

(From) *VEILS: ENGAGING SPIVAK*
Chapter 1
Whose Imprimatur?

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"Tiger Raises His Head,"
as demonstrated by Grandmaster Doc-Fai Wong.

"I always thought it would be better
to be a fake somebody than a real
nobody."

-- Tom Ripley in *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (1999)

In Stephen Morton's *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2003), presently the only published, book-length study exclusively dedicated to Spivak's work, the author promises to "briefly elaborate" (101) Spivak's argument on the "continuing importance of Marx's labour theory of value" (101) as set out in her "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" (*In Other Worlds*, 1987). According to Morton, "Spivak initially turns to Marx's discussion of value in Chapter 1 of *Capital Volume One*, a key section of Marx's thought, in which Marx begins to develop the theory of the commodity. Spivak notes how 'Marx left the slippery concept of "use value" untheorized'" (Morton 101-102; quoting Spivak,

"Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida," 1993, 97).¹ It is a "brief elaboration" of Spivak's argument indeed, as not only does Morton completely avoid Spivak's "Scattered Speculations" in favor of a brief quotation from her "Limits and Openings" (see Chapter 3, "Mostly Limits"), he only returns subsequently to "Scattered Speculations" to make the point that "Spivak is careful to distinguish her own position from the economic determinism of Marx by insisting on a deconstructive approach that places the economic 'under erasure'" (Morton, 105; quoting "Scattered Speculations," 168). Moreover, Morton's very quotation of Spivak on the "erasure" of the economic elides the fact that in making this move Spivak is hailing the authority of (her English translation of) Derrida to such a degree that she never employs the phrase ("under erasure") without herself placing it within inverted commas. And indeed, in the convoluted logic which is Spivak's signature, she even "suggests" that she is "following Marx" (rather than, say, Derrida?) in such an argument: "I have done no more in this essay than . . . to suggest that, following Marx, it is possible to put the economic text 'under erasure,' to see, that is, the unavoidable and pervasive *importance* of its operation and yet to question it as a concept of the *last resort*" ("Scattered Speculations," 168).

Certainly there is good reason for Morton's evasive treatment of "Scattered Speculations," for the text is exactly what Spivak says it is, "scattered" and "speculative," and one would be hard-pressed to say which aspect renders it more hopelessly "difficult" to decipher, as even Colin MacCabe anxiously suggests in his "Foreword" to *In Other Worlds*. Referring to his own brief attempt at reading "Scattered Speculations," MacCabe gives over to apology: "Even if I have understood it correctly, the argument is too complex to do full justice to it here" (xv; see also ix). Instead of *taking a side* in relation to the borderline unintelligibility and disorganization which structures Spivak's text, MacCabe absorbs and *takes responsibility* for it: in short, his is a micro-narrative of *interpellation* within Spivak's codes and the institutional protocols aligned with them. These curiously awkward readings of "Scattered Speculations" appear nonetheless to be rather firm in their underlying assumption that there *is* in fact an integral and coherent argument articulated in Spivak's text, however taxing it may be for them to get hold of it. But how well-founded is this assumption?

"In fact," Spivak says just prior to her reading of *Capital, Volume I*, "the basic premise of the recent critique of the labor theory of value is predicated on the assumption that, according to Marx, Value represents Labor" ("Scattered Speculations," 158). In a note to this statement Spivak says that "I refer to this critique at greater length below" (293, note 7) and then offers a "brief checklist" (293, note 7) of texts which apparently, according to Spivak, harbor the assumption that "Value represents Labor." She refers to Piero Sraffa (*Production of Commodities by Means of Commodities*), Samir Amin (*The Law of Value and Historical Materialism*), Diane Elson (editor, *Value: The Representation of Labor in Capitalism*), and Ian Steedman (*Marx After Sraffa*; editor, *The Value Controversy*). But of course Spivak never does "refer" again to this "recent critique," and with the minor exception of two passing (and largely unconnected) references to Amin (168) and Sraffa (170), she never engages in the least respect *any* of the "checklist" texts she cites. Consider briefly the case of Amin. How is it that Spivak attributes "the assumption that . . . Value represents Labor" to Amin? In the very work to which she refers, Amin clearly articulates the "opaque" process by which surplus value is extracted, i.e., "opacity" as the *mystification* of exploitation under capitalist relations of production:

[T]he capitalist mode of exploitation is opaque. On the one hand, the proletarian sells labor power, but seems to be selling labor, and is paid for the eight hours of work put in, not just for the four that would be necessary for maintenance; on the other hand, the bourgeois realizes a profit which is

calculated in relation to the capital owned, not to the labor exploited, so that this capital seems to the capitalist to be productive. (Amin, 13)

Spivak's vague assertion that Amin's reading of Marx entails the assumption that "Value represents Labor" is so completely ridiculous and baseless that her conveniently abbreviated formula ("Value represents Labor") becomes utterly indecipherable when put face to face with Amin. Far from assuming that "Value represents Labor," Amin's reading of Marx *correctly* stresses what Marx on numerous occasions calls the "secret" (Amin's "opaque") of exploitation under capitalism, according to which "Value" is reflected *ideologically* (imaginarily) so as to obscure and relegitimize the regime of private property relations justifying the capitalist's "right" to the profits deriving from surplus labor. Spivak reduces Amin's text to a caricature of Bush's notion of "speaking clearly" -- "Value represents Labor" -- only in order to avail herself of the opportunity to "go beyond" the assumption he in fact never made.

However tempting it is to label Spivak's "checklist" scenario fraudulent or incompetent, this formulation is inadequate on a theoretical level to produce an explanation of *why* this is occurring in the first place, with Spivak or among others regarded as intellectuals. It is worth bearing in mind that Morton's book on Spivak, appearing more than twenty-five years after Spivak's translation of *de la Grammatologie/Of Grammatology* and her subsequent rise to fame, opens with Morton's public "apology" to Spivak for his work which he calls at once "systematic and at times reductive" (2003, xiii); then by the end Morton holds Spivak out as nothing less than a "polymath" (141). One would have hoped that the polymath could have held up under some kind of genuinely systematic *examination*. But to dismiss Spivak's text as riddled with fraud and recklessness is merely another way of saying that it propounds a "misreading," and this in turn is to contain the historical struggle over conceptuality within the semiotic problematics of reading/misreading in deconstruction itself: in other words, it is to grant the "theory" its own alibi. What is happening in Spivak's "checklist" is not merely a difficulty, a complexity, or a complication, but the employment of a kind of highly codified double-thinking that could be called "neoconsciousness." Neoconscious "left-wing" Marxists like Spivak, along with mildly accommodating readers such as Morton and MacCabe, are not really concerned with rigorously comprehending and developing a principled critique of their objects of inquiry, whether it be Amin, Elson, Marx, Foucault or even Derrida. Instead, the thrust of neoconsciousness promotes a concentration on the neoconscious critic's own "spin" of the object in a display of inventive shrewdness and seeming command of the subject matter called into an apparent focus.

In this framing of the all-important "reading," the substance as well as the very relevance of Spivak's "checklist" become non-issues, displaced by the weightiness and "depth" of things Spivak has to *say* about them. The more subtly diffuse, the more complexly obscure, the more difficult to access the chain of references, the more *complicated* the *folding together* of conceptual strata into a *mélange* (a mixture) of neoconscious debris, through all these practices the veil of neocon reading becomes all the more impermeable, opaque and shielded from critique, an interrogation of its conditions of possibility. Ultimately neocon thought participates in the bourgeois "invention" of new ("neo"), retrofitted forms of intellection designed to cloak their underlying *content*, their material basis in appropriating control over what Sartre termed "metastable" psychic structures: polarizing rift zones of thought "subject to sudden changes or transitions," "vacillat[ing] continually" and "very precarious" (*Being and Nothingness*, 1956, 90) because they delineate fractural regions, spaces of contestation in the uses and purposes of knowledge under definite historical conditions. The *analogon*, a

parallel image or "equivalent of perception" (Sartre, *The Imaginary*, 2004, 18), of neocon complication in Spivak, whose form is very similar to the more eloquent writings of Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari and Zizek, is what geologists call the "abyssal plain," the *deepest surface* of the ocean floor, traversed by a chaotically folded, jumbled mixture of sedimentary rubble and scrap-off from the history of sub-oceanic shifts and pressure-driven eruptions.

Like the geologic abyssal plain, the neocon left-wing *surface of depth* is itself nothing new on a broader level, as Lenin argued in 1920 in his "'Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder" (1972, 648-659), pointing out this tendency to confuse opposites and mingle fantasy with reality in order to construct an imaginary world of "radicalism" where one cannot be so easily and automatically established in praxis. According to Lenin, this "infantile disorder" is marked by an "incredibly and hopelessly muddled thinking" (651); "in their effort to be clever, [they] make themselves ridiculous" (651); "some kind of rigmarole" (652); "simply a thoughtless and incoherent use of the now 'fashionable' terms" (652); "unable to think matters out and gain a clear understanding" (652); "talk rank stuff and nonsense" (653); "so supremely absurd that one can only shrug one's shoulders" (653); "that petty-bourgeois diffuseness and instability" (653); "they consider themselves sound Marxists, but talk incredible nonsense in a most ridiculous manner and reveal their failure to understand the ABC of Marxism . . . making utterly inept statements" (653). Spivak's programmatic statement of neocon leftism is perfectly expressed with the imperative that "the inexhaustible taxonomy of catachreses . . . must at least be invoked at every step" (Spivak, "Constitutions and Culture Studies," 1995, 166). But "every step" forward in this project, it seems, is two steps back in the ABC's of Marxism.

Spivak's "checklist" as well as her encounter with Marx, as I discuss below, are strikingly similar to the phenomenon of "witness *mis*-identification" of suspects in criminal cases, where the alleged witness is shown a photo-spread of mugshots of prior, convicted offenders and asked to identify the perpetrator in question. In Dr. Sanjay Gupta's report on "memory" research aired on *CNN* on March 25/27, 2005, he summarized the findings on misidentification in this way: "As the witness concentrates on each new image, the memory of the original image is blurred." In the case of Spivak reading Marx, for example, Morton and Spivak rehearse the complaint that Marx has committed a kind of "crime" in theory codified as economic determinism, reductionism or the promotion of *class* as the explanatory framework of "*last resort*." So far so good for Morton and Spivak, insofar as their conduct proceeds in conformity with that of good bourgeois citizens who intently nullify and minimize the bourgeoisdom -- the class structure -- which envelops them and strictly determines the political and economic *content* of their "freedom" to engage in and be engaged by a vast system of fundamentally exploitative relations, including "pedagogical" relations in the production of knowledge.

But the vigilant witnesses, Morton and Spivak, are also constituted as "different" within bourgeois rule in that they are "left-wing" critics of bourgeoisdom for whom Marx holds a certain attraction and moreover lends credibility to their own status and identifiability as "radical" scholars. Now they set themselves to work identifying the criminal element in Marx; but the contradictions unleashed by their "difference" give them over to a certain dispensation to sternly reprimand Marx rather than prosecute to the fullest extent, to place Marx under a sort of permanent probation. To this end, Spivak's "memory" is jogged, she "remembers" something, and Morton merely corroborates: that Marx was a "German" who wrote, of course, in the German language. Herein lies the "theory" Spivak herself offers as a mitigating circumstance, a limited defense of Marx

when viewed in light of the wider (con)textuality of Marx's translation into "English." Spivak thereby raises herself up to the level of an *expert* witness since she is an acknowledged authority on the most complicated questions of theory (Derrida) and literarity (Devi) in translation. Thus Spivak's "memory" of the German Marx assumes a certain *superiority* and preeminence: a *neoconsciousness* which legitimizes her *own* translatorial reading as one which "remembers" Marx within a "new" set of watchwords appropriate for the left-wing of deconstruction.

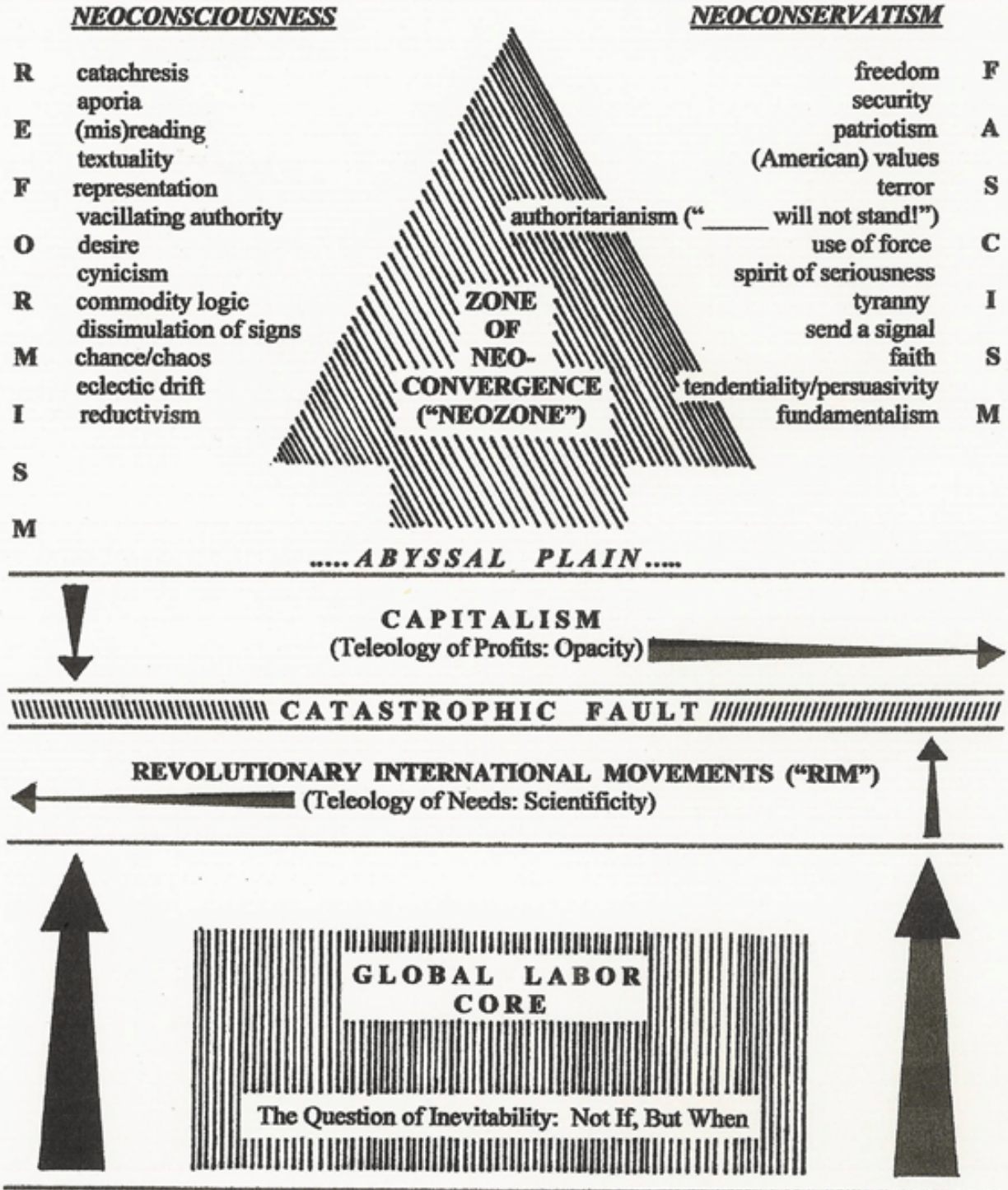
Ironically of course, this "new" Marx is at once registered in English as well as German, and as Gupta puts it, "the memory of the original . . . is blurred" precisely because it is subjected to the "inexhaustible taxonomy of catachreses." In other words, Marx is tried under the jurisprudence of aporia: as Drucilla Cornell has argued far more systematically than Spivak, "Justice . . . operates as aporia," an "unsurpassable aporia" (Cornell, "Time, Deconstruction, and the Challenge to Legal Positivism," 1995, 248). The Marx Spivak (mis)identifies under the veil of "expertise" is the Marx one is supposed to remember; and the alleged crime of class as a "last resort" is *expunged*, erased from the historical record. Quasi-memory of this kind occurs not only in the eerie expanse of the abyssal plain, but also drifts in the region of the "neozone," the zone of neo-convergence as between left-wing neoconsciousness and right-wing *neoconservatism* (see Model below³). This is because, as the various contributors to *The Neocon Reader* (2004) make quite clear, one of the calling-cards of neoconservatism is the "hawkish" (Boot, "Myths About Neoconservatism," 2004, 47) position advocating "regime change," meaning that deep-level oppositions are not merely to be "blurred" but eradicated and substituted by puppet regimes whose "thinking" within the New World Order presents no substantial threat to American capital and control on a worldwide level. "When it comes to dealing with such regimes," according to William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "the United States will not succeed in persuading them to play by the existing -- which is to say American -- rules of the game" ("National Interest and Global Responsibility," 2004, 69). Rather what is called for is "an effort to bring about the demise of the regimes themselves" (70). Spivak's neoconscious memory of Marx "conserves" Marx in this "new" diffusion and evanescence of left-wing and right-wing ideological "tendencies," "persuasions" and "sensibility" (Stelzer, "Neoconservatives and Their Critics," 2004, 4). Every single coin has two "different" sides: the blurring of class into erasure is the soft-line strategy whose hard-line supplement is the strategy of all-out "decapitation strikes" aimed at demonstrating, as Condoleezza Rice puts it, that the U.S. is "beyond challenge" (Rice, "The President's National Security Strategy," 2004, 83). Why is this necessary? As Rice says, "Democracy is hard work" (86). The peculiar "strain of thinking" (Kristol, "Postscript -- June 2004," 2004, 75-76) of neoconservatism is very similar to that of Spivak, as for example when Joshua Muravchik suggests that "If . . . the policies [of neoconservatism] succeed, *then* the world *will have been* delivered from an awful scourge" ("The Neoconservative Cabal," 2004, 241, my emphasis). If . . . then . . . will have been . . . *the abyss*. The "strain" in the neozone is that everything is very unclear "and yet" disturbingly certain at once.

Returning to the "disorder" of "Scattered Speculations," Spivak's expedient reference to Sraffa, Amin, Elson and Steedman, when considered carefully, only begs the question: What does it mean when the "reader" of her text is essentially reduced to *guessing* what she's talking about? In this connection, *compare* Spivak's move in relation to President Bush's dismissive assertion that the July 2004 CIA intelligence report on the future of Iraq is really nothing more than "guessing," a report which offered three equally disturbing scenarios: "civil war, political fragmentation, or tenuous stability under long-term occupation" (Everest, "Behind the Fantasies of Bushworld," 3). Considered chronologically, of course, Spivak's *guessification* or mystification of Sraffa/Amin/ . . . is

separated from Bush's recent comments by nearly a decade and a half. Likewise, considered in terms of their discursive sectors and circulations, there would appear to be no plausible or justifiable connection at all. However, considered ideologically, Spivak and Bush actually employ the same *modus operandi* of avoiding analysis in favor of a characteristically hazy and sort of "forever out-of-reach" version of reality. In each case, the reader-viewer-listener, i.e., the *subject* of Spivak/Bush, is invited to occupy the position of one who merely "guesses" at what's at stake, whether it's some "recent critique" involving Sraffa/Amin/ . . . , or the future of "hard work" in American-led imperialism in Iraq and the wider Middle East.

A (GEO)MATERIALIST MODEL OF TRANSFORMATION

THE METASTABLE ENVIRONMENT



An objection may be raised here, that I have needlessly reduced Spivak to the same ideological bloc of Bush and the "neo" right-wing elements backing him, such as Karl Rove, Paul Wolfowitz (the imminent President of World Bank), Donald Rumsfeld and of course Dr. Rice. First of all I re-emphasize what I emphasized above, that I propose a "comparison" of the role of guessification, "double-think," mystification or veiling in Spivak and the Bush enclave. Comparison has become a lost scientific modality because it questions the apparent disconnection between "different" phenomena. Comparison is in essence a questioning of differences and connections. It introduces the dialectics of critique into the structure of existing practices and thereby points up the possibility of what does *not* yet exist, what is *not* thought, and dares to ask *why?* Comparative critical inquiry challenges the status quo in significant part because it calls forth a relentless *imagination*, an estranged and alien way of looking at things, and refuses to rest within the existing world where it is born and to which it points back in nausea and horror. Einstein, for example, compared the formulation of "E = MC²" to imagining oneself on the tip of a beam of light projecting into infinity. Marx *compares* the mystifying ratio of capitalist profits in connection with the disparities of wage-slavery by linking the concrete with the "force of abstraction" (*Capital, Vol. I, 1967, 19*). Comparison interrogates the system of "haves and have nots": the Paris Hiltons, on the one hand, who are rich and famous for *doing* nothing of any use-value to humanity but rather for *being* born into the ruling class, and on the other hand the billions of real nobodies who spend their lives *doing* all the work, for comparatively *nothing*, and *imagining* some more just world. The have nots are condemned to nothingness while the haves are rewarded for nothing. The fault line of the "No," not the neozone, is the space of their struggle and mutual resistance. As Sartre puts it, the existence of the have not "must arise in the world as a *No*; it is as a *No* that the slave first apprehends the master, or that the prisoner who is trying to escape sees the guard who is watching him" (*Being and Nothingness, 86-87*). Comparative critical theory justifies its existence not by reference or deferral to some transcendental tier, but rather by the conscious *project* of social justice: in a word, it is *engaged* in the world. Sartre, for example, openly declared the bourgeois voting machinery a "trap for fools" and refused to speak in the U.S. because of American imperialism and genocide in Vietnam. Today the global lecture circuit is the icing on the cake for the "star" intelligentsia. Why is it that Sartre has been so unwelcome under postmodernism and its aftermath? Is Sartre not "complicated" enough? Obviously not, since complication is the name of the game of "patterns of flight . . . a permanent game of *excuses*" (*Being and Nothingness, 78-79*). By the slightest comparison Sartre makes the most "radical" look like spoiled schoolchildren who have "surpassed," as Cornell suggests, the boredom of Lenin's ABC's. This is why it is necessary to re-emphasize what I emphasized above, that Spivak needs to be *compared* to Bush, Rice, de Man, Derrida, Wolfowitz and so on. Rice says that "Democracy is hard work," but reading Spivak is also "hard work." The question is what happens when one actually *does* this work rather than apologizing for being unable or unwilling to do so. Perhaps the one who does such work will in turn be compared to a "fundamentalist," for merely sitting in a café after work, reading books, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes, writing, drawing strange diagrams, producing ideas. Democracy is hard work after all, is it not?⁴

It is obvious that the "differences" between Spivak and Bush are manifold. But central to this very obviousness is the structuring polarity of Spivak as a premier exponent of the post-de Manian/post-Derridean left-wing on the one hand, and on the other hand Bush as the ideologue and *point* of executive power on behalf of American capital throughout the world. The differences between the neocon left-wing and the neocon right-wing, in other words, are differences *within* the existing *system* of exploitative and oppressive social relations. The non-obvious question I am pointing up is whether such differences make a genuine difference in Marxist praxis, which is to say in *transforming* this awful scourge

upon the masses of humanity. The question raised is one of *remembering* this struggle, of saying "No" to its erasure and its neocon regime change into textuality. This is not something that can be left to guessing. There exists a responsibility to *engage* it.

Now since, as I have argued, MacCabe and Morton are of little help in coming to terms with Spivak's argument, let us examine this argument for ourselves. Immediately following her reference to the aforementioned "checklist," Spivak says, "Yet the definition of Value in Marx establishes itself not only as a representation but also a differential" (158). The following, then, is Spivak's reading of Marx, including her indication of "translation modified":

What is represented or represents itself in the commodity-differential is Value: "In the exchange-relation of commodities their exchange-value appeared to us as totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract their use-value from the product of labor, we obtain their value, as it has just been defined. The common element that represents itself (*sich darstellt*) in the exchange-relation of the exchange-value of the commodity, is thus value" [*Capital I* 128; translation modified]. Marx is writing, then, of a differential representing itself or being represented by an agency ("we") no more fixable than the empty and ad hoc place of the investigator or community of investigators. . . . Only the continuist urge that I have already described can represent this differential as representing labor, even if "labor" is taken only to imply "as objectified in the commodity." It can be justly claimed that one passage in *Capital I* cannot be adduced to bear the burden of an entire argument. We must, however, remember that we are dealing here with *the* definitive passage on Value upon which Marx placed his imprimatur. ("Scattered Speculations," 158)

The acknowledgement here as to the enormous "burden" Spivak places upon her translation of Marx is well-taken. Yet even this admission is immediately qualified by the assertion that she has somehow laid hold of "*the*" passage of passages on Value in Marx. In fairness, of course, perhaps it should be said that none of this would pose a problem *if* there were some reasonable degree of analysis and argumentation in relation to "*the*" chosen passage. At any rate, more problematic is the fact that "*the*" passage Spivak "reads" (if you really believe this), quotes and translates is so thoroughly divergent from virtually *any* other existing translation of Marx's *Capital* that the task of even *finding* the corresponding passage is remarkably challenging. Finally, add to this, that while indicating "translation modified," Spivak cites *Capital, Volume I*-- not *Das Kapital, Erster Band*-- and even her notes section in *In Other Worlds* provides no detailed reference information to the specific edition of *Capital* she apparently relies upon (although how she relies upon an *English* language edition is itself a mystery).

"Scattered Speculations" was originally published in the highly prestigious *diacritics*, and in that original publication as well there is no reference to *Das Kapital*. Far from observing any rudimentary protocol of scholarly rigor and intellectual accountability, this entire *ruse* developed around the problematics of "translation" amounts to Spivak's attempt at *privatizing* the obviously *presumptive* authority of her "reading" of Marx. This privatization of theory is aimed at removing Spivak's "argument" on Marx from the arena of public inquiry and contestation. The privatization of this or that "passage" of the Marx archive is actually an *analogue* and a reflection in ideology of the petit-bourgeois entrepreneur's "right" to her private ownership of the means of production and, consequently, her "right" to the profits. Just as there is a *Constitutional* legal presumption favoring the petit-bourgeois entrepreneur's authority over her private property, Spivak

qua petit-bourgeois intellectual likewise enjoys a similarly unquestionable presumption in favor of the *publication* (legitimation) of her privately "modified" text. It is in fact tantamount to a case in point of Marx's theory that "The ideas of the ruling class are . . . the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling *material* force of society, is at the same time its ruling *intellectual* force" (*German Ideology*, 172).

The corresponding paragraph to Spivak's three-sentence "modified translation," as found in Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling's English translation of *Das Kapital*, is as follows:

We have seen that when commodities are exchanged, their exchange-value manifests itself as something totally independent of their use-value. But if we abstract from their use-value, there remains their Value as defined above. Therefore, the common substance that manifests itself in the exchange-value of commodities, whenever they are exchanged, is their value. The progress of our investigation will show that exchange-value is the only form in which the value of commodities can manifest itself or be expressed. For the present, however, we have to consider the nature of value independently of this, its form. (*Capital*, Vol. 1, 1906, 45)

This is Moore and Aveling's translation from the 3rd German edition, edited by Engels. According to Engels in his 1886 "Preface to the English Edition," Moore in particular is "joint[ly] responsible" (1967, 13), along with Engels, for the passage in question; and moreover Engels remarks that "perhaps, no one is more conversant with the book itself" (13). Such an acknowledgement by Engels, especially against the backdrop of a lifetime of intimately collaborative work with Marx, *in the very least* calls forth *some* degree of serious consideration of the "modifications" introduced single-handedly by Spivak. Furthermore, not only is the Moore and Aveling translation used in the International Publishers text referenced above, their translation is also used in the English language collection by Progress Publishers (Moscow), as well as Robert C. Tucker's widely disseminated edition of *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Nonetheless, Spivak apparently has something "better" to offer.

Note, however, that while Spivak plainly goes to the trouble of setting out her own translation, she never has a *word* to say throughout "Scattered Speculations" about the *significance* of this translational "difference" itself, how *exactly* her's differs from Moore's, *why* her's differs from Moore's, why she deemed it *necessary* or otherwise desirable to do so, and so forth. This is a regularly occurring practice with Spivak.⁵ In any event, in the interest of *some* higher level of genuine intellectual openness that Spivak herself dares not offer, it must be acknowledged that there are reasonable grounds upon which one may regard Spivak's translation in this instance not only "as" accurate but even *more* accurate or "true" to Marx's German text.⁶ This is essentially because Spivak's translation is developed according to a kind of strictly "*verbatim*" or word-for-word procedure, resulting, not surprisingly, in a linguistically or technically "accurate" text which is in some respects more cumbersome and obscure than that of Moore. Thus, upon careful examination of the three texts (Marx's German, Moore and Spivak), while it may be fairly said that Moore actively "re-words" Marx, it may also be said that Spivak's handiwork is remarkably *mechanical*, which is curious in the intellectual history of deconstruction as a practice wound tightly around the notion of "play" and seemingly resistant to all forms of "structure," rigidity, reductionism and, of course, "economic determinism." The underlying problem is that the *verbatim* translation of Marx excludes, forecloses and reduces the quality of conceptual flexibility evidenced by Moore. Marx's own 1875 "Afterword to the *French* Edition" bears this point out exactly:

"Mr. J. Roy set himself the task of producing a version that would be as exact and even literal as possible, and has scrupulously fulfilled it. But his very scrupulosity has compelled me to modify his text, with a view to rendering it more *intelligible* to the reader" (1967, 31, my emphasis).

The anchor of Spivak's translation-based "reading" lies in the significance she attaches to the word "represents," as she points out by bracketing and inserting the German reflexive form "*sich darstellt*" in her translation. Although there are other obvious structural differences as between Spivak and Moore, this is the major erudite discovery Spivak unveils to the world; interestingly, it demonstrates what Marx called the "literal" brand of faithfulness to the original German text. Instead of "represents," Moore consistently employs the word "manifests." As I remarked earlier and as is clear from the face of Spivak's "ease of argument" (158), she does not bother to point up any further significance to her disinclination to merely follow Moore's work; nonetheless, her insistence on and around the word "represents" suggests that somehow her reading could not be born out on the basis of Moore's "manifests." I think Spivak underestimates herself!

Bearing in mind again that Engels assumed joint responsibility with Moore for the English translation (in which "manifests" and not "represents" is used), Engels in 1868 wrote a review of *Das Kapital* in a German workers' newspaper in which he regularly uses the word "represents" when summarizing Marx's theory of value. This is significant in that it goes to demonstrate, as I suggested above, that Engels recognized and attributed *no significance* to the semantic shades of difference between the words "represents" and "manifests." In other words, based upon the evidence of this usage, Engels appears to have regarded the words as more or less interchangeable, both more or less equally "intelligible," as Marx put it. Yet more than a century later our keen exponent of the philosophical sect of deconstruction seizes upon this "difference" -- *sich darstellt!* -- in order to "re-think" Marxism. I have tried to narrow down as much as possible the following excerpt from Engels' review, but it is important to quote at length because of its clarity as well as because, and by contrast, Spivak's attempt to deal with this entire issue is so mystifying -- or as Spivak might say, it is "codic"⁷ (Spivak, "The Post-colonial Critic," 1990, 69). In fact, to return to an earlier point, part and parcel of the obscurity pervading Spivak's treatment of Marx is her assertion of having extracted "*the*" passage of passages. Again Marx's own comments tend to discredit such an assumption. In his 1872 "Preface to the French Edition" of *Capital*, Marx says that "the method of analysis which I have employed . . . makes the reading of the first chapters rather arduous, and it is to be feared that the French public, always impatient to come to a conclusion, eager to know the connexion between general principles and the immediate questions that have aroused their passions, may be disheartened because they will be unable to move on at once" (1967, 30). Is there not some trace of this "impatience" at work in Spivak's attempt to essentially reduce Marx's theory of "value" to three sentences in the twelfth paragraph of *Volume I*? Engels writes:

How is this contradiction to be solved? How can there remain a profit for the capitalist if the worker receives in compensation the full value of the labour he adds to his product? . . . Economics up to now has been helpless in the face of the contradiction, and writes or stutters embarrassed phrases which say nothing. . . . [N]o one resolved it, until now

* * *

What is the value of labour power? The value of every commodity is measured by the labour required for its production. Labour power exists in the form of the living worker who requires a definite amount of means of subsistence for his existence as well as the maintenance of his family, which ensures the continuance of labour power also after his death. The labour time necessary for producing these means of subsistence represents, therefore, the value of the labour power. The capitalist pays this value weekly and purchases for that the use of one week's labour of the worker. . . .

* * *

The capitalist now sets his worker to work. In a certain period of time the worker will have performed as much labour as was represented by his weekly wages. Supposing that the weekly wage of a worker represents three workdays, then if the worker begins on Monday, he has by Wednesday evening *replaced* to the capitalist the *full value of the wage paid*. But does he then stop working? Not at all. The capitalist has bought his *week's labour* and the worker must go on working also during the last three week days. This *surplus labour* of the worker, over and above the time necessary to replace his wages, is the *source of surplus value*, of profit, of the steadily growing increase of capital.

. . . [T]he main point is that the capitalist, besides the labour he pays for, also extracts labour that he *does not pay for*, and this is no arbitrary assumption, for the day the capitalist extracts from the worker in the long run only as much labour as he paid him in wages, on that day he will shut down his workshop, since indeed his whole profit would come to nought.

. . . The value of the labour power is paid for, but this value is far less than that which the capitalist manages to extract from the labour power, and it is just the difference, the *unpaid labour*, which constitutes the share of the capitalist, or, more accurately, of the capitalist class. . . . In general it is this unpaid labour which maintains all the non-working members of society. . . . *On it rests the whole existing social system.* (Engels, "Marx's Capital," 1969, 146-148, my underlining, Engels' italics)

Now Spivak has brought to our attention, and she is "scrupulously" correct, that Marx said that value "represents itself" (*sich darstellt*) in "the exchange-relation of the exchange-value of the commodity"; or as Moore puts it, in "the exchange-value of commodities." As Engels says three times in the above passage, this "value" of labor power is "represented" by wages, or that amount which the capitalist pays the worker in exchange for his or her labor. But as Engels makes considerably more clear than Spivak, this "representation" of the value of labor power is crucially fractured or marked by the "difference" of *unpaid labor* or *surplus labor* which, "over and above the time necessary to replace [a worker's] wages, is the *source of surplus value*, of profit" (148). This "difference" Engels also clearly refers to as the *contradiction* upon which "rests the whole existing social system" (148).

Beyond these common threads, and indeed excluding entirely, where Spivak is concerned, the concepts of "surplus labor," "surplus value" and even "contradiction,"

Spivak is very certainly marching to a different drummer than that of Marx, Engels and Moore. Beyond these common threads, it is fair to say that Spivak is "re-thinking" Marxism under the twin guises of "translation" and "reading." But the question now becomes, what kind of *veiling* is occurring here? And is there a space of thinking beyond its mystifying operations? Consider the question of "value" under capitalism, or as Spivak wants to insist in a curiously *literal* translation and reading, how value "represents itself" (*sich darstellt*), in the December 26, 2003 earthquake in the city of Bam, Iran.⁸ This powerful earthquake measured 6.5 on the Richter scale, devastating the area and killing as many as 40,000 people, leaving thousands more injured and homeless. Just four days before the Bam quake, an earthquake of the same magnitude struck central California in the U.S. The California quake claimed only three lives. According to a statement issued by the Communist Party of Iran, various foreign and domestic capitalist ventures in Bam -- including, for example, agricultural projects, a factory for the manufacture of seats for Daewoo automobiles (Korean), tourist-oriented hotel construction, and construction of office and apartment structures -- had attracted many workers to the city. However, the very onslaught of capitalist "development" had the effect of dramatically increasing land values, which in turn created the conditions for a shortage of housing for workers and their families. People were forced to simply add more stories on top of traditionally-built mud houses; and since capitalist construction firms held a monopoly on cement, people were forced to build their walls with local mud bricks and roofs of dangerously heavy metal beams.

All this transpired while it was well-known that Bam was situated along an earthquake fault line. Jan Egeland, head of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, stated in an interview on the Bam quake that it is "very important that when Bam is rebuilt it is earthquake proof, which it really wasn't -- it was tremendous to see how all of these rooms became death traps" (see "Interview"). In central California, where a seismologically *equal* earthquake hit in close proximity to the so-called "Hearst Castle" (former mansion compound of millionaire Randolph Hearst, now a museum for tourists) and in fact at a time when many residents were out "shopping" on the Christmas holiday, the quake-proof status Egeland refers to has been largely achieved; meanwhile in Bam the "death trap" housing conditions were entirely coextensive with the foreseeability of catastrophic quakes. "The people of Bam were not killed by the earthquake alone. Human hands prepared the conditions for their deaths. . . . In fact they were killed by the reactionary political power, the exploitative economic system and the greed of the ruling classes, while nature only gave these reactionaries a hand" (see "What Killed the People").

The fragility and destruction of Bam lies on the other side of Spivak's veil. Could it be that *this* is how value "represents itself" (*sich darstellt!*) under capitalism: profit at the expense of and in exchange for life and the satisfaction of basic human needs ("use values")? But Spivak hammers her own point: "the entire textual chain of Value" (162); "expansion of the textuality of value" (163); "the 'textuality' of the chain of value" (163); "the textuality of Value in Marx" (164); "the text of exploitation" (166). While Spivak may well avoid the horror of "economic reductionism," she does so at the price of rendering *deconstructive* Marxism virtually powerless to explain such "natural disasters" as the Bam earthquake other than by this profoundly de-materialized notion of the "textuality" of value. Who is "following" Marx here? Or is Spivak's following also a veiling? In the cerebral world of *diacritics* Spivak is regarded as "re-thinking" Marxism, but how celebrated would Spivak be if she announced to students in Iran that the death of Bam was a result of "textuality"? In any event the condemned of Bam are not forgotten, and the real fault line that determined their deaths will not be blurred in the memory of Marxism. The geomaterial nothingness visited upon them could have been prevented, but

the system said No. Why? Because the No of the capitalist system is a telecasting -- a violent *unveiling* -- of its carelessness, recklessness, its fraudulence and incompetence in meeting the most basic needs as well as any higher aspirations of the masses of people whose material interests it expropriates and throws back against them with a vengeance. It follows that this system not only exploits and oppresses the masses, but in doing so constitutes an imminent *endangerment* of humanity.

To propose that "value" under this system is "textual" is a blindness devoid of insight: it is the height of Bad Faith in theory and has nothing whatsoever to do with "following Marx" as a transformative theorist. There is no comparison. Rather we have a theoretical "regime change" under the veil of supplementarity and by virtue of some genuinely "hard work" on Spivak's part. The "reading" of the textuality of value is a neoconscious pedagogy of the first order because it concentrates and monopolizes subjectivity exclusively in a "new" zone of re-cognizing the existence of capitalist exploitation while producing a more "complicated" subject whose position in relation to the system is invested with the shrewd cynicism and reversible self-awareness which is everywhere evident in Spivak's work. By the radical pedagogue's own hand, the "last resort" of class struggle to transform the system is negated, blurred, subjected to erasure. This is why we find the ambivalence between Morton and Spivak themselves -- and throughout the left-wing, including Spivak's interlocutors in India -- on the question of how Spivak "follows" Marx. Spivak follows Marx opportunistically and in a vacillatory way, not all the way along the path of revolution. This is the neocon difference between "reading" the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* as a "rhetorical" artifact and *theorizing* the *Manifesto* as a conceptually unified analogon which *includes* the subject in the "history of *all* hitherto existing society . . ." (Marx and Engels, 1972, 84, my emphasis). For this subject there is no exit, but there is resistance. Yet here we have Morton in 2003 hailing Spivak the "polymath" -- a simulacrum of left-wing caricature.

But the plate margins of transformative praxis are shifting. This shift involves a critical reexamination of core issues such as the question of value, whose genealogy lies not in "cultural studies" but rather in the epicenter of critical social thought in the widest sense. This is why Spivak is compelled to wrangle with Marx in the first place, and in turn why Morton spins away from Spivak's spin without engaging much of anything. Value is a concept entrenched in permanent struggle between the fundamental contradictions of necessity and freedom, scarcity and super-abundance, toil and play.⁹ The question of value is a question from which there is no escape: it is integral to the historical structure of capitalism (**EVERYONE FOR THEMSELVES AND THE DEVIL TAKE THE HINDMOST**) and therefore constitutes one of the ABC's on the horizon of communism (**FROM EACH ACCORDING TO THEIR ABILITIES, TO EACH ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS**).¹⁰ As if reverberated with Derrida's death in 2004, the intrinsic metastabilities of the dominant postmodern tendencies are now amplified through the shock waves of contradictions at the core of the capitalist system. The No of Bam was echoed across the Indian Ocean exactly one year later on December 26, 2004 -- for those who had the sixth sense to hear. The Sumatran Tigers heard it and raised their heads. Hunted to the brink of extinction, exploited, commodified, endangered, pushed back by the tourist industry, missing links in the great chain of the have nots, what does their condition have to do with value, anyway? Nothing -- that is, everything.



What textuality?
(Photo: Farooq Burney, International Red Crescent)

Notes

[1](#) *Lao hu tai tou* / Tiger raises his head.

[2](#) But Elson directly raises the question in her own contribution to this collection:

Does [this] mean that Marx is simply giving us a *definition* of the category value . . . , [or] is using "determine" in the sense of "logically define"? No, because value is not the *same* as a quantity of socially necessary labour-time: it is an objectification or materialization of a certain aspect of that labour-time, its aspect of being simply an expenditure of human labour power in general, i.e. abstract labour." (Elson, "The Value Theory of Labour," *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed., Diane Elson, London, Humanities Press, 1979, p. 132, Elson's emphasis).

And Elson shortly thereafter remarks that, "There is a continuity as well as a difference between what determines and what is determined" (133). Is Elson assuming that "Value represents Labor"? I think Elson is clearly saying "No." Where Spivak is concerned, this entire episode represents a kind of evidentiary forecast (and an incriminating one at that) of her more recent remark in the beginning of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999), that she isn't "erudite" enough to be interdisciplinary, but she "can break the rules." In class society, however, whether one can break the rules is often a relatively separate issue from whether one gets *arrested*, whether one has to confront the other party, whether there are consequences, whether one is "corrected" and so forth, all of which Spivak conveniently escapes. But see the Chapter 5, "What Expropriation?," examining Spivak's punitive encounter with Derrida.

3 My thanks to artist Robert Stanfield for his assistance in the Model.

4 On "democracy" and class, see Lenin, "Preparatory Material for the Book, 'The State and Revolution,'" *Collected Works*, Vol. 33; *The State and Revolution, Collected Works*, Vol. 25; "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," *Collected Works*, Vol. 27; and "International Working Women's Day," *Collected Works*, Vol. 32.

5 See, e.g., in Spivak's *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, Routledge: New York, 1993, "More on Power/Knowledge" at page 288, note 1; page 290, note 36; "Limits and Openings of Marx in Derrida" at page 303, note 1; "French Feminism Revisited" at page 312, note 40; and "Scattered Speculations on the Question of Culture Studies" at page 322, note 26. For an extremely eye-opening and probative examination of Spivak's work in translating the writings of Mahasweta Devi, see Minoli Salgado's "Tribal Stories, Scribal Worlds: Mahasweta Devi and the Unreliable Translator," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 35:1 (2000), 131-145, in which Salgado takes Spivak to task as an "abusive translator."

6 My thanks here to Ulrich Froehlich and James Winders for their comments on and analyses of Marx's original German text in relation to the translations of Spivak and Moore. The following is Marx's original German text from *Das Kapital. Kritik der politischen Oekonomie, Erst Band, Buch I*, Verlag von Otto Meissner, Hamburg, 1872, p. 13:

Im Austauschverhältniss der Waaren selbst erschien uns ihr Tauschwerth als etwas von ihren Gebrauchswerthen durchaus Unabhängiges. Abstrahirt man nun wirklich vom Gebrauchswerth der Arbeitsprodukte, so erhält man ihren Werth wie er eben bestimmt ward. Das Gemeinsame was sich im Austauschverhältniss oder Tauschwerth der Waaren darstellt, ist also ihr Werth. Der Fortgang der Untersuchung wird uns zurückführen zum Tauschwerth als der nothwendigen Ausdrucksweise oder Erscheinungsform des Werths, welcher zunächst jedoch unabhängig von dieser Form zu betrachten ist.

Note that Marx's work was originally published in Hamburg by Meissner and Behre until 1914. Spivak, of course, is a "Routledge Critical Thinker," according to the series in which Stephen Morton's book appears, and most of Spivak's works have been published under the Routledge seal (imprimatur?). But "Routledge" itself is owned by the publishing empire now known as "TFI," following a corporate merger of "Informa" and the "Taylor & Francis Group" announced in May of 2004 (follow <http://www.routledge.com> to <http://www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com/investors> to

"Merger with Informa"). TFI trades on the London Stock Exchange. The Taylor & Francis Group's "Mission Statement" to investors blends its monopolistic outlook with a disturbingly fascistic undercurrent: "We will seek to own the majority of all intellectual property as the critical value proposition. . . . Consequently our shareholders will see significant, sustainable, profitable growth" (see <<http://www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com/investors/mission>>). Hypothetically, what if a "*Capital, Vol. IV*" or an *Anti-Duhring* or even a *Little Red Book* were written today; how and where would they be published? See "FBI Targets Indymedia," *Revolutionary Worker*, Vol. 26, No. 22, #1259, Nov. 21, 2004, 14.

7 Spivak remarks in "The Post-colonial Critic" interview of 1987 that "I am viewed by the Marxists as too codic . . ." (69), apparently suggesting an awareness of the highly "encoded" form of the discourses in which her positions are staked out. Nevertheless, obviously even in making this remark, Spivak can't resist the opportunity to re-encrypt herself via the deployment of this kind of meta-neologism: the "codic" -- which is itself "too codic." To put it differently, it is too *veiled*. My thanks to Madhava Prasad for his comments on this issue. This manner according to which Spivak's text *comes off* as a little "too codic," a little too veiled, a little too difficult, a little too complex and so forth: this aspect also locates Spivak within the domain that Jean-Paul Sartre theorized as the "caricature." According to Sartre, the caricature is "deliberately distorted, the nose is much too long, the cheeks are too prominent, etc." (Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber, Routledge: London, 2004, p. 17). In a sense the caricature *performs* its veiling because it is through and through nothing but a veiling, an "analogon" of some other entity of which it is the caricature. But the performativity of caricature in Spivak also veils its performance, hence doubly (indeed indefinitely) mystifying or cloaking its historical connection with any "real" foundation. See Chapter 2, "What is a Caricature ?"

8 This discussion is drawn from the following sources: "What Killed the People in the Earthquake in Iran?," *Revolutionary Worker*, #1225, Jan. 18, 2004 (<<http://www.rwor.org/a/1225>>); "Catastrophes -- Signs of a Society Rotting on its Feet," *Internationalism*, #271, Jan. 29, 2004 (<<http://www.internationalism.org/wr/271>>); "Iran: Interview with Jan Egeland, Head of OCHA [UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs], on Bam Earthquake Aftermath," *IRINnews.org* [Integrated Regional Information Networks] (<<http://www.irinnews.org>>); and Denis McClean, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "Winter Threatens Bam's Homeless," Jan. 2, 2004 (<<http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news>>), wherein other photography by Farooq Burney may be found. On the earthquake that struck Gujarat, India, on January 26, 2001, killing as many as 100,000 and leaving millions homeless, see "India: Earthquake and Free Market Devastation," *Revolutionary Worker*, #1091, Feb. 18, 2001 (<<http://www.rwor.org/a/1091>>); and Jagadish G. Chandra, "Gujurat Earthquake -- No 'Natural' Disaster," *The Socialist*, #192, Feb. 2001 (<<http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/TheSocialistIssue192>>). See also Amadeo Bordiga, *Murdering the Dead: Amadeo Bordiga on Capitalism and Other Disasters*, Antagonism Press, London, 2001.

9 See *Stolen Childhoods: A Feature Length Documentary on Child Labor* (2004), directed by Len Morris and Robin Romano, a co-production of Galen Films and Romano Productions (<<http://www.stolenchildhoods.org>>).

10 On these opposed core principles, see Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme," *Selected Works*, Vol. II; Lenin, *The State and Revolution, Collected Works*, Vol. 25; and

Lenin, "From the First Subbotnik on the Moscow-Kazan Railway to the All-Russia May Day Subbotnik," *Collected Works*, Vol. 31.

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-- and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part I, in ed. Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1978, 146-200.

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