. Use-values have come and gone under other modalities of production, but under Capital the extraction of surplus from the gross outcome of exchange means that something more than the production of use-value is required to ensure the ongoing growth of the system. Commodity aesthetics, the term coined by Haug (1986), are an answer to this problem. They correspond, not to actual use-values, but to the representation of use-values which is something quite different. By shifting the representation of a particular use-value, advertisers are able to multiply the markets available to consume their products. Moreover, by altering the perceptions of use-value among potential consumers, advertisers also alter the material desires of the consuming population. This manipulation may or may not change any material objects, but it does change the "means of valorization" (1986: 15). Says Haug (1986: 16):

From out of the contradictions of use-value and exchange-value thus distributed between individuals, there appears a tendency time and again to modify the commodity-body,

i.e. its use form. Henceforth in all commodity production a double reality is produced: first the use-value; second and more important the appearance of use-value.

This double reality makes it possible to manipulate the needs of a consuming population. Through the technique of shifting representations of use-value, a process that evolves with the emergence of new media forms (see Graham, 2002), consumer needs can be portrayed as better served by certain products over others. This gives the consumer a sense that one product may be able to satisfy his/her wants better than an identical one. Notice, therefore, the duality to this manipulation. From a “real” need, a fabricated one is created. Haug States:

Manipulation could only be effective if it ‘somehow’ latched on to the objective interests of those being manipulated. ‘The masses’, I maintained, ‘are being manipulated while pursuing their interests. Manipulative phenomena, therefore, still speak the language of real needs that are now estranged and distorted beyond recognition. (1986: 6)

Haug’s criticism here presupposes the existence of “real” needs, and then proceeds to account for the fabrication of illusory need. In the latter effort, his work is no doubt seminal. The difference between a use-value and the representation of use-value opens up, like Spivak’s textualization of economic forms, the possibility for critique on the basis of heteroglossia. Nevertheless, the first portion of his effort, the positing of pristine need prior to interruption by a “culture industry”, does not sit well with other theorists of consumption.

Namely, Baudrillard is against the notion of any ‘real’ need and insists rather on the ongoing emptiness of object desire. Writing on Galbraith, he criticizes the rationalism behind such statements as ‘Needs are in reality the fruits of production’ (1998: 74). Man, writes Baudrillard, is not a rational economic actor; his economic activity is mediated by the unconscious. As such, need does not spring from the production process, it springs from the depths of the human psyche. Baudrillard (1998:76-77) stated:

...outside the field of its objective function, where it is irreplaceable, outside the field of its denotation, the object becomes substitutable in a more or less unlimited way within the field of connotations, where it assumes sign-value. Thus the washing machine *serves* as an appliance and *acts* as an element of prestige, comfort, etc. It is strictly this latter field that is the field of consumption. All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as signifying element. In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite* function or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something different, which is either social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification.

The substitutability of object for need means that desire is never satisfied. This introduces a problem in the argument that any "real" need can be posited. It also contributes to the point I am raising in this section: the reproduction of production is not only crucial to the progression of Capital, it is crucial to the subjectivization of the individual. If the link between need and object can be so arbitrary as Baudrillard suggests (arbitrary like the *sign* itself), then the fixation of certain objects to certain needs must be the result of a profound pedagogy generally invisible to the eye of the consumer-subject. Ideology, says Althusser, has no history. So too, then, is the object's need-satisfying capability without history. Or rather, its history is concealed from view. Again, the gravity of the specular. The *bildung* that forms the consuming subject is an education not only in proper ways of seeing, but also in the proper ways of not seeing.

Given the work required in the production of the economic subject, it would seem likely that cosmologies of value that oppose the logic of late Capital would come under pressure from the broadening influence of global Capital. However, there is some disagreement as to the outcome of conflict in the realm of value theory. Yang (2000) contends with what she calls a "Eurocentric" critique of global capital that considers it a kind of behemoth that arrives in new cultural spaces and destroys indigenous economy as well as community social relations. "I will suggest here," Yang states, "that capitalism can be altered, subverted, or appropriated

by, made to accommodate to, and even itself absorb preexisting socio-economic forms" (2000: 481). This argument is one of "economic hybridity", the idea that systems as disparate as market economy and "ritual expenditure"—which Yang describes is the case of Wenzhou province China—can form a dialectical third and sustain an altogether distinct form of economy. She states:

Rather than the unidirectional penetration of global capitalism, what has been unfolding in post-Mao rural Wenzhou is a new phase of economic hybridization in which an interrupted native tradition of household and market economy and the introduction of overseas capitalism have released the forces of a ritual economy which had been curtailed and almost abolished in the Maoist era. In this new hybrid one can faintly detect a logic of peasant economy, inflecting the market economy with its distinctive voice and standpoint and helping to unmask and undermine the larger economy's hegemonic principles (2001: 486).

According to this argument the opposition between two modes of valuation, one premised upon the exchangeability of goods in a market, the other premised upon the ritual destruction of goods in ceremony, are in the end not contradictory but complementary. For Yang, the conflict over value gives rise to a hybridized notion of value that allows the subject of Wenzhou culture to coexist as a Capital economy subject. But, just how generalizable is this conclusion? Is there no instance in which the influx of Capital logic to non-Western spaces yields conflict that is not so easily reconciled?

The case of Wenzhou China has its own specifics that make it especially suited for fusion with the market economy. In India, by contrast, despite the longstanding effort to liberalize the economy, the influence of Capital has been markedly destructive. Several South Asian public intellectuals have commented on the toll wrought by Western economy on the Indian population. The environmental activists Vandana Shiva

explains, for instance, that starvation is the result of market arrangements on the subcontinent.

Starting with globalization and trade liberalization pressures, India has been prevented from allowing food to reach its people. The government expenditure involved in moving grain around the country from areas that produce lots to areas that don't produce as much has been treated as a subsidy that must go. Unfortunately, as a result of this, government expenditure has decreased because the World Bank, that miraculously made 250 million Indians disappear from being poor and devised a whole new poverty line by creating a new calculus that made poverty disappear, even though it hadn't, changed the universal right to access to food into a targeted scheme (2001).

The question regarding access to food is, of course, whether it is or is not a universal right. While it cannot be argued that the "Indian subjectivity" is one that views access to food a universal right—indeed there is no such subjectivity except as a form nationalist ideology—it is true that the privatization of crucial food stockpiles was a result of World Bank policy. Here, the opposition emerges between Western schemes for regulating economic exchange, and the local need for subsistence that demands exchange be treated differently; the poor and starving, after all, are not in a position to enter a bidding war over subsistence resources.

A second impact of the Western economic system on India is the abatement of diversity in the marketplace. Patenting schemes described by Shiva and her counterpart Arundathi Roy have taken relatively simple, agricultural products and turned them into corporate intellectual property. In a country as populous as India, monopolizing a natural resource holds potentially lucrative power. But it is also a cooptation of local culture:

There is such grandeur in India and so much beauty. I don't know whether they can kill it. I want to think they can't. I don't think there is anything as beautiful as a sari.

Can you kill it? Can you corporatize a sari? Why should multinationals be allowed to come in and try to patent basmati rice? People prefer to eat roti and idlis and dosas rather than McDonald's burgers. Just before I came to the U.S., I went to a market in Delhi. There was a whole plate of dal, lentils. Tears came to my eyes. Today, that's all it takes to make you cry, to look at all the kinds of dal and rice that there are, and to think that they don't want this to exist (Roy, 2003).

This process whereby Western companies have patented Third World resources is confronted by the activism of people like Shiva and Roy. But, it is related more generally to the encounter between two or more cosmologies of value. The corporate interests enter with their own notions of value that say a natural resource—seeds, water, mineral—can be made into private property and sold back to the people who depend on them. The local cosmology is one that sees the value of these resources in precisely their common, public nature. While I have done no original ethnographic work to support the last statement, it is one that has been written of in the context of many indigenous cultural struggles across the world. In many cases, the inability of indigenous peoples (here I am lumping Indians with indigenes but with awareness) to value their resources in accordance with the logic of Capital has led to the dehumanization of those peoples. American Indians, to take one more example, experienced expulsion from their native lands on the basis that they could not convert that land into viable, surplus wealth. Finally, in the late 20th Century, once First Nations realized casino gaming could provide them with a last ditch source of income, much of the North American majority was perturbed by the sight of these ex-humans making a late entry into the “great equalizer” of market economics.

The crisis of value on the global scale results—and this is a historically longstanding process—in the dehumanization of local populations unable to adhere to the cosmology of value required for the reproduction of Capital. Thus a turn to reconcile modern with postmodern Marxism by considering the subaltern must realize that the erasure of most subalterns, save for the few (call them hybrid ‘subaltern-elites’) who are able to at least negotiate Western value systems, precludes them from ever speaking on the matter. Thus, value does not correspond to a substance

or a product. It is a positioning of the subject. The subject, in turn, is brought into existence through the education in and recognition of specific modes of value. The individual who ceases or fails to recognize value where it lies in specific contexts—though the context of Capital is growing less and less specific—also ceases or fails to be a human unless that context can sustain radical dissent from its predicative culture. Such a conclusion has stark implications for the study of human rights: how we even understand the term “human” is tied to a whole string of other issues. The economy then, as Mauss once so presciently suggested, is indeed a total system. It forms the basis on which humanity itself stands to gaze upon all its others.

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