I want to turn instead to the labor theory of value itself and to discuss some aspects of it that can be found in chapter one of volume one of Capital and to do that I want to make the general statement in which I want you to try to think about everything else I said that basically what I want to argue is that all of the characteristics of value as analyzed in the first chapter are simultaneously aspects and characteristics of the antagonistic class relationships that capital is able to impose and are therefore resisted, challenged, and often ruptured by those capital seeks to dominate through the imposition of work. One result, of course, is to see how within capitalism, because the chapter ends with the money form, to see how money embodies all the essentials of these antagonistic relations and therefore becomes a terrain of struggle as capitalists try to use money to manage and expand their social order while workers resist that usage, often subverting money for their own purposes and seeking to escape the order. So I want to talk therefore a little bit about (A) the concept of abstract labor, the question of the measure of value, and the question of the form of value.

My position on abstract labor is, I think, quite different from virtually all other interpretations. What I want to argue is that the semantic sense, or at least the only semantic sense that I can make out of the concept of abstract labor, the rationale for talking about all the various concrete forms of labor with which we are familiar, is that they have something in common. What? Not just the fact of being labor, but what they all have in common within capitalism is that they all form the basic substance of capitalist control. No matter what kind of labor is imposed, the mere fact of imposing labor, of putting people to work, of keeping people at work, is the way in which capital dominates society. It's what eats up all our time – well, maybe not all our time, but most of our time at least – they try. It eats up our energy, absorbs our lives, or, as Marx likes to say with his Gothic metaphors, vampire-like lives by sucking the blood – in this case literally appropriating people's lives for its own purposes. Right? For its own purposes being what? Basically the maintenance of its kind of social order, the perpetuation of itself.

Looking at abstract labor in this fashion short-circuits most of the debates that have gone on among Marxists about what abstract labor stands for. And I'll only mention one: a common view, certainly one embraced by the first Marxists that I read, people like Baran and Sweezy, was that it made sense to speak about abstract labor because labor is malleable under capital and workers are often shifted from job to job and jobs are changed. And therefore, if there's a lot of malleability and a lot of shifting around, then okay, it makes sense to abstract from that process. All that is definitely true, but all of that happens precisely in the attempt to find forms of work which will function and which are reproducible to keep people working. And it's precisely against the subordination of life against work that I see people rebelling all over the place, whether they conceptualize it in that fashion or not – which, of course, most of them don't.

Okay, so the concept makes sense to me in that sense. Work is the fundamental means of social control. And therefore, we need a way to talk about it which differentiates it from all the various kinds of work that we're familiar with. Now, this way of looking at it also has an impact on looking at work – sort of the kind of work that Marx talks about all the time as well as other kinds of work. Marx, for the most part, talks about waged labor. His focus is on the factory, his focus is on the primary way in which work was being imposed in the industrial period of English industrialization, a domain into which all of life was being sucked – not merely all of the work, all the life of male workers in factories, but wives, children, the entire society was being sucked into the factory. However, it never was entirely, and over time, of course, capital failed to impose wage labor everywhere. And of course, Marx recognizes in chapter 25 of Capital One that capital has always had and requires the existence of unwaged labor. But unwaged labor is also a domain of imposed labor. The imposition of labor doesn't simply happen within the factory or within the office or within the waged workplace. Capital has sought to impose it everywhere. So that concept of abstract labor, at least in some sense, right, makes us see that no matter how work is organized, whether it's waged or unwaged, if people's activities are structured in such a way as to contribute to the expanded reproduction of capital, then it's work. Right? It's work. It's labor. I don't differentiate between the two. I don't agree with Engels' attempt to differentiate between labor and work. I also don't agree with Marx's notion of a generic notion of work – but perhaps we'll get back to that, maybe, maybe not.

Now, if all this is the case, then piecemeal, this relationship can be ruptured every time people are successful in struggling against work, no matter what the methods are that they use, right? And ruptures occur every time people either refuse activities which have been turned into work or they disrupt those activities, either on the job or off, right? Those activities that capitalists try to arrange as vehicles for keeping people busy working. One of the interesting things about recent bottom-up history is to demonstrate how it took capital a long time to impose the wage for work. Many of the students of E.P. Thompson, like Peter Linebaugh and others, have demonstrated how, for a long time, capital imposed work in which much of the value of labor power came not in the form of money wages but in other forms. And of course, the reserve army has to survive, has to get income. How it gets that income is an interesting question. Sometimes it's partly from wages, sometimes it comes from the state. There’s a variety of ways in which that’s maintained, whether they like them or not, but that has to happen. And as the domain of unwaged labor expanded, as workers were successful in hammering down the length of the working day, and the working week, and the working year, and the working life cycle, right, capital had to colonize all of that time liberated from direct control and try to shape that domain, all of those domains, shape them so that what went on in those domains basically contributed to commodity production of the most essential commodity, namely labor power, right? So the social factory, as some Italians like to call it, right, becomes a factory in which both commodities are produced for sale for profit and in which the most basic commodity of all is produced: labor power. And work is enclosed and organized in both domains.

Okay, I’m not, given time constraints, enough on that subject. Let me turn to the question of measure. This is, of course, the subject of section two of chapter one. It’s a very brief discussion, but one which is vitally important because it, in particular, sets up labor to hold this whole later discussion of relative surplus value. But the basic – what’s going on here is a discussion of what it means to measure abstract labor. Right? What sense can that make when actual measures must always be measures of concrete labor? Right? Well, there’s a huge debate about this in the history of Marxism. There are a lot of worries about this, given differences in skill, differences in complexities of work, all those kinds of things. When you look at abstract labor the way I look at it, all of those debates are short-circuited. They are not my problem because if what abstract labor is grasping is work as social control, social as the fundamental means of domination, then it doesn’t matter about skill. I mean, it doesn’t matter if it’s skill level, complexity – all those issues are irrelevant, not in a whole, but irrelevant to the issue of putting people to work. An hour of work is an hour of work is an hour of work. It’s an hour of occupying people’s time and keeping them busy, regardless of the level of skill, regardless of the nature of the work.

Just as an aside, you know, capitalists often recognize this. One of my favorite moments in American economic history was when there was a period of time in which the steel industry was in a state of crisis, and everybody thought that it was under siege by steel production in the rest of the world because modern steel methods had been introduced in the wake of World War II all over the place but not in the United States because the American steel industry had never been bombed. So the same technologies were being used before the war and after the war. So everyone was saying, "Hey, you know, if you don’t like Venezuelan steel competing with American steel or Korean steel competing with American steel, then you should be investing in modernizing American steel production." And right at that moment, United States Steel, one of the biggest steel producers in the United States, bought Marathon Oil. And everybody said, "What are you doing buying an oil company? Why aren’t you modernizing steel?" To which U.S. Steel responded, "Hey, we’re a business. It doesn’t matter what we produce. The only question is where we can make the most profit." Now, in my terms, it is, it doesn’t matter how we put people to work as long as we can put people to work. That’s the key issue, and I would argue that a lot of capitalist policymakers think very much in these terms, and a lot of economists have been preoccupied with precisely this issue.

So Marx says, "So how do we measure abstract labor?" And he speaks in terms of socially necessary labor time. Okay, most people think about socially necessary labor time simply in terms of the labor time which, on the average, is required to produce something. From my point of view, I mean, that’s correct, but the real issue is how much time can capital put somebody, put people to work producing a given unit of any particular item. The value of an item for capital, right, isn’t just the labor time that goes into socially necessary labor time. It’s the amount of work that can be imposed in having people produce that item, which is one of the reasons why, when Marx eventually gets to relative surplus value, right, we begin to realize, and capital real begins to realize, that as productivity is raised as part of relative surplus value strategy, the amount of time that you can put people to work producing each unit of whatever it is you’re raising in productivity of is going down and therefore that particular domain of production is becoming less and less useful as a means of putting people to work and as a means of organizing society.

Now, this is not, I would argue, not at all just a theoretical issue. In fact, historically, there are very clear moments in which this has been a preoccupation. In the United States, one of those moments was the late 50s and early 60s, in which automation in industry and manufacturing was proceeding so fast that economists and sociologists were able to make their careers out of asking the question, "Where the hell are we going to find enough jobs to keep people working?" Well, the problem, of course, was resolved in that period by the rise of the service sector, which had very low labor productivity and provided enormous scope for putting people to work. Another moment of this was when economists turned their attention to the South, what we now call the Global South. In those days, we called it the third world. And at that time, a lot of multinational corporate investment in this world was in what were called enclave economies. In Cuba, before the revolution, a nickel plant was put in; it created about 50 jobs. In Venezuela, this is long before the revolution, if you want to call it that, right, came the exploitation of oil, and oil production produced almost no jobs. And so among development economists, the problem of what are called enclave economies became a very serious one. Any introduction by foreign capital of high capital-intensity technology that didn't create jobs meant that this investment was unable to absorb the ever-growing quantity of labor that was pouring in from the countryside, right, and setting up squats around the cities as enclosures in the countryside pushed people out of the countryside or they came on their own for their own reasons. This was a serious problem addressed by economists.

And then, of course, a third moment of this came in the wake of the Carter-Reagan depression of the early 80s, which soon became a global depression and became the international debt crisis, in which unemployment soared. On top of the great recession of the mid-70s came the depression in the early 80s. Unemployment went into double digits, right, inflation had gone into double digits, now unemployment went into double digits, and in the what increasingly began came to be called jobless recoveries, right, that followed in the 80s and 90s, unemployment stayed high. And one upshot of this was the birth of a whole literature on the inability of capitalism to provide enough jobs. Right? So that you had, for example, Rifkin's The End of Work and Aronowitz's Jobless Future, a whole literature basically saying, right, that it seems that the fragment on machines, which to which you referred a little while ago, is now coming to a head. And of course, Tony Negri has been making this argument for some time, right? The final fragment of the machine was being realized, that the rise in the organic composition of capital was reaching a point where the capitalists were running out of ways to put people to work.

This, at the time, of course, I found all very interesting. Now, that, of course, did not raise any questions about measuring work other than the quantity that could be imposed. More recently, of course, there has been an attack on the idea that work can be measured, and this is primarily the Negri crowd, you might say, people around him and so on, arguing that not only is capital no longer – it completely turned the position around – not only are they not having problems putting people to work, but in fact, they’re able to put people to work throughout society. It’s ironic and amusing for some of us that after having nasty fights with the wages for housework movement, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and others who argued basically for a 24-hour workday – essentially, the Negri people, Negri and company, have now adopted that position with a vengeance. And if there’s no way to – if everything is now subordinated into work, into intellectual, into immaterial labor as part of the general intellect, these, of course, the general intellect is plucked out of the fragment of machines, the immaterial labor is a variation on mental labor and affective labor, and it’s a little bit of Foucault and a little bit of Deleuze and a little bit of other things. But if the capital is successful in enclosing labor everywhere, then it’s impossible to distinguish between work and not work. And therefore, you might as well forget about measuring work. Measure is no longer possible. That’s their argument.

Now, this, of course, is premised on the notion of labor value, which is very much the same economic concept of labor value which was shared by most of the Marxist tradition. In fact, in Hart and Negri’s latest book, Commonwealth, you find them referring back to Sweezy and discussing what labor value is all about. Well, it should be obvious by now that I disagree with this position, having argued, been arguing for quite some time, that not only does capital impose labor throughout society, or strives to anyway, right, but that the notion of abstract labor is not – well, to me, the old notions are not useful. But this way I formulated it is useful in understanding this particular aspect of social control, of the imposition of work.

So a lot of this debate or a lot of this discussion and the debate which is swirled around it, well, I guess it’s interesting, but it doesn’t seem to be – it doesn’t get us very far. Now, given that I came to Marx worrying about the struggle against work, then the question is, well, to what degree does this analysis of abstract labor and measurement give us anything to work with, looking at the struggles against it? Well, from my point of view, it clearly does, because if you can identify the ways in which activities are work by capitalist definition and contributing to the expanded reproduction of labor power, then you can also identify when human activities are not of that sort. You can identify between the two, you can separate the two, and in both cases, you can measure the two. And at the same moment that Hardt and Negri are arguing that measure is impossible, of course, the capitalists are busy, more busy than ever, trying to measure both waged work and unwaged work. I don’t know about here and folded, but in the United States, metrics is the name of the game in the corporate world. There is a ferocious attempt to impose measure on every second, every keystroke of people using computers. They’re totally preoccupied with it. And in the domain of unwaged labor, it’s the same deal. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, is now putting a lot more effort into measuring what goes on in the home, let’s say, how much work is done in the home, according to their definitions. And of course, in schools, measurement is also being pursued with a vengeance. In fact, and I know I’ve heard in the last 24 hours that this is also true here, although the methods being used are somewhat different. But in the United States, this is not new, mind you. We now have a substantial historiography of the history of capitalist intervention into the school, into shaping the school system throughout the 20th century. And thanks to the work of a number of historians of this, we now know how capital sought to take the methods of scientific management from the factory and apply it to the school and how they sought to develop measures to determine to what degree teachers were, in fact, successfully imposing labor. This is an old story, it’s not a new story. The only thing that’s new is the way it’s being done and the viciousness with which it’s being done.

I understand here at the University people now have to pay if they decide to add a field. In the United States, we have to pay for everything, right? Nothing is free. But what is happening is that it is being made more and more difficult to change fields. It's being made very difficult because the university as a whole is engaged in a process of speed-up in which it keeps very carefully keeping track of how much work students are doing and how fast they are moving through the program. And just like in, say, the first 20 minutes of Charlie Chaplin’s film Modern Times, they are busy pushing students through as fast as they can push. And that, of course, requires measures—very careful measures.

So students, of course, just like workers on the job, fight back against this. When speed-up came to the Ford plant in Ohio back in the 60s, you had young worker revolts in sabotage of the line. When the Department of the School of Engineering brought speed-up to the University of Texas, you had a general revolt among engineering students against this, in which they prepared excellent arguments as to why this was a bad idea from the point of view of education and learning how to be an engineer. They, of course, had no effect whatsoever. And from the School of Engineering, it was generalized to the university as a whole. But they fought back against it.

Students, of course, continue to fight back against work and against efforts to measure their work. Most notoriously, of course, students cheat. Cheating is a very handy way to do what you're supposed to do without having to put too much time and energy into doing it. And it can be done as an individual, and it can be done collectively. And it has been. For the last few years, I've taught courses on the political economy of education. And one of the most amusing things that I managed to dig up looking into the history of the political economy of education was an article on cheating in China. A historical article about how, you know, the Chinese, under one form or another of Confucianism, have used testing for 3,000 years to determine entry into the civil service. Well, so there's 3,000 years of history of imposing tests and of trying to deal with cheating. It's really amusing to see the multifarious ways in which Chinese students have cheated in these tests down through the centuries and through the millennia. This is truly an old story, not just a story of capitalism but a more general story.

But certainly within capitalism, this is the case, given that basically capitalism cheats people out of an education. One is tempted to write a book, right, about following left and the right to be lazy, the right to cheat, given that you were being cheated out of an education by having a time in school basically turned into a time of discipline and conditioning to work the rest of your life. Why not feel free to cheat in return? Which leaves open, of course, what can you get out of a very bad situation?

Now this kind of thing subverts the very process of measuring, right? You have all these attempts to measure, but this is covert resistance. I mean, cheating is covert, right? It's illegal; it’s not acceptable. So you have to do it carefully. You have to hide it, which means that things like grades can never be accurate measures of how much work—I mean, basically grades are a measure of how much work people are willing to do, right? I mean, people get high grades who do a lot of work; people get low grades who do a little work. So teachers are Maxwell's demons who differentiate between high-entropy students and low-entropy students, but only on the basis of things like test scores. But if you cheat, then the measure is false. It doesn’t work. So there’s a subversion of the very process of measuring.

Then there could be the subversion of the purposes of measurement, right? In which, for example, the refusal to work in a period of relative surplus value, which much dominated the 20th century, for the most part, the struggle against work undermines the attempt to raise productivity, reduce the value unit of production in order to increase value. On the one hand, sabotage, let’s say, which forces work to be done over, means more work for the same unit of production. And therefore, you might say, well, that’s good for capital. From my point of view, that’s good for capital, but not when its strategy is to reduce the amount of work, right, in order to lower the value of labor power and cut costs and raise profits.

Got to turn to the question of the form of value. And what interests me most in Marx's analysis here is the stuff he takes most obviously from Hegel. In the simple form, the discussion of reflexive mediation. In the expanded form, the notion of totalization and tendency towards infinity. And in the general form, syllogistic mediation. And these are in this first chapter. Of course, all these things are discussed abstractly, not as in life, but abstractly in terms of exchange of commodities. But, of course, a little later, if we keep reading the book, which most people don’t—they get so turned off by trying to read chapter one that they just quit—but if you keep reading the book, right, of course, you discover not too many chapters along that the most important exchange of commodities is the wage for labor power, right? So you can read this discussion in chapter one just in those terms and get a lot out of it, I think.

Right, in the case of reflexive mediation, if you know about it, of course, you immediately go back to the phenomenology and the discussion of the master-slave relationship and see how capital wants us to accept its definition of us, right, as workers, which depends upon our acceptance of capital's definition of itself as managers of us as workers, and so on and so forth. Right? Every time we refuse work, we rupture that relationship. We break the mirror, right? The reflexive mediation. The students—and this is true in the realm of wage labor, and this is true in unwaged labor. When workers go out on strike, they cease to be working. They not only differentiate themselves from machines, which don’t know how to go out on strike—at least not yet. Wait a while; maybe we’ll see that. Certainly, some science fiction writers imagine that as much.

When students go out and strike, when students cheat, when students—they rupture this relationship. When they study what they want to study outside the specified curriculum, they are rupturing this kind of relationship. They are defining themselves in other ways. They’re not accepting this definition. They’re not accepting this rule. And we can see the same kind of phenomenon throughout capitalist society over and over again.

In the case of the expanded form, and what’s interesting about it is when we look at it as determinations not just of commodity exchange but of capital as a whole, it certainly signals something which was mentioned about totality, right? The whole point of the expanded form is that it’s totalizing, maybe in the bad infinity, but it’s totalizing, right? It is about the tendency of capital to put, from my point of view, to put everybody to work one way or another, to expand every aspect of its way of organizing the imposition of work throughout the world and, indeed, off-planet. In case you haven’t noticed, we already have experiments with industrialization methods in space, and we already have problems of managing labor in space. Yes, you don’t know this. There are a whole series of instances in which astronauts have told command centers in Houston, “Don’t bother yourself. We’re going offline.” And there’s absolutely, of course, nothing they can do about it because they’re up there orbiting the Earth. Where are they going to shoot them? This might highlight what’s going on in a rather dramatic but rather counterproductive way. So there’s a whole problem already among capitalists in trying to figure out how you manage labor which controls a fantastic amount of capital into situations in which control is extremely difficult.

Anyway, this discussion of totalization and of the tendency towards infinite expansion is, from our concern, clearly applicable to the class relationship. And it’s interesting about this now. In the general form, which I think is the most interesting, which, of course, the only difference between the general form and the money form is that money becomes the universal equivalent. But in the general form, you have the focus on this relationship of syllogistic mediation in which one thing mediates the relations between two other things or many other things. And in Marx's example, of course, it’s money, eventually money as a universal equivalent, which mediates relationships among commodities. But, of course, in the class relationships, it’s money, among other things, that mediates relationships among workers. Some workers are paid more; some workers are paid less. They have a relationship to the capitalist off, right off the bat, what Sartre would call a serial group. The only thing they have in common is the fact that they’re working for the capitalists. Their problems in getting beyond form some other kind of group organizing structure. But money is not the only mediator. This syllogistic mediation takes all kinds of forms: the violence of the state, the organization of the military, the organization of family, the organization of schools, Christ, right, media between capital and the working class. The list of mediations is basically—it’s almost a list of all the institutions and characteristics of capitalist society. And so the ruptures of those relationships, wherever they may be found where this is true, is a rupture of this relationship. And it is a rupture in the ability of capital to impose work. It seems to me that when you take these, even just these handful of concepts, and you look at the world situation, it becomes clear why the methods that are being used right now are so brutal, are so vicious.

Because certainly, let’s say, what was done in Poland immediately after during the early period when Jeff Sachs came with shock therapy, what’s now being done in Greece, what was done to the third world throughout the 1980s and ’90s, to what’s being done in Greece, in Spain, but basically throughout Europe—the imposition of austerity. And I might add in the United States, in case you don’t recognize this, but it’s being done throughout the United States on both the federal and the state level. The states in the United States have constitutional amendments that impose budgetary balance, right? So budgets are unbalanced on purpose in order to use the law to force their rebalancing through the imposition of austerity. And basically, the same kind of thing has happened at the federal level. The United States is running a huge deficit, a federal deficit, which of course was engineered under the Bush administration by having a couple of wars of choice without paying for them, borrowing to pay for them, and so on and so forth. It’s a long story, a complicated story. But I argue—and this takes us far beyond what I have to say today—that the nastiness of all this is because, at the heart of all of these situations in which these policies are being imposed, capital has been—its relationships have been ruptured over and over and over and over again in the sense of its ability to impose in all of these domains.

Certainly, the Soviets used Capital as a guide to accumulation, right? We know this. Marx writes about primitive socialist accumulation. And the only thing socialist about it is the word, basically. And the case of China.

I'm not a China expert and I haven't followed the development as closely as I might, but it seems to me the Chinese have reproduced the history of primitive accumulation as we know it in the West very much, right? In driving people out of the countryside into the cities, in creating a huge reserve army. I mean, it's a long history, right? I mean, you know, it's an interesting history. You know that after the revolution, the Chinese peasants thought that the rule of thumb of communism was great: "to each according to their needs, from each according to their abilities." And the Chinese Communists had to pass the Wu Chang resolution in 1956: "No, it's to each according to their work," which, of course, is a basic rule of thumb in neoclassical microeconomics.

So I don't know to what degree the Chinese leaders have had recourse to Capital or to Marx in terms of figuring out how to accelerate accumulation. I just don't know. But certainly there's a lot of similarity, except, of course, everything is happening much faster—so fast that the struggles of Chinese workers are progressing so quickly that the Chinese are now outsourcing. You know this. I mean, not only are American and European companies producing in China, but now the Chinese are moving operations to various places in Southeast Asia, where the workers are even under better control than they are in China, because things are getting out of hand in China. So I don't know.

As far as the other thing goes, yes, absolutely. Obviously, there are people who identify with their work, no doubt about it. A lot of professors consider ourselves privileged because we get paid for doing what we say we want to do anyway, right? As Bologna pointed out a long time ago, right behind the workers' councils in Germany in World War I were skilled workers who identified with their tools and their ability to use their tools, right? That kind of thing. So of course that exists; there's no doubt about it. However, I think when academics talk about it, they project a lot. The vast majority of jobs in capitalist society are not of that sort, and people don't relate to it in that way.

Look, students may be totally into studying but not necessarily into the curriculum which is imposed upon them. My guess is that most of the people here have not followed the curriculum which was imposed strictly but, in fact, went out of their way to do other things in order to study. But in the process, right, that violates—in a certain sense, in a certain sense—what was intended to be their work. Now, it may wind up being work anyway; it may wind up just producing labor power. That's quite possible. Certainly in the case of academics, right, in the case of professors, right, we wind up imposing work on students and on each other. We can struggle against it; I've written about that. But we do it, or we lose our jobs.

With respect to the debates which have been going on among feminists about domestic labor and among other Marxists about domestic labor, I think that there are certain positions in that debate which basically amount to falling back into the use of old categories, like mode of production, of trying to apply structuralist Althusserian-type approaches and looking and seeing, "Oh gee, this is organized differently; therefore, this must be a different production," as opposed to looking at what this does, what the purpose of this work is supposed to do, and what it often does, which is produce and reproduce labor power, right, regardless of how it's organized.

You know, way back, clearly slavery—at least early slavery—was organized differently than wage labor. But Marx himself points out how slavery is an initial part of capital. You know, it requires something like a mode of production analysis of the structural sort to avoid seeing that and avoid recognizing that. I mean, without slavery in the New World, there was no British industrialization, no cotton, no cotton textile industry, and so on. No slavery, no wage labor—they were integral to each other. The same goes in the case of the reproduction of labor power. No reproduction of labor power, no labor. No labor power, no work, no workers, right?

Marx, who saw women and children being drawn into the factory, thought this was going to undermine the reproduction of labor power because not enough domestic work would be done anymore if all the women were taken into the factory. So, in that sense, right, capital—he saw it undermining itself. Well, of course, that process was largely reversed, right? So the women were returned to the household to procreate new generations of workers and to reproduce workers.

So from my perspective, the key issue is: are those relationships? So in terms of the debate within feminism, other than a critique of their difficulties in articulating any kind of theory of self-valorization, I like the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and the women who were associated with the Wages for Housework movement. And I disagree with people—with all of those people who argued that, "Oh, you're just asking to be exploited," as if people's lives weren't already being subordinated to work.

Competition is one of the bywords of the moment, and basically what competition means is pitting workers against workers. I mean, even if you take microeconomics, the usual definitions of competition—price competition or product innovation competition—it all comes down to which capitalists have the best control over their labor force, whether it's imposing low wages or getting the most creativity and imagination. You see this today in industries that produce games, television, and so on. But work has to be creative and imaginative. Capitalists are most successful with that when the competitive struggle… yes, absolutely, competition is one of those buzzwords of globalization, and it is designed to pit us against each other without question.

This, by the way, is not new, not in Western capitalism and not in state capitalism of the Soviet Union. If you've never read the essays Lenin wrote right after the revolution, you should. Not only "The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government," which was introducing Taylorism, but his essay on competition. You know, he really thought Russian workers were a lazy bunch of bums and what they needed were a bunch of mechanisms in order to make them work. After all, they thought the point of the revolution was to work less—not in Lenin's point of view.

Capital restricts us to its own set of rules, right? I mean, that's what it means; that's what domination means. It means to impose a set of rules and to outlaw and either crush or assimilate anything that doesn't fit that set of rules—that particular way of organizing society. And it certainly is an organization which is highly restricted and which is highly destructive of human life, of nature, of the globe, etc. I couldn't agree more about that. How do you replace this? And you said other than worker struggles? Well, I don't think there is any other way into worker struggles. The question is, what's the nature of the struggles?

One of the things which I think is so interesting about the current period is that it is hard for me to identify any dimension of capitalist society which is not contested. And moreover, not only is everything contested, but in virtually every domain of contestation, people have alternative proposals. Unlike the 20th century, in which people tried to suggest under the rubric of socialism or communism a system to replace this system, a new system to replace the existing system, today what we have is a discussion about the creation of other worlds, plural, of a multiplicity of ways by which we humans, who demonstrate clearly through our history that we are a diverse lot, have found a multiplicity of ways to organize ourselves in meaningful, interesting forms.

There is no reason to think the supersession of capitalism in terms of the replacement of one system by another. So there's no unified answer—well, at least there's no interesting unified answer. Which is one reason why I once wrote an essay for a collection on why we should stop talking about socialism, why we should stop talking about what we want in terms of socialism, because the term socialism has always evoked another system—one that would replace the current. This is one of the reasons why I spent many years collaborating with the Zapatistas in southern Mexico, because their approach in this multi-linguistic, multicultural part of society—because they are not unified. This is not one language and one culture; this is as varied a set of cultures and languages as you have in Europe. But they have found a way to knit together a politics of struggle in which all those people can struggle together, not to create the same thing, but to create space and the opportunity to create a number of different ways of living, ways of being.

So no, I don't think there's any other way to get beyond capitalism than through worker struggles. Except let us remember that workers struggle to be more than just workers. I mean, it's not for no reason that Marx spent so many pages talking about the struggle against work in chapter 10 of Capital, why he pays so much attention to the attempt to reduce the number of hours of the working day. It's not just that labor is alienating and exploiting; it is that there's a lot more to life than what he defines as work in capitalism or out. Because remember, he does have a generic notion of work, right? I disagree with that. I don't think there should be a generic notion of work outside of capitalism. It doesn't make any sense to me. But clearly, there's an understanding there that we struggle against work to have better work, not only to have better work by having less work but also to do all kinds of other things.

Which is one of the reasons why I have a lot of problems with certain strains of Marxism, which would identify work with human being from Engels on. Right? I prefer the definition of work in chapter 7 of volume one of Capital, which is much more restricted in terms of a particular kind of interaction of humans with nonhuman nature