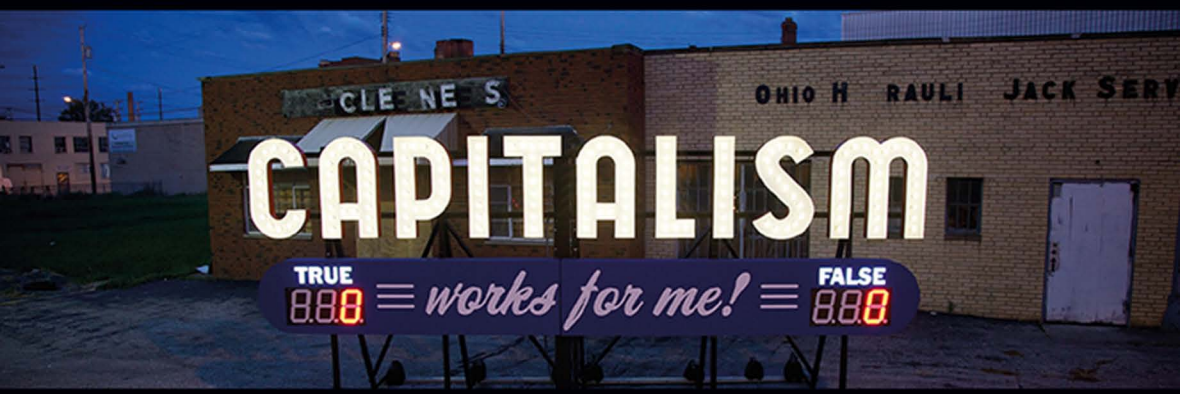
The Discourses of Capitalism

Everyday Economists and the Production of Common Sense

Christian W. Chun



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The Discourses of Capitalism

Since the global economic crisis of 2007–2008, 'capitalism' has been the topic of widespread general discussion in both mainstream and social media. In this book, Christian W. Chun examines the discourses of capitalism taken up by people in their responses to a street art installation created by Steve Lambert, entitled *Capitalism Works for Me!* In doing so, he considers several key questions, including:

- How do everyday people view and make sense of capitalism and its role in their work and personal lives?
- What are the discourses they use in their common-sense understandings of the economy to defend or reject capitalism as a system?

Chun looks at how dominant discourses in social circulation operate to co-construct and support capitalism, and the accompanying counter-discourses that critique it. This is key reading for advanced students of discourse analysis, language and globalization/politics, media/communication studies, and related areas. A video lecture by the author can be accessed via the Routledge website (www.routledge.com/9781138807105) and the Routledge Language and Communication Portal (www.routledgetextbooks.com/textbooks/languageandcommunication).

Christian W. Chun is Assistant Professor of Culture, Identity, and Language Learning in the Applied Linguistics Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston, USA. He is the author of *Power and Meaning Making in an EAP Classroom: Engaging with the Everyday* (2015).

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1 The discourses of capitalism

Capitalism and its discontents

In the past 30 years, there have been at least 15 major economic crises worldwide including the 1987 US stock market crash, the 1997 Asian monetary crisis, and the 2007–2008 global financial meltdown. The ensuing economic crisis that began in 2008 impacted millions of lives in North and South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia, wiping out vast amounts of savings and accumulated wealth, and substantially increasing both government and consumer debt for many countries including China, Spain, Greece, Mexico, and the United States. Unemployment rates in countries such as Greece and Spain now surpass one fourth of the population and threaten to destabilize not only the European Union, but also the global economy. In the United States, 51% of working Americans now make less than $30,000 a year (Office of the Chief Actuary, Social Security Administration, 2014), which puts them near the poverty threshold annual income of $24,230 for a family of four (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2014). In the face of all this, economists, policymakers, politicians, and pundits present their various and sometimes-conflicting arguments on how to solve these economic collapses and offer palliative measures to prevent future downturns (e.g., Akerlof & Shiller, 2009; Baker, 2010; Blinder, 2013; Farmer, 2010; Geisst, 2009; Gorton, 2012; Kaletsky, 2010; Krugman, 2012; Lybeck, 2011; Quiggin, 2010; Rajan, 2010; Sinn, 2010; Stiglitz, 2010; Taylor, 2009).

There has been one unanticipated positive outcome amidst this landscape of economic decline and collapse: the 2008 crisis led many people who had been adversely affected to ask why and how this happened to them. Their own responses to the crisis, including some questioning the economic system itself, have generated countless discussions across the global platform of social media networks and online sites of the mainstream media (e.g., Couldry, 2012). The general public debating about the economy was indeed unprecedented inasmuch as "prior to the crisis, economics was something that the average person had gone out of their way to avoid" (Mirowski, 2010, p. 30). Now though, as Philip Mirowski (2010) observed, "suddenly it seemed like everyone with a web browser harbored a quick opinion about what had gone wrong with economics, and was not at all shy about broadcasting it to the world" (p. 30).

Why then have seemingly more people now become so passionately opinionated and vocal about the economic system known as 'capitalism'? Perhaps the heated public discussions and debates stem from everyday people's increasing anxieties over the continuity and/or security of their jobs, uncertain employment prospects in an unpredictable era, stagnating and declining wages, rising income disparities occurring worldwide, mounting consumer and student debt, and growing poverty among the formerly middle-class in countries such as the US and UK. As the economist Richard Wolff (2016) notes, the mainstream repression of arguments over capitalism versus alternative economic systems during the Cold War and the ensuing years after the 1989 collapse of the Soviet Union lasted until "the 2008 crash of global capitalism reopened the space for those debates to resume" (p. x).

Given that economic issues indeed occupy a prominent and fundamental place in many of our lives, whether it is having enough money to pay the bills on time, accruing more debt, and/or desperately seeking a job in the current era of global competition and outsourcing, it would seem that understanding how people mediate the dominant economic system called capitalism is of the utmost importance. What does capitalism actually mean to people, both through its discourses and materialized lived experiences? How do people make sense of it, and describe its impact on their lives? This book seeks a deeper understanding of how we engage with the discourses of capitalism with its manifold, dominant, and dialogical meanings. But it aims for more than just a better understanding of the ways in which people take up capitalism's discourses. It also attempts to find ways to build upon and further develop the necessary critical counter-hegemonic discourses that can challenge and ultimately derail the hegemonic representations of capitalism (e.g., 'the free market' or 'capitalism is democracy') that have been so widely disseminated and taken up in public discourse for decades now. My purpose here is an unapologetic political project that grounds this exploration in ultimately seeking how we can move to a democratic governance and participation in the production and distribution of the surplus wealth the majority of us create through our labor. Understanding what capitalism is, how it operates, and the ways in which we view its role(s) in our lives, and our own roles in this economic system is a crucial element of this project. And by doing so, I also invite readers to examine their own assumptions, meaning-makings, and discourses of capitalism they have taken up in making sense of their own working and everyday lives.

There is much at stake in how we engage with these discourses of capitalism because how we view our economy and its roles and functions in society in which we live, work, love, and die, and behave accordingly have been shaped in large part by its hegemonic representations through its material manifestations in policies and practices, academic literature, media discussions, and popular portrayals. In critically engaging with how everyday people mediate discourses of capitalism, we can build upon our imagining, considering, and developing the possibilities in our own agencies in effecting much-needed changes to an economic system that impacts all of us in ways beyond our immediate lived experiences.

My lived experiences under capitalism

My maternal great-grandparents and grandparents left what was then called the Canton province of southern China for New York City in the 1920s, where they settled in the Lower East Side neighborhood of Chinatown. My paternal grandfather and father arrived in the City a few years later, living uptown in East Harlem. I was born and raised in a predominantly White working-class neighborhood in the borough of Queens, New York City, less than a mile from the house where the fictional character Archie Bunker from the 1970s American television hit show, *All in the Family*, lived. Although Archie Bunker was popularly described as a bigot, as portrayed by the actor Carroll O'Connor, the character was somewhat more nuanced than this. He would poignantly express the views, anxieties, and laments I heard from the people I grew up with in my neighborhood. Part of their prevailing ethos was 'get a job!' and then once you had actually landed a job, you were expected to 'just do your job!' People in this neighborhood, including my parents, had experienced the Great Depression during the 1930s, and many felt they had pulled themselves up by their proverbial bootstraps in the subsequent decades. Because they were justifiably proud of their ensuing life trajectories up to that time during the 1960s and 70s when the so-called 'middle class' in the US was more prosperous than it had ever been, they also felt justified they could give little countenance to those who they perceived as failing to do likewise.

The Archie Bunker character, who worked as a unionized foreman on a Brooklyn loading dock, often expressed this view of relative upward mobility, along with his politically right-wing opinions. In fact, mirroring the political shift of many White working-class people who had previously aligned themselves with the 1930s New Deal administration of President Franklin Roosevelt and his Democratic Party, Archie Bunker was a staunch supporter of President Richard Nixon, a Republican, and who would be viewed today as a Democrat in terms of his economic policies. Archie Bunker then enthusiastically supported the much more conservative Ronald Reagan, who first ran for the US presidency in 1976. This narrative arc of Archie Bunker's shifting evermore rightward in his politics in fact foreshadowed and in this sense even prophesied Reagan's eventual victory in 1980 and the ensuing rise of what became known as "Reaganomics" – the espousal of the so-called "trickle-down economics."

Somehow, many working- and middle-class voters – but certainly not all – either accepted or ignored the basic premises and assumptions of the trickle-down theory of Reaganomics. This was basically the promise made and popularized by Reagan that by giving significant tax breaks to the rich (aka the '1%', as popularized by the Occupy Movement), their resulting increased wealth would 'trickle down' to the rest of society in the form of more spending and investment presumably leading to job growth and thus, a stronger economy. However, one question would be, stronger for whom? It is no coincidence that both President Reagan and his counterpart across the Atlantic, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, were able to draw upon this demographic of White

working class (although in the US, they viewed themselves as being members of the 'middle class'), in many ways typified by the television character of Archie Bunker. Reagan and Thatcher were able to do this by appealing to this segment of the working class in legitimizing and giving voice to their growing resentment toward what they saw as the entitlement of those supposedly benefiting from the social welfare state; this of course with racist overtones. Never mind the fact that many of their supporters had done exactly this, that is, receiving healthcare from the National Health Service in the UK, and for those 65 and over in the US, Medicare, as well as countless numbers of Americans who had been saved from certain destitution due to Social Security. Instead, they chose to enthusiastically support and vote for these two politicians who aimed (and subsequently succeeded to varying degrees) to dismantle the very social welfare settlement and labor-capital accord that had served many in the working class so well the preceding 45 years in enabling them to attain a middle-class lifestyle. And it was no accident either that both my parents, who had supported and voted for Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972, later became avid supporters of Reagan just like Archie Bunker (although they later switched to the Democratic Party in the 1990s).

My family eventually left New York City and moved to the nearby suburbs of Long Island to a neighborhood that would be regarded in the US as much more middle-class – single-family homes with at least one, if not two cars in every driveway. In both these communities of the City and Long Island, my neighbors, school friends, and I had much more in common than we thought, despite our common practices of identifying and being identified as being 'Irish', 'Italian', 'Jewish', 'Catholic', and in my case, 'Chinese'. Even though I never learned the language or knew much about the cultural practices associated with being Chinese other than having Chinese food during Chinese New Year, I was seen by some as being 'Chinese' despite my formative years growing up in those communities. The first growing realization of my social class commonality with my classmates was when I was a high school senior applying to various Ivy League universities. One university was Harvard, which notified me that I would have an admissions interview with an alumna. She lived on the North Shore of Long Island, the so-called "Gold Coast", a historically affluent area with the likes of such storied families as the Vanderbilts, Roosevelts, Morgans, and Whitneys.

When I drove up to the alumna's home in my father's ten year-old car, it was the biggest house I had ever seen. It had at least three levels with a long winding driveway. She and her family were classic old-money WASPs – White Anglo Saxon Protestants. Needless to say, I did not get into Harvard because they deemed me not having the 'right stuff' – although not because of my academic achievements or even my ethnic background but because the alumna knew I had been socialized in a working-class background. If you closed your eyes and heard me speak back then, you would have sworn you were talking to Archie Bunker himself, minus his bigotry. My rapidly growing awareness of stark social class differences was further heightened by my attending a small private

liberal arts four-year college in Pennsylvania. It was there I met people who had gone to private schools throughout their entire schooling, and who had either lived abroad or at least traveled overseas. I also met for the first time several people outside my extended family that might have looked similar to me in terms of socially-constructed ethnic physiognomic categories in the eyes of some casual bystanders: two fellow classmates who were from Hong Kong but had attended exclusive private preparatory schools in the US. During spring break vacations, they would fly off to Switzerland to ski while I would take the 5-hour train ride back home to Long Island. It was then I started to feel the disparities in social class and its attendant lived experiences in important ways because although others might have viewed those two classmates and me as being of the same 'race' or 'culture' based on our superficially perceived physical similarities, I had nothing in common with them in terms of their wealth, socioeconomic status, lived experiences, and accompanying outlook on their own prospects in life.

I began to realize that my high school classmates and I had engaged in the prevailing dominant discourse in the US at the time that we were all normatively middle-class, we all had essentially the same access to various forms of resources and capital, and that the only way to go was up – that is, if we worked hard enough and 'did our job', and with a bit of luck, we too someday could be one of those who would be able to fly off to Europe during a week-long vacation to ski. Adopting another dominant discourse, the only discernible differences we co-constructed among ourselves drew from racialized categories – I was 'Chinese', and so-and-so was 'Irish' or 'Italian' even though all of us had been born in the US and were fluent only in English. Thus, we had been socialized into focusing on the micro-differences in our physical appearances regarding hair and eye color, our ancestral family names (although some of these including mine had even been altered upon arrival in the US), and the occasional observation of customs mainly centered around holiday food choices. However, my family would often have pasta during Christmas holidays – did this make us 'Italian', or did it make my Jewish friends who ate at my father's Chinese food restaurant 'Chinese'? We were too fixated on these details to notice that collectively as the 'middle class' in America, we were all in the same boat that had just begun slowly springing leaks in the 1970s, and continuing to the present day with declining or stagnant wages, job loss, and decimation of unions.

With this as a background, as a teenager I was fairly conservative in my own politics. While I was an undergraduate student, I voted for Ronald Reagan in the 1980 US presidential election. I remember his campaign commercial was aired on the radio while I was driving. In his inimitable speaking style honed by years of film acting and then pitching for various corporate sponsors including General Electric (GE), Reagan posed the following question to the American public in the wake of the Iran hostage crisis enveloping the Carter Administration at the time: "It's nice to be liked. But isn't it better to be respected?" In many ways, this was a brilliant appeal that tapped into the growing anxieties of many Americans in the late 1970s. These anxieties stemmed from the post-World War Two labor–capital accord in the US coming to an end due to the systemic stresses

brought on by multiple factors including falling rates of corporate profit, the OPEC oil crisis, recessionary stagflation, and the rise of the competing German and Japanese economies. Reagan was able to shift the focus away from US corporations responsible for cutting wages, raising prices, laying off workers and outsourcing good-paying manufacturing jobs, and in doing so, brought into the mainstream the now prevalent neoliberal discourse of blaming undue government 'interference' for keeping the market from working as it should. This discourse, coupled with the perceived notion that US military hegemony was on the wane in the wake of the Vietnam War defeat, enabled Reagan to mobilize support through portraying both foreign powers and Americans' own government as standing in the way of America becoming 'great' again. This playbook has since been adopted by ensuing Republican candidates in their bids for the US Presidency.

However, after Reagan was elected, my own politics soon changed dramatically. I had started taking several undergraduate economics courses that eventually led to my getting a B.A. degree in Economics. The departmental faculty had a number of young assistant professors who had come of age during the late 1960s and had been part of the New Left. Two of my professors in particular, Antonio Callari and Jack Amariglio, would go on to become founding editorial members of the journal, *Rethinking Marxism*. It was their courses, along with several of their other colleagues, which began to re-shape profoundly my ways of viewing society that has continued to this day. Their teaching approaches comparing and contrasting neoclassical, Keynesian, and Marxian economic theories were eye-opening and ultimately inspiring. Already feeling alienated from my college environment because so many of my classmates were from privileged backgrounds and were quite assured in their assuming high-paying professional careers, I found a theoretical and philosophical-historical framework that helped me make sense of who I was and what I was seeing and feeling. It was a stunning revelation as an undergraduate student to be introduced to the Marxian legacy and thinkers by my professors, especially Jack Amariglio, who first suggested I read Louis Althusser while I was still an undergraduate. In addition to reading Althusser as well as the work of Marx and Engels, I continued with Antonio Gramsci, Stuart Hall, Henri Lefebvre, Ellen Meiksins Woods, Étienne Balibar, Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek, and many others in the ensuing years.

Some years later after finishing my undergraduate studies, in the late 1980s, I became a political activist, working for what was then called SANE/Freeze – the original Ban the Bomb movement that began in the US during the 1950s. This was during the Reagan and Bush (the elder) administrations, when they were extensively involved in various military interventions in Central America, including attempting to destabilize and (not-so) covertly overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. As part of my job, I canvassed numerous neighborhoods across the greater Los Angeles area, knocking on doors and meeting people from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds, discussing with them if they knew how their tax dollars were being spent on the ever-increasing build-up of nuclear weapons, funding the *contras* in Nicaragua, as well as supporting the oppressive military government in El Salvador.

It was an eye-opening experience in many ways having met and talked with at least 10,000 people during those two and a half years. It was through this activist work that I directly encountered on a large scale the ways in which people construct what Antonio Gramsci called their common-sense beliefs. I had read a bit of Gramsci as an undergraduate but I felt compelled to return to his work, specifically his *Prison Notebooks*, during my time working as an activist in the attempt to understand how people I was talking with on a nightly basis could hold contradictory and conflicting views of society, their country, and the world. My decidedly heterodox (at least in the American cultural and political context) political, ideological, and own common-sense beliefs that had been transformed while studying economics, critical theory, and philosophy as an undergraduate were significantly informed and further shaped through this daily activist engagement with the various communities of Los Angeles, all of which has resonated to this day. But I have often thought back to when I was an initial supporter of Ronald Reagan, and yet changed my beliefs dramatically within a fairly short time frame, never to return to my former politics. If I was able to do it, and similarly like-minded people have done so as well, why not others?

I returned to political activism when the Occupy Movement began in the autumn of 2011. Joining the movement in their Los Angeles location, I participated in marching, protesting, talking with fellow protesters, and eventually running a workshop on language and power entitled *Critical Language in Action*, which was uploaded to YouTube and has since garnered over 3,800 views. I once again encountered those incoherent and contradictory elements of common-sense beliefs from both fellow Occupiers and interested passersby in numerous conversations. Many were outraged by the growing economic inequalities they were directly experiencing and observing. In explaining the causes of the global economic crisis, some expressed the view that it was all due to one institutional agent, the Federal Reserve. Their solution was to eliminate this, and capitalism would be able to function freely. Others attributed the crisis to 'corporate capitalism', seeing capitalism running amok as it were and in need of greater restraint. In this, a prevalent discourse was adopted and repeated – that capitalism could be reformed and tamed.

What is capitalism?

For many (but certainly far from all) in my parents' generation who came of age in the immediate years after World War Two, they received a small slice of the pie known as 'the American dream': a house in the suburbs, a new car every few years, and the expectation that they would always be financially better off the following year. These middle-class Americans were fortunate enough to reap the benefits of the long struggle of organized labor against capital from the 1930s to 1950s, and the resulting New Deal of the Franklin Roosevelt administration and the accompanying postwar settlement lasting until the early 1970s. For these people during this era, they rightly felt capitalism was the best bet in town. If you worked hard enough and you did your job, then you would be

paid 'a fair day's wage for a fair day's work'. However, capitalism does not operate on this principle.

If capitalism in fact does not run on fair-minded principles, what then are the distinguishing features that characterize it as a unique economic system of production, appropriation, distribution, and consumption? As the economist Richard Wolff points out, capitalism has repeatedly been defined by politicians, journalists, pundits, and many academics as "markets plus private ('free') enterprises" (Wolff, 2015). However, Wolff argues that capitalism was certainly not the first nor the only economic system that has relied on a market mechanism of product and resource distribution. Both feudal and slave-based economic systems relied on markets to distribute their resources, whether it was the human slaves themselves or the various products slaves and serfs under feudalism produced. Thus, a market system "does not distinguish capitalism from a slave system … (or) from feudalism" (Wolff, 2015). In the same manner, the notion and practice of so-called "free enterprises," as Wolff contends, is not confined to capitalism exclusively either. Feudal manors and slave plantations were also able to freely set their own prices and production outputs without state-mandated restrictions. Wolff notes that capitalism in the US functioned without interruption without a 'free market' during World War Two as the federal government mandated the use of government ration cards, which effectively replaced the prevailing market system as a means of distributing goods and services. In addition, capitalism functioned without having the freedom to set prices and wages during the early 1970s as President Nixon imposed wage and price controls in the US in an effort to combat inflation. Although initially intended for just 90 days, it lasted at various levels for nearly three years.

So why is this distinction between free enterprise/markets and capitalism important? It matters because in often conflating the two, both the media and the public, whether intentionally or inadvertently but ideologically nonetheless, serve to reinforce the idea in both everyday and academic discourses that capitalism in effect equals freedom, democracy, and choice. In addition, these repeated linkages of capitalism with notions of freedom as supposedly exemplified in free enterprise and free markets have another ideological purpose – to effectively dismiss any thought or suggestion, much less discussion or exploration, of any other alternative economic systemic arrangements. In a world in which capitalist discourses have always called for finding ways to improve everything including commodity products and oneself (as its own commodity in the form of selling one's labor power) in the name of 'progress', it is ironic that capitalism sees itself from being immune to any improvement, even with its so-called 'imperfections' and all.

If free enterprise and free markets do not constitute capitalism, what then are its defining features? "Like all important topics, capitalism has been defined and understood quite differently by different people and groups throughout its history," and therefore "no one should proceed as if any one definition is the only one or is a definition on which everyone agrees" (Wolff, 2012, p. 19). Indeed, the term 'capitalism' illustrates Vološinov's (1973) claim that "the word

has the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change" (p. 19). Because of its social and ideological multiaccentualities, capitalism means different things to different people due to their "using the same signs from different perspectives" (Ives, 2004a, p. 81). These differential accentualities stem in part from the term's ideological framing collocations with the 'free market' and 'free enterprise' that are oriented toward particular addressees.

With this in mind, the definition of capitalism I use in this book to engage with the participants' varying meanings is from Marx's (1976) *Capital*: it is in the class structure of the workers' production of surplus value which is then appropriated and distributed by capitalists. Marx differentiated between two parts of the working day: "necessary labour-time" and "surplus labour time" (p. 325). The necessary labour-time refers to that working day portion during which the labor expended by workers serves to reproduce their own value of the means of subsistence for themselves; i.e., their "own preservation or continued reproduction" (p. 324) of oneself in the workplace. However, for the rest of the working day, the workers do not create any value for themselves but instead create the surplus value, "which, for the capitalist, has all the charms of something created out of nothing" (p. 325). This form in which surplus value is extracted from the worker, which Marx argued is "merely a congealed quantity of surplus labour-time, as nothing but objectified surplus labour," serves to distinguish the "various economic formations of society" throughout history including slave-labour and wage-labour (p. 325). For example, if a working day is 8 hours long, the first 4 hours might be the necessary labour-time for workers to reproduce their own value (i.e., wages paid to them for the entire 8 hours they worked). But the last 4 hours of that working day would be the surplus value (beyond the paid wages) produced by the worker, which is then appropriated by the capitalist. If the working week is 6 days, this then is "the same as if (the worker) worked 3 days in the week for himself [*sic*] and 3 days in the week gratis for the capitalist" (p. 346). Thus, the longer the workers work beyond the necessary labour-time in any given working-day duration, the more they produce their labor value solely for the capitalist, whose sole purpose is to create and "absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour" (p. 342). In this manner, "the rate of surplus-value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour-power by capital, or of the worker by the capitalist" (p 326). As Marx famously observed, "capital is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (p, 342).

However, Marx (1976) noted that "capital did not invent surplus labour" (p. 344). For example, in slavery, "the excess of the slaves' total output over what they get to consume (plus what replaces inputs used up in production) is the surplus" (Wolff, 2015). In a feudal economic system, personal relationships shape the surplus appropriation and distribution in that serfs working their assigned plots of land would keep whatever they produced from certain working days while providing their product of their labor on their lord's retained land on other days. Under feudalism, the workers' unpaid labor for a specified working day (called the 'corvée'), was "accurately marked off from the

necessary labour" (Marx, 1976, p. 346). However, under capitalism, surplus labour and necessary labour "are mingled together" in "the drive for an unlimited extension of the working day" in ways that are "not directly visible" (p. 346). Indeed in capitalism, its surplus organization is different:

> The surplus producers in capitalism are neither property (slavery), nor bound by personal relationships (feudal mutual obligations). Instead, the producers in capitalism enter 'voluntarily' into contracts with the possessors of material means of production (land and capital). The contracts, usually in money terms, specify 1) how much will be paid by the possessors to buy/employ the producer's labor power, and 2) the conditions of the producers' actual labor processes. The contract's goal is for the producers' labor to add more value during production than the value paid to the producer. That excess of value added by worker over value paid to worker is the capitalist form of the surplus, or surplus value. While the capitalist, feudal and slave organizations of the surplus differ as described above, they also share one crucial feature. In each system, the individuals who produce surpluses are not identical to the individuals who appropriate and then distribute those surpluses. Each system shares a basic alienation – of producers from their products – located at the core of production. That alienation provokes parallel class struggles: slaves versus masters, serfs versus lords, and workers versus capitalists. Marx used the word 'exploitation' to focus analytical attention on what capitalism shared with feudalism and slavery, something that capitalist revolutions against slavery and feudalism never overcame.
>
> (Wolff, 2015)

Thus, capitalism as an economic system is not necessarily tied to 'free' markets or 'free' private enterprises. These two constructs should therefore not be used to define what makes capitalism unique or different from previous economic systems such as feudalism and slavery forms of production. As Wolff (2015) notes, it is the workers who are exploited because their wages are not commensurate with what they have produced, and are positioned within a social relation of production that they have supposedly entered 'willingly' or 'voluntarily' of their own accord, unlike the forms of indenture under which feudal laborers worked. And this notion of a worker being able to voluntarily walk into and *out* of any job has given rise to the framing of capitalism as being a 'free' enterprise system whereby workers are free to choose which job, where, and when it suits them. But just as importantly, workers, who include not just what we might think of when using the term 'worker' as in a factory worker but all people in the workforce laboring for organizations (including universities) that appropriate their surplus labor value, do not have the power and say in capitalist-based organizations to decide how their surplus can be distributed back to them and to others. In corporations for example, the important decision how the surplus value produced by their employees will be appropriated and distributed is made

by a board of directors on behalf of their major shareholders, and not the workers who produced the very surplus value themselves. Thus, in this view of capitalism, "Marx's special insight was to show how the property distribution enabled the capitalists to increase the value of the means of production they owned" (Resnick & Wolff, 2003, p. 15).

Seen in this manner, a capitalist form of economic production, appropriation and distribution is fundamentally anti-democratic in that the majority of the workers who are affected by decisions made at work do not have an important say, if any, in these decisions. When I was on the faculty in the English Department at City University of Hong Kong from 2013 to 2015, I once asked my graduate students, many of them from mainland China, what their definition of capitalism was. Their replies also drew upon dominant mainstream media and academic discourses of capitalism: "the free market", "a free economy", "the freedom to choose and buy" were some of their responses. When I provided them the aforementioned defining characteristic features that mark capitalism, one student commented, "that sounds like a dictatorship to me."

However, both Phil Graham (2006a, 2006b) and Allan Luke (Graham & Luke, 2005, 2011) make the argument that we should no longer define our current political economic system as "capitalism" inasmuch as the structuring internal and external dynamics have changed significantly enough since the 19th century to warrant the term "corporatism" instead. The ongoing economic crisis, they argue, "continues to defy available explanatory paradigms of economics, political economy, and geopolitics, most of which are premised on obsolete concepts of capitalism" (Graham & Luke, 2011, p. 104). They identify four features they believe distinguish the current economic system as being "corporatist" from a capitalist one instead. These are "the separation of ownership from control; the separation of business from industry (Veblen, 1923); the separation of accountability from responsibility; and the subjugation of 'going concerns' (Veblen, 1923) by overriding concerns" (Graham & Luke, 2011, p. 107). I will address here only their first feature – the separation of ownership from control – which is the most salient in how we define capitalism. Naming this separation between ownership and control is based on their argument that "the largest public corporations are controlled by people who do not own them on behalf of the many millions who have no idea what they actually own" (p. 108), referring to the many members in the public who have invested in corporations through shareholding, pension funds, and retirement plans. Thus, Graham and Luke contend that "in economically 'advanced' countries, the irony is that (a form of) social ownership of the means of production has been achieved without the appearance of any of the benefits hoped for by communist and socialist movements" (p. 107). This argument is based on their claim that the primary Marxist definition of capitalism is private ownership of the means of production, and with the accompanying aim of achieving social ownership instead. Indeed, they maintain that capitalism in its "simplest and most common definition" is "an economic system in which private individuals own and invest in the means of production and use these to increase their wealth through a combination of

price system, profit motive, competition, and the use of specialized wage labor" (Graham & Luke, 2011, p. 107).

Contrary to this prevailing notion that Graham and Luke have adopted in their case for abandoning the term 'capitalism', Richard Wolff (2012, 2015) argues that this is actually *not* the defining characteristic of capitalism – the private ownership of the means of production. Wolff notes that this confusion of defining capitalism in this manner also led the Soviets to assume that by replacing private ownership with social ownership of the means of production – as noted by Graham and Luke referring to the many middle-class workers having invested in companies – socialism was proclaimed to be achieved. Instead, the Soviet Union essentially transitioned from private to state capitalism in that although the ownership of the means of production was now officially in the hands of all the people (as represented by the Soviet state), the organization of the surplus produced by the workers was still decided by a select few – the Soviet government bureaucrats who appropriated and distributed the surplus but did not help to produce it. That is, the "*surplus producers and appropriators in state enterprises were not made identical*" (Wolff, 2015, emphasis in original). So although the majority of corporate stock are "now nominally owned by 'the workers of the world' through their pension funds, direct shareholdings, and other investment strategies" (Graham & Luke, 2011, p. 108), these workers still have no say in deciding how the surplus they produced is to be organized and distributed in terms of profits, wages, and investment. Thus, Wolff's defining characteristic of capitalism runs counter to Graham and Luke's argument that capitalism has "morphed into corporatism" because of "the formal separation of ownership from control, especially as it pertains to the means of production … marking the end of a central premise of capitalism" (p. 115). Indeed, if anything, this formal separation of ownership from control, especially control of deciding how any surplus value produced by workers is organized, appropriated, and distributed is the primary defining characteristic of capitalism, be it 'early', 'industrial', or 'late'.

US economists and capitalism

Most economists in the US failed to forecast the 2007–2008 global financial crisis and indeed a good many seemed to be nonplussed in its immediate wake (Krugman, 2009). In mainstream culture and its pop cultural representations, "the figure of the economist has more often than not served as a butt for jokes or the template for an unsympathetic protagonist in the larger culture; economists make for lousy celebrities" (Mirowski, 2010, p. 28). This representation, or rather the public's perceptions of economists' views and opinions on the economy, and more importantly, their failure to predict the crisis is not wholly unwarranted:

> Leading active members of today's economics profession … have formed themselves into a kind of Politburo for correct economic thinking. As a

> general rule – as one might generally expect from a gentleman's club – this has placed them on the wrong side of every important policy issue, and not just recently but for decades. They predict disaster where none occurs. They deny the possibility of events that then happen … They oppose the most basic, decent and sensible reforms, while offering placebos instead. They are always surprised when something untoward (like a recession) actually occurs. And when finally they sense that some position cannot be sustained, they do not reexamine their ideas. They do not consider the possibility of a flaw in logic or theory. Rather, they simply change the subject. No one loses face, in this club, for having been wrong.
>
> (Galbraith, 2009, cited in Mirowski, 2010, p. 29)

And for those who might regard Galbraith's choice of comparing the current economics profession to a Soviet-era style Politburo to be a bit hyperbolic, Mirowski (2010) observes that in fact beginning in the late 1970s in the US, there was a systematic academic purge of economic scholars specializing in the philosophy and history of the field. As the postwar – and in due time, the prevalent Cold War mentality and concerns of the American economic orthodoxy took hold, this eventually led to "high-ranking journals, such as the *American Economic Review*, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, and the *Journal of Political Economy*, declared they would cease publication of any articles whatsoever in these areas, after a long history of acceptance" (Mirowski, 2010, p. 30). Of course, the lack of publications in these particular journals by scholars working in economic history and philosophy impacted these scholars' careers inasmuch as lower journal rankings were then used as the basis to deny tenure promotion and to bar the hiring of those with such methodological inclinations and preferences. Those in power in the economics discipline consequently "expelled both philosophy and history from the graduate economics curriculum, and then they chased it out of the undergraduate curriculum as well" (p. 31). Not surprisingly, the implementation of such policies meant that by the 1990s, there were very few courses in economic history or philosophy offered in US universities simply because there were few economic scholars with this training and research background left to teach these courses. This has led to an overwhelming orthodoxy in the economics profession in the US, whereby from the 1990s onwards those who have majored in economics and gone on to pursue terminal degrees have not been exposed to anything outside the narrow range of the now almost standardized curriculum of economic courses. And so, with the outset of the global economic crisis, economists used the crisis as a way to settle their scores "within the narrow confines of the orthodox neoclassical profession: MIT v. Chicago … mindless econometrics v. mindless axiomatics, New Keynesians v. New Classicals … efficient markets v. informationally challenged markets" (Mirowski, 2010, pp. 31–33). As Mirowski notes, "this was all so boring one can't help thinking it was being done on purpose, to lull the rabble back to sleep" (p. 33). Yet, this so-called "rabble" might not have been completely asleep, and even if they had been, many were certainly awakened by the impact

of the crisis, whether it was the ensuing loss of jobs, the collapse of property prices, loan defaults, mortgage foreclosures, or investment losses. But in terms of how the crisis was framed, discussed, and the solutions proposed in the media, an important effect was indeed that the public was not exposed, at least in the mainstream media, to forms of economic thinking and analyses from a wider range of scholars holding significantly different views outside those narrow confines of economic orthodoxy.

This trajectory of the economics discipline in the US over the past 40 years has contributed to why the economic system itself is never criticized, much less questioned in the public forums of the mainstream media that still have significant impact on helping to shape public opinions and perceptions of capitalism. When economists are interviewed on television or radio, or are writing for the general public in newspaper opinion columns, the spectrum of views is aligned with the economic orthodoxy that Mirowski (2010) named. In short, this narrow spectrum essentially ranges from a Keynesian approach that is viewed as 'liberal' to a monetarist or Friedman one that has been regarded as the 'conservative' stance in the US political context.

The Keynesian approach advocates government intervention in the economy, whether through funneling tax payer-funded money back to the public in the form of various assistances such as higher unemployment benefits, helping to create jobs by implementing public infrastructure works, or preventing banking institutions and corporations from going bankrupt during financial crises. This approach was named after the British economist John Maynard Keynes, whose influential book, *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, was published in 1936 during the height of the Great Depression. Keynes, in analyzing the boom and bust cycles that are characteristic of capitalism, never intended to propose another form of economic system, despite this very charge by those on the Right. Instead, he "sought to theorize a way to tame and manage those cycles" (Wolff and Resnick, 2012, p. 35). He did this by offering "a radically new way to conceive of the economy and likewise a radically new policy for the state" (p. 17). This radically new state policy in the intervention of the economy's recurring crises led to the social welfare state in the aftermath of World War Two, which effectively ended the Great Depression for the victorious Western European countries. However, this is not to discount the enormous and important contributions and demands by organized labor both in the US and the UK in the 1920s and 1930s that helped lead to the creation of the social welfare state, particularly the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in the US that focused on organizing unskilled and thus underrepresented workers. It was these efforts along with a receptive Roosevelt Administration that adopted pro-union policies and followed the Keynesian approach that led to 30 years of a broad accord between capital and labor following the end of World War Two (although there were many who were left out due to several ongoing issues such as hiring discrimination practices based on gender and race). This accord in the US was effectively managed by successive Presidential Administrations adopting variations of the Keynesian approach of government intervention in the economic

impacts upon the public, of which the last prominent example was the introduction in 1965 by the Johnson Administration of Medicare that provided universal health care coverage to all Americans 65 years of age and older.

However, by the late 1970s, the US economy was going through a severe slump known as stagflation – a combination of rising consumer prices or what is known as inflation, and stagnant economic growth. The causes for this were vigorously debated by economists and politicians at the time, and this helped pave the way for the return of the neoclassical economic approach championed by the economist Milton Friedman. Friedman was based at the University of Chicago and his fervent acolytes championing the so-called 'free market' later became known as "the Chicago school of economics." In effect, Friedman and his former students along with like-minded colleagues advocated that the government intervene, or as they would say, 'interfere', in the economy as little as possible. The market, if left alone without undue government intervention as a Keynesian approach would have it, would correct itself over time, whether this involved inflation, economic downturns, stagnant wages, unemployment, or any combination thereof. In the context of US political culture, Friedman's insistence on a market 'free' of any outside institutional interferences would be later taken up and popularized by President Reagan, along with the 'trickle-down' theory of economic improvement.

Everyday economists and their discourses

Understanding how people think about, construct, and narrate discourses of the economy and its effects on their lives, as well as their responses to economic discourses by others is a crucial component to our conceptions of how public knowledge and discourses are constructed, and how these discourses are enacted, received, and valued. These economic discourses and their representations – the way the global, national, and local economies are perceived, conceived, and depicted (Ruccio, 2008a) – raise a central issue of whose discourses and voices count, and whose are heard. Are the representations, narrations, discourses, and knowledge of the economy as constructed by people legitimate and thus worth being heard by policymakers and institutional stakeholders? Or are their myriad economic representations, discourses, and theories of the economy only examples of what has been called "ersatz economics" (McCloskey, 1985b, cited in Amariglio & Ruccio, 1999, p. 20), and therefore can be dismissed out of hand? Indeed, "academic economists often consider such formulations to be … a mostly random set of irrational elocutions lacking both structure and consistency" (Ruccio, 2008b, p. 2). However, as Ruccio (2008b) argued, "the alternative is to recognize 'everyday' economic theories and statements as having their own discursive structure" (p. 2).

These discursive structures need to be explored for the ways in which they reflect not only locally co-constructed forms of economic knowledge based on lived experiences, but also how dominant economic discourses are mediated and taken up. In their engagements with economic discourses and representations,

people assume, create, and enact an identity that, following Klamer and Meehan (1999), I refer to here as "everyday economists" (Klamer & Meehan, 1999). In Klamer and Meehan's (1999) framing, these everyday economists are people who are dealing with issues related to the economy in their daily lives. As such, they are "most likely to personalize the economy; they think in terms of people doing things, of right and wrong, of victories and defeats, of special interests, and of identities … these people, and we are all among them, think in dramatic terms, of winners, losers, and of power" (Klamer & Meehan, 1999, p. 69). In fact, this should surprise no one for "everyone engages in economic theorizing" (Wolff & Resnick, 2012, p. 6).

These everyday economists' discourses and representations can be found in "a wide variety of sites, including many of the genres of so-called popular culture" (Ruccio, 2008b, p. 3). These genres include movies, TV shows, novels, and music (Ruccio & Amariglio, 2003). However, people's economic views expressed in these genres and other meaning-making venues "are often attacked by academic economists, who bemoan the low level of economic knowledge among the general citizenry" (Ruccio, 2008b, p. 3). Thus, from time to time, from grade school on, economic literacy campaigns are "designed to replace 'ersatz' economic knowledge with the methods and conclusions of economic 'science'" (p. 3).

However, it should be noted that the many professional economists who claim their field of economics as a science in its own right failed to predict the 2008 global crisis, and indeed, have also failed to predict past crises. This raises the issue of whether the knowledge generated from the academy should be valued more highly than the knowledge generated from everyday people's discursive engagements with the economy. Of course, these differently generated forms of knowledge are neither separated nor epistemologically 'distinct' – and in particular for everyday economists' discourses, they may "represent the modern-day equivalent of a Bakhtinian carnival," including "on the one hand, stylized parodies of (and even attacks on) all sorts of official academic languages and pronouncements and, on the other hand, conceptual strategies and ways of seeing that pave the way for alternative economic practices" (Ruccio, 2008b, pp. 5–6).

Rather than viewing the economy as a uniform, monolithic, and abstract force distinctly separate from us, it is defined here as being "both determined by, and a determinant of, the social (including political and cultural) and natural elements that make up the rest of the world, such that there is no clear line that can be drawn between economy and non-economy" (Ruccio, 2008b, p. 10). Ruccio (2008b) argued that because of the lack of any clear distinctions between the economy and non-economic spheres (if such exist), it is imperative that we explore both the role "diverse economic representations play in how … subjectivities and identities are constituted" (p. 15), and how these representations are "produced, how they circulate, and the manner in which they are contested in sites and practices throughout society" (p. 15). And lastly, research has shown that public opinion does have substantial influence on economic policy decisions (e.g., tax hikes or cuts and corresponding government spending)

inasmuch as people's perceptions of the economy's health have been seen as a major factor in determining election outcomes in democratic societies (Blendon et al., 1999). This demonstrates the importance and need to explore the ways in which public knowledge and views of the economy are co-constructed and articulated.

Previous research on economic discourses

In the past 25 years or so, several researchers in the field of economics have employed interdisciplinary approaches to the conceptualization and development of theoretical economic frameworks. These approaches mainly feature poststructuralist discourse analytic methods in reading and deconstructing dominant economic narratives, representations, and discourses (e.g., Amariglio, 1990; Amariglio & Ruccio, 1999; Ruccio, 2008a; Ruccio & Amariglio, 2003; Ruccio, Cullenberg, & Amariglio, 2001; Stäheli, 2008; Starr, 2008; Watkins, 1998, 2008). The discourse analytic tools used by these economic researchers were borrowed and adapted primarily from the work done by Foucault, Derrida, and Kristeva. Poststructuralist analytic approaches had already been employed by other disciplinary scholars who made major contributions to literature and cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Amariglio (1990) was one of the first to problematize economic discourses and representations as constructed by many mainstream economists. These productions of economic knowledge and discourse are seen by Amariglio to be rooted in the modernist claims of stability, truth, and scientific facts. In contrast, he argued for a poststructuralist view of economic discourse in which economic knowledge is viewed as being discursive in nature. It is the discursive meaning-makings of economists, journalists, politicians, and how these are taken up by the general public that help shape our sense of economic realities. Stäheli (2008) adopted a similar approach to examining visual strategies involved in constructing representations of the economy and the market. Ruccio (2008a) also advocated the use of poststructuralist approaches to investigate economic representations and discourses.

Although the construct of economic discourses and representations generated and produced outside of the academy in everyday life has been theorized by the aforementioned researchers, their analytical investigations for the most part have been limited to the domain of films, music, poetry, novels, cartoons, advertising, and art (e.g., Ruccio, 2008a; Ruccio & Amariglio, 2003). In fact, there has been scant research, if any, on specifically the ways in which the general public has produced knowledge of the economy through intellectual engagement and debate in the media with economists, journalists, and pundits on pressing political and economic issues.

There have been somewhat parallel and theoretically adjacent approaches used in examining local, national, and global economies in other scholarly fields such as sociology, anthropology, geography, and urban studies. However, in contrast to the extensive research done on the economy and accompanying

discourses in these fields, economic discourses have only begun to be directly addressed in the field of applied linguistics. So while the aforementioned economists utilized discourse analytic methods – highly innovative in the field of economics at the time – that shared many theoretical and methodological features with several of the discourse analytic approaches developed and used in applied linguistics for some time, few applied linguists themselves have turned their own analytic and theoretical lens on economic discourses. These economic discourses and their associated meaning-makings must be explored because they help to materialize and instantiate economic, social, and political power and domination by the few over the many. Furthermore, the reciprocal rise of critical (and sometimes radical) responses and challenges from the many to these discourses and their materialized practices also need to be examined for not only how discursive regimes may be contested and perhaps displaced, but also for how we may use these analyses for social justice educational goals.

There have been some notable exceptions, however (e.g., Block, 2014, 2015; Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Chun, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016; Clarke & Morgan, 2011; Fairclough, 2000, 2006; Gounari, 2006; Graham & Luke, 2005; Holborow, 2006, 2007, 2012a, 2012b, 2013, 2015; Luke, 2007). In my own previous work (Chun, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2015), I have addressed how economic and globalized neoliberal discourses were taken up in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) textbooks, curriculum materials, and the classroom. The aim was to explore the ways in which students and teachers make meanings of the world around them, and these ensuing pathways of meaning making that perpetuated or contested dominant discourses in circulation. With this book, the purpose is the same – to examine how people make meanings of the economy and its place in their lives.

However, my interest has not been merely scholarly for its own sake (as important as this may be) in exploring how everyday people including teachers and students take up the discourses and the representations of the economy, i.e., how they see the economy's role in their lives in the ways it mediates their everydayness, and their views of the accompanying social relations of which they are an inescapable part. Instead, my research interest has been grounded in my own embodied praxis. This praxis has been situated and enacted through a myriad of critical practices that include interacting with people from all strata of society in Los Angeles, as part of my activism work going back to the late 1980s; intellectually engaging with critical, feminist, radical, post-structural, and Marxist theories since my undergraduate days; and my teaching and working with thousands of English language learners since 1991. As I wrote in my 2015 book, *Power and Meaning Making in an EAP Classroom*, my critical pedagogy practices stemmed not from my intention to impose any critical 'dogma' on my students but emerged instead from outside-the-classroom events, most notably and dramatically the uprisings in Los Angeles during the spring of 1992 that impacted so many of my students' lives. With this book, I build upon my previous research by using a Gramscian theoretical framework (explained in Chapter 2) in examining how the general public takes up discourses of capitalism.

Aims of the book

The aims of this book are thus rooted squarely in both my research inquiries and in my lived experiences in my efforts to continue exploring and understanding people's economic discourses in making meaning not only of their lives but the world around them. I attempt to engage critically and dialogically with the responses from people to a mobile street artwork created by the artist Steve Lambert, entitled *Capitalism Works for Me!* Measuring 9 feet high (2.74 m), and 20 feet across (6.1m), the artwork boldly features the word 'capitalism' in bright neon-lit letters, with a tally board right below it showing the vote count totals for 'true' and 'false' in response to "works for me!" Connected to the sign, and placed within easy access to passersby, there is a standing module on which the words "In my life this is" are imprinted along with a green button labeled "True" and a red button labeled "False" for people to press to indicate whether or not capitalism has worked for them in their lives (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2).

Some of those passersby who voted were willing to be interviewed by Steve Lambert and his staff. These street interviews gave these participants an opportunity to publicly air their views on the ways in which they saw capitalism impacting their life trajectories and experiences as well as how they perceived capitalism affecting others. The interviews that took place in New York City, Boston, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 2012 and 2013 were video-recorded and uploaded to the website Vimeo and the links posted to Steve Lambert's webpage. In addition to giving me permission to use these online videos for my data collection, the artist graciously and generously provided me with another 67 videos taken in London during the recent exhibit in early 2015, which are not available online. He also shared with me more video interviews taken in Times Square, New York that

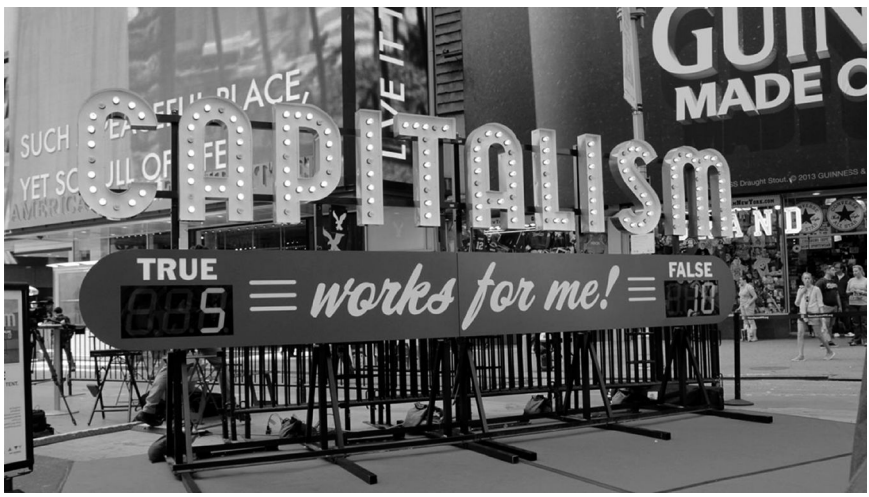

Figure 1.1 Steve Lambert's *Capitalism Works for Me!* in Times Square, New York. Courtesy of Steve Lambert (Creative Commons BY-NC-SA).

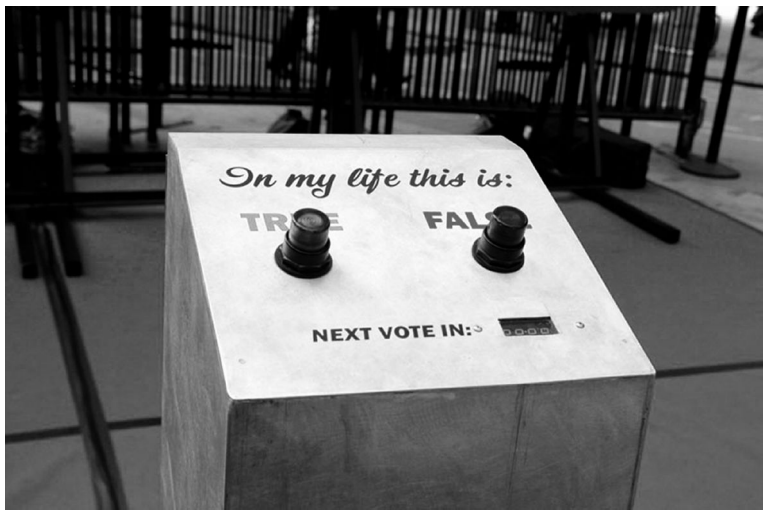

Figure 1.2 Voting console for Steve Lambert's *Capitalism Works for Me!* in New York City. Courtesy of Steve Lambert (Creative Commons BY-NC-SA).

were not included in the Vimeo uploads. These additional videos from Times Square feature another 152 interview participants. These videos offer a glimpse into how those who were walking by this street artwork – everyday people living and traveling in the US and UK, with many from around the world – define what capitalism is, what it has meant to them throughout their lives, how they view its role and effects in society, and what it might mean to others. This public artwork piece created an important dialogic space in the aforementioned cities, providing an invaluable chance for people to express their opinions about the economy and the particular system that creates and sustains it. This is indeed no small feat inasmuch as there are very few examples in public spaces where people have a chance to talk and argue about the economic system explicitly named as 'capitalism' – the Occupy Movement being a notable one.

Steve Lambert's idea for *Capitalism Works for Me!* stemmed from his belief posted on his website page that art is about having a conversation about topics that many people find difficult or almost frightening, such as capitalism. In asking people about capitalism, he draws a parallel analogy with religion:

> Starting a conversation about Capitalism is like walking up to a stranger and asking, "Can I talk to you about Jesus?" … We have every right as a society to ask of that system, is it working? Is it working for us? … We've been afraid to ask that question.
>
> (Lambert, 2011)

Lambert's artwork *Capitalism Works for Me!* was not intended as a protest sign but rather a provocative one whose intentions was to initiate and stimulate conversations about the dominant economic system in the world. However, the

fact that it invited passersby to examine if capitalism is working for them can be seen as, if not exactly a protest sign, then a related one in that it calls into question something that has been normalized and thus regarded by some as natural and permanent. The very writing of this statement, complete with an exclamation mark that calls attention to its intention, can be viewed in light of Coulmas' (2009) observation that "writing embodies the dialectics of power and resistance. A potent tool to secure institutional authority, it can also be turned against the powers that be and challenge authority" (p. 14).

In my exploration of how people take up and mediate Steve Lambert's public artwork sign *Capitalism Works for Me!*, I not only situate it within the analytic framework of public discourse in urban spaces, but also in what has been called "public pedagogy" – the various educational and learning activities and practices in public domains beyond traditional educational institutions (e.g., Biesta, 2012, 2014; Burdick & Sandlin, 2010; Burdick, Sandlin, & O'Malley, 2014; Sandlin, Schultz, & Burdick, 2010). There has been very little work done on investigating the public's discourses on the economy – a form of public pedagogy in action. The aim of this book is to understand how hegemonic discourses of capitalism are taken up, mediated, and dialogically co-constructed by people in their role as everyday economists, and the ways in which these discourses are reproduced and accepted as "common sense" (Gramsci, 1971), or challenged and contested in counter-hegemonic views of capitalism. My analyses of these discourses of capitalism have been done with the intention of contributing toward understanding more how a public pedagogy rooted in critical, radical traditions and approaches (e.g., Freire, 1970, 1994; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Fontana, 2015; Gramsci, 1971; Marx & Engels, 1978; Ruccio, 2008a; Wolff, 2012) can help to widen the cultural and political discursive spaces of not only questioning and contesting capitalism, but also exploring and developing truly democratic alternatives to organizing our workplaces, economy, and society. In a world increasingly besieged by climate change, political and social upheavals, rapidly increasing wealth disparities, and overwhelming poverty, all of which are caused by our economic system, the stakes have never been higher.

The analysis explores how people in these interviews draw on their lived experiences of work, unemployment, debt, and inequality in co-constructing what can be called 'economic common-sense making'. In analyzing over 300 interviews with passersby viewing and voting 'true' or 'false' in response to *Capitalism Works for Me!*, my purpose is to engage with their common-sense beliefs about capitalism, and explore if there are any possible alternatives to this system that they can imagine and articulate. Thus in this manner, I have attempted to write throughout this book in an accessible style employing a variety of voices in the Bakhtinian sense (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a, 1986): academic, journalistic, activist, and conversational. These public pedagogy registers are needed to reach the broadest possible audience with the aim of prompting further discussions on what kind of economic systems we should have to benefit the majority of us. And given the fact I have lived most of my life in the United

States, and thus my views and lived experiences have been shaped accordingly, I will also be primarily writing from an American point of view.

At this point, one may ask, why should we care about people's economic common-sense making if some of these everyday commenters adopt dominant discourses disseminated from the media, politicians, and pundits? Hall and O'Shea (2013) argued, "the analysis of 'common sense' isn't about representativeness; it is about how the field of discourse is constituted at any particular moment in time" (p. 17). But it is not only about seeing how any field of discourse is constituted at a particular historical or current time period, as important and necessary as this is, of course. Critical analyses are needed of how we make sense and meaning of capitalism because it occupies such an integral part of our lives, and in fact these analyses are also instrumental in the endeavor of any critical project working toward economic and social justice goals. Following in the critical and revolutionary praxis tradition of Antonio Gramsci, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and many other political and educational activists who have worked for social and economic change, it is by addressing and working within the various fields of practices with which people adopt, employ, and modify in their everyday and lived experiences of society and the world, that we engage with the field of common sense, as Hall and O'Shea (2013) remind us.

This book also addresses the gap that exists in the rather limited applied linguistics research on discourses of capitalism, particularly that of everyday people's engagements, receptions, perceptions, co-constructions, productions, narrations, and mediations of its many and often contradictory discourses. The various discourses the participants draw upon in their interviews will be analyzed with the following questions in mind: How do people view and make sense of capitalism? How do they relate their lived experiences, roles and identities within capitalism? What are the discursive moves and resources that they employ in co-constructing hegemonic and/or counter-hegemonic discourses of capitalism? How are these discourses used by the general lay public in articulating their common-sense understandings of the economy, the economic system, and its effects on their everyday lives and others? In spite of recurring economic crises and the ensuing devastating impact on many people's lives, some people still defend capitalism as the only viable socioeconomic system available to us. What are their meaning-making resources and processes they employ in doing so? I attempt to answer these questions by advancing our understanding of how discursive dialogicalities and their materialities work to both maintain existing hegemonic institutions and their practices, and simultaneously provide avenues of thought, articulations, and actions to imagine and create economic alternatives. In examining how public discourse operates in the co-constructions of capitalist imaginaries and realities, I address the ways in which critical public pedagogy can help mobilize a critically grounded good sense of people in their questioning, challenging, and eventually overthrowing the capitalist hegemony through alternative imaginaries, discourses, and practices. Indeed, another world is possible.

2 Ideology, common sense, and hegemony

In this chapter, I first give an in-depth overview of the long-standing debates on defining what ideology is, and the various conflicting notions since the word's introduction in the late 18th century. This is done to present a necessary broad canvas of the various theoretical and methodological approaches and attempts to understand how people adopt, adapt, accept, or resist and challenge dominant discourses through which they experience and view society and the world. I then provide several examples of how ideology has been represented in mainstream media, specifically Hollywood cinema, as a way of illustrating one common and popular notion of ideology that is widely disseminated and accepted – that of 'false consciousness'. The aim here is to present this necessary historical background and the surrounding debates of this term as it has been applied to people who are viewed by some in the throes of 'false consciousness' when viewing their society. Following this, I explain my theoretical framework I will be using in analyzing the participants' discourses of capitalism, which draws upon Gramsci's (1971) notions of common sense, good sense, and hegemony.

The problem of ideology?

For Stuart Hall, the primary "problem" of ideology facing us is "to give an account, within materialist theory, of how social ideas arise" (Hall, 1996b, p. 26). He defined ideology as "the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 26). However, an ongoing issue is these seemingly one-to-one relationships between "different classes and social groups" and their mental frameworks they use to make sense of society. How then do we account for the ways in which some (but certainly not all) members of social groups not in power take on certain aspects (but not others) of the same language, discourses, and concepts in viewing and representing society used by many members (but again, not all) of the social groups who *are* in power?

The problem of ideology is therefore to address how and why different and particular kinds of ideas gain traction and take hold in some people's minds

and are materialized in our everyday lives (Hall, 1996b). For example, why do certain ideas come to dominate social thinking among people across different classes and social groups, as in the notion that capitalism equals the 'free market' or that capitalism is also synonymous with freedom, liberty, and democracy? Similarly, why has the idea that although capitalism may be 'imperfect' at times – the word 'crisis' suggests as much – this particular historical economic system is far better than any other possible option? Margaret Thatcher brilliantly distilled this idea into her famous four-word declaration, "there is no alternative!", which became a common-sense truism for many. Other than a charismatic politician giving voice in compelling ways to certain beliefs and viewpoints, where and how do these notions originate or emerge, and eventually become part of the common-sense fabric of people's beliefs, values, and ensuing consensus politics? It is therefore important to explore the ways in which these and other particular "concepts and the languages of practical thought … stabilize a particular form of power and domination; or … reconcile and accommodate the mass of the people to their subordinate place in the social formation" (Hall, 1996b, p. 27). These may come about through various ways in which, for example, historicized notions in the US of 'freedom', 'liberty', and 'equality' have become embedded "in the categories we use in our practical, commonsense thinking about the market economy" (ibid, p. 34). However, this is not to say these concepts and languages of thought remain dominant or hegemonic forever in helping to keep people in their assigned social class roles. We have seen throughout history new ways of thinking about and seeing the world that emerge prompting and mobilizing people "into historical action against the prevailing system" (ibid, p. 27). The question then becomes: how do these dominant hegemonic concepts, languages of practical thought, and discourses finally begin to lose their traction and hold on our symbolic beliefs and material practices? Because if these serve to reproduce our subjectivities through the reproduction of social relations within capitalism, "according to the 'requirements' of the system," as Hall (1996b) astutely pointed out, then "how does one account for subversive ideas or for ideological struggle" (p. 30)?

The confusion, controversy, and debates surrounding ideology can be partly attributed to the fact that no such theory of ideology "exists, fully prepackaged, in Marx and Engels' works" (Hall, 1996b, p. 27), as Marx himself did not develop an explanatory account of "how social ideas worked, comparable to his historico-theoretical work on the economic forms and relations of the capitalist mode of production" (ibid, p. 27). Furthermore, as Hall (1996b) argued, Marx's comments on ideology and social ideas did not have the goal of any "law-like status" but were rather "much more *ad-hoc*" (p. 27) than anything else. Since then, ideology as a term or concept has come to mean or signify "all organized forms of social thinking", which "leaves open the degree and nature of its 'distortions'" (p. 27). As a result, the notion of ideology has now encompassed both the practical thinking and reasoning – the common sense and good sense as Gramsci termed these – as well as "the theoretical knowledges which enable people to 'figure out' society, and within whose categories and discourses we

'live out' and 'experience' our objective positioning in social relations" (p. 27). Drawing upon Gramsci's work (Gramsci 1971), Hall and others (Hall, 1996b, 1997; Hall & O'Shea, 2013; Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013) have argued that what is at stake is the very struggle engaging with the terrain of common-sense thinking and beliefs that conflate, appropriate, intertwine, and embed certain notions and practices within and across hegemonic discourses. As Hall (1996b) asked:

> Is the worker who lives his or her relation to the circuits of capitalist production exclusively through the categories of a 'fair price' and a 'fair wage', in 'false consciousness'? Yes, if by that we mean there is something about her situation which she cannot grasp with the categories she is using; something about the process as a whole which is systematically hidden because the available concepts only give her a grasp of one of its many-sided moments. No, if by that we mean that she is utterly deluded about what goes on under capitalism.
>
> (p. 37)

Most people are not at all utterly deluded about what goes on in a capitalist society, and in fact cannot help but be all too aware of its material and social effects on their livelihoods and thus their lives. For those of us who are opposed to a capitalist-organized economic system, how then do we work to change those very categories and available concepts that people draw upon and use so that they can imagine new ones in striving to create democratic alternatives and practices within their workplaces, schools, homes, and communities? Part of any approach must of course address how we use language and accompanying discourses in co-constructing our common-sense beliefs about capitalism.

What is 'ideology'?

The extent to which mental conceptions and representations of society are "usually unstable" (Harvey, 2011, p. 123) is somewhat debatable if we ask: why and how do certain representations and discourses take hold and become dominant over time? And, why and how do some discourses eventually become untenable and discredited in the eyes of many, while others continue to be common-sense beliefs? Since the advent of poststructuralist theories in the 1970s and the ensuing usage of 'discourse' displacing 'ideology', many scholars felt the need to jettison the construct of ideology, or at the very least, discontinue using it altogether. Yet, Slavoj Žižek (1994) argued there is "the unrelenting pertinence of the notion of ideology" (p. 1) in our lives. Žižek neatly summarized various poststructuralist criticisms of ideology critique by asking, "does not the critique of ideology involve a privileged place, somehow exempted from the turmoils of social life, which enables some subject-agent to perceive the very hidden mechanism that regulates social visibility and non-visibility?" (p. 3). He went on to pointedly ask, "is not the claim that we can accede to this place the most obvious case of ideology?" (p. 3). In fact, as he provocatively observed,

ideology "seems to pop up precisely when we attempt to avoid it, while it fails to appear where one would clearly expect it to dwell" (p. 4).

For Louis Althusser (1971), ideology is not a question of determining criteria of the 'truth' or 'falsity' of representations and ideas about the world. Instead, ideology represents "the way I 'live' my relations to society as a whole" in that it is "a particular organization of signifying practices which goes to constitute human beings as social subjects, and which produces the lived relations by which such subjects are connected to the dominant relations of production in a society" (Eagleton, 2007, p. 18). Or, as Althusser himself put it, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 162). Althusser's key contribution was to suggest "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation … called *interpellation* or hailing" (p. 174). Althusser likened the interpellation process to an individual turning around on a street in response to the police hailing, 'Hey, you there!' By this act, the individual becomes a subject in her recognizance of the hailing aimed at her, and not someone else. However, Althusserian interpellation does not allow or acknowledge space for any agentive resistance, rejection, or partial accommodation to dominant ideologies attempting to hail or recruit people as they make sense of society.

Perhaps not surprisingly then, the word 'ideology' is itself one of the most contested and intensely debated terms. As Terry Eagleton (2007) observed, "nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition" (p. 1). In fact, as Žižek (1994) claimed, ideology as a term can be applied to anything from a "contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power" (pp. 3–4). Žižek himself insisted that the notion of ideology "must be disengaged from the 'representationalist' problematic: *ideology has nothing to do with 'illusion'*, with a mistaken, distorted representation of its social content" (p. 7, emphasis in original). Regarding its "positive content", any ideology is therefore "not necessarily 'false'" inasmuch as "it can be 'true', quite accurate, since what really matters is not the asserted content as such but *the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation*" (p. 8, emphasis in original). Žižek pointed out here that the ways in which a particular topic or content is presented utilize different framing strategies allowing the incoherent and contradictory elements that constitute common-sense beliefs as Gramsci noted. These discourse strategies highlight certain facts while ignoring inconvenient ones that would contradict the particular framing.

Žižek (1994), in discussing Pêcheux's (1975) linguistic turn of Althusser's interpellation, observed that "one of the fundamental stratagems of ideology is the reference to some self-evidence – 'Look, you can see for yourself how things are!'" (p. 11). This discursive move of citing that "the facts speak for

themselves" is what Žižek called "perhaps the arch-statement of ideology – the point being, precisely, that facts *never* 'speak for themselves' but are always *made to speak* by a network of discursive devices" (p. 11). We have seen this time and time again with Western powers employing the discourse of 'benevolently delivering' democracy to dictator-ruled countries. While it is true those nations are suffering greatly under oppressive regimes, and the ensuing invasion by Western allied countries (if successful) would lead to some reforms, e.g., the introduction of the rule of law or certain voting enactments, the fact that those nations happen to be rich in valued resources such as oil and gas are never mentioned as important reasons for the 'justified' military interventions. Thus, "the starting point of the critique of ideology has to be full acknowledgement of the fact that is easily possible to *lie in the guise of truth*" (Žižek, 1994, p. 8, emphasis in original).

Žižek (2002) also argued there exists an important gap in our everyday ideological horizon. This gap "between (real) knowledge and (symbolic) belief determines our everyday ideological attitude" (p. 243). He cites the familiar psychological experience of commenting on something that is horrific and traumatic: "I know that it is so, but nevertheless I can't believe it" (p. 241). By way of an illustration of this, when confronted with a set of facts detailing the various economic injustices inherent and perpetuated by a capitalist mode of economic production and distribution, people might express something like, 'I know there is no (economic) justice in this world, but nevertheless I live my life as if I can't believe it'. This can be amply seen in the various factions within both the Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party movements in the US in which some attributed the failures and the collapse of the economy not to the very system itself ('I still believe in it even though I know it is not working'), but to specific agents such as the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan, Wall Street bankers, President Obama, and for many Tea Party members, immigrants taking away jobs. This gap between knowledge ('it's obvious the system is not working') and belief ('but it worked before and will again, right?') partly answers the persistent and nagging question of why people vote against their own interests. But this is obviously not enough, for it should prompt those of us who are committed to working for economic and social justice in the world to address and explore ways in which we can bridge this gap between real knowledge and symbolic belief. These gaps have been bridged before as progressive and revolutionary movements and events have historically demonstrated.

Since there are numerous conflicting and motivated meanings regarding the term 'ideology', a brief historical review is needed here. Raymond Williams (1985) used his notion of keywords – the "significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation" (p. 15) – to explore how concepts such as 'culture' and 'democracy' do not have singular fixed meanings, but instead have changed and shifted over time. Hence, keyword meanings are "typically diverse and variable, within the structures of particular social orders and the processes of social and historical change" (p. 22). As Williams showed, the use of the term 'ideology' rapidly underwent significant changes in meaning from its

original intended use as a "science of ideas, in order to distinguish it from the ancient metaphysics" (Taylor, 1797, as cited by Williams, 1985, p. 154), to another (ideological) meaning used by Napoleon Bonaparte in attacking the democratic critics of his regime. In his deliberate framing of Enlightenment principles as 'ideology', Napoleon initiated a tradition continuing to this day in which the term is used "in conservative criticism of any social policy which is in part or in whole derived from social theory *in a conscious way* … especially used of democratic or socialist policies" (Williams, 1985, p. 154). It thus acquired "by a process of broadening from Napoleon's attack, a sense of abstract, impractical or fanatical theory" (p. 154), which has had material reverberations in differing contexts both in the past and present. Using the term ideology in this way was somewhat akin to Marx and Engels' employment of it in some of their works (although this is fiercely contested by Rehmann, 2014) as in the "illusion, false consciousness, unreality, upside-down reality" (Williams, 1985, p. 156), in their well-known metaphor of the camera obscura. However, as Marx (1975) argued in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Philosophy*, it is "always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production … and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men [*sic*] become conscious of this conflict and fight it out" (p. 426). This meaning of ideology as it relates to people becoming conscious – in other words, politicized – is very different than the meaning of ideology as mere illusion, as Williams noted. Lastly, another predominant usage of the term referred to ideas stemming from different class and/or social groups and their particular material interests, as formulated by Lenin as 'proletarian ideology' as opposed to 'bourgeois ideology', accompanied by its adjective indicating which one was progressive and the other reactionary.

Terry Eagleton (2007) compared the word 'ideology' to "a text, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands; it is traced through by divergent histories, and it is probably more important to assess what is valuable or can be discarded in each of these lineages" rather than attempting to "merge them forcibly into some Grand Global Theory" (p. 1). Eagleton went on to list 16 current definitions of ideology in social circulation. Among these are: 1) the material processes of the production of meanings, (subjective) representations, signs, ideas, beliefs, and values in social life; 2) a set of ideas held by particular social classes or groups; 3) ideas (some of them 'false' depending on one's point of view) legitimating and inhabiting positions of social, economic, and political power; 4) offering individuals a particular subject position; 5) the medium through which people make sense of their world; 6) the conjuncture of power and discourse; 7) illusions stemming from social necessities; and 8) the (semiotic) processes through which social life is recontextualized and framed as a natural reality. As Eagleton pointed out, though, some of these formulations obviously contradict one another; for example, "if … ideology means *any* set of beliefs motivated by social interests, then it cannot simply signify the *dominant* forms of thought in a society" (p. 2). Another salient observation Eagleton made is that "if ideology is both illusion and the medium in which social actors make

sense of their world, then this tells us something rather depressing about our routine modes of sense-making" (p. 2).

Regarding the notion that everyday people may be in thrall to a dominant ideology, Abercrombie and Turner (1978), in drawing upon the sociological research examining British workers, argued "subordinate classes in contemporary capitalism do not *straightforwardly* adopt the dominant ideology" (p. 158). Instead, "working class consciousness is characterized by a fluctuating relationship between 'dominant' and 'subordinate' conceptions" (p. 158), depending on concrete situational issues and circumstances they faced. However, Abercrombie and Turner's (1978) argument that the main impact of dominant ideological beliefs is thus not on the dominated, but instead is "more pertinent for the dominant classes" (p. 160) is somewhat tenuous inasmuch as well-known billionaires such as Warren Buffett and George Soros have criticized what they see as the excesses of the global capitalist economic system. Perhaps though, this is indeed indicative of Abercrombie and Turner's observation that there will be "opposition from certain strata or fractions within that dominant class" (p. 165) since any uniform imposition is impossible without resistance. Thus, they claimed "there is no decisive, clearly articulated and uniform set of beliefs which provides comprehensive coherence for the dominant class" (p. 163). This is indicated by the continuum of views and beliefs ranging from the very progressive to the hardcore conservative on many social issues in the US such as marriage equality rights, the death penalty, gun ownership laws, civil rights, and women healthcare rights. However, among the dominant class, at least those who are represented or aired on mainstream media, there tends to be a much narrower range of views and beliefs that usually fall into an oppositional binary regarding economic issues and related government policies. The predictable binary economic views consist of more (Keynesian) versus less (monetarist or Friedman) government intervention and assistance to the economy as the sure route to maintain and promote economic growth and prosperity. The mere questioning of the economic system itself – capitalism – is never raised, and therefore any explorations or discussions of possible alternative economic arrangements of wealth production and distribution are never brought up. In this manner, there seems to be actually a clear set of uniform beliefs and ideological coherence among those in power concerning the economic system that has benefited them all too well.

Those viewing ideology as the ruling ideas solely corresponding to the ruling class positions (Marx & Engels, 1970) raise the issue of necessary correspondence between levels of social formation (Hall, 1996a). Hall (1996a) argued this has led to the poststructuralist critique of necessary correspondence adopting the view that there is "necessarily no correspondence" in which "nothing really connects with anything else" (p. 14). Instead, Hall posited a third position of "no necessary correspondence" in which "there is no law which guarantees that the ideology of a group is already and unequivocally given in or corresponds to the position which that group holds in the economic relations of capitalist production" (p. 14). In other words, one "cannot read off the ideology of a class

(or even sectors of a class) from its original position in the structure of socio-economic relations" (p. 15). Hall observed that "ideologies do not operate through single ideas; they operate, in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations" (p. 24). Furthermore, he added:

> Ideological representations connote – summon – one another. So a variety of different ideological systems or logics are available in any social formation. The notion of the dominant ideology and the subordinated ideology is an inadequate way of representing the complex interplay of different ideological discourses and formations in any modern developed society. Nor is the terrain of ideology constituted as a field of mutually exclusive and internally self-sustaining discursive chains. They contest one another, often drawing on a common, shared repertoire of concepts, rearticulating and disarticulating them within different systems of difference or equivalence.
>
> (p. 24)

This common and shared repertoire of concepts was much in evidence with the Occupy Wall Street movement and the Tea Party in the US. Both saw the injustices of the economic system in similar but also differing ways: there was no denying the loss of good jobs in the manufacturing and service sector and the declining wage salaries leading to the collapse of the middle class. However, they interpreted these facts by viewing the same agent through different agentive lens: Occupy Wall Street accusing the Obama administration for being too cozy in accommodating corporate interests, and the Tea Party claiming the President as too interferential in government overreach into private lives such as his 'Obamacare', i.e., government-mandated healthcare for the uninsured. And yet, both movements on this issue at least had a common shared equivalence. In implementing his healthcare, Obama had indeed accommodated powerful health insurance companies so that healthcare has remained partially privatized, resulting in continuing profits for the insurance providers.

Göran Therborn (1980) critiqued the Althusserian approach to ideology by using it not to refer to notions of misrecognition, falseness, or coherence, but instead referring it to that "aspect of the human condition under which human beings live their lives as conscious actors in a world that makes sense to them to varying degrees" (p. 2). Thus, ideology is "the medium through which this consciousness and meaningfulness operate" (p. 2). In his criticism of Althusser, Therborn replaced the idea of "subjection-guarantee" with the social function of "subjection-qualification" in which subjects who are ideologically interpellated become "qualified to take up and perform (a particular part of) the repertoire of roles given in the society into which they are born, including the role of possible agents of social change" (p. 17). So although we may be 'qualified' in some ways by various ideologically-driven interpellations, through lived experiences and education, we can become qualified in return to name these interpellations and question them.

Therborn further argued that this subjection-qualification involves "three fundamental modes of ideological interpellation" (1980, p. 18). These ideological interpellation modes attempt to subject and qualify subjects in the following ways: First, telling them to see "what exists, and its corollary, what does not exist; that is, who we are, what the world is, what nature, society, men and women are like" (p. 18). It is through this that we acquire our sense of identity in being and becoming conscious of what we believe to be true and real. The second mode involves "what is good, right, just, beautiful, attractive, enjoyable, and its opposites. In this way our desires become structured and norm-alized" (p. 18). The third mode attempts to make us recognize "what is possible and impossible; our sense of the mutability of our being-in-the-world and the consequences of change are hereby patterned, and our hopes, ambitions, and fears given shape" (p. 18). I believe it is particularly this last mode of ideological interpellation of what is possible or not that helps shape how some view our present economic system as our sole option, and in doing so, dismiss any other alternatives as either hopelessly utopian or evident nightmarish failures (e.g., the Soviet Union).

As Therborn further elaborated, the totality of these three interpellation modes "may be allocated different weight and prominence" in "any given discourse or discursive strategy" (p. 19). Furthermore, according to Therborn, ideological conflicts do not only entail competing world-views, but also struggle "over the assertion of a particular subjectivity – for example, as an individual believer, citizen, member of a class; over the definition of (the inclusion in, or exclusion from) particular subjects like 'the productive class', the 'people', or the 'exploited'" (p. 78). This is a crucial point, for depending on the subject positions, which are never fixed or unified, "to the extent that a particular interpellation is received, the receiver changes and is (re)constituted" (pp. 78–79). Inasmuch as there are always conflicting and contradictory interpellations, people – receivers – are "not necessarily consistent in (their) receptions and responding acts and interpellations (p. 79). It is this very layering of discourses, of common-sense hegemonic beliefs containing seeds of good-sense counter-hegemonic views that demonstrates that "the ideological (re)formation of subjectivities is a social process" and thus, "sudden shifts between acquiescence and revolt are collective processes, not merely a series of individual changes" (p. 79).

Ideology represented in cinema

In addressing the theoretical legacy of ideology in the Marxist tradition and the subsequent criticisms of so-called 'false consciousness', Stuart Hall (1996b) argued:

> Take, for example, the extremely tricky ground of the 'distortions' of ideology, and the question of 'false consciousness'. Now it is not difficult to see why these kinds of formulations have brought Marx's critics bearing down on him. 'Distortions' opens immediately the question as to why some

> people – those living their relation to their conditions of existence through the categories of a distorted ideology – cannot recognize that it is distorted, while we, with our superior wisdom, or armed with properly formed concepts, can. Are the 'distortions' simply falsehoods? Are they deliberately sponsored falsifications? If so, by whom? Does ideology really function like conscious class propaganda? And if ideology is the product or function of 'the structure' rather than of a group of conspirators, how *does* an economic *structure* generate a guaranteed set of ideological effects? The terms are, clearly, unhelpful as they stand. They make both the masses and the capitalists look like judgemental dopes. They also entail a peculiar view of the formation of alternative forms of consciousness. Presumably, they arise as scales fall from people's eyes or as they wake up, as if from a dream, and, all at once, see the light, glance directly through the transparency of things immediately to their essential truth, their concealed structural processes.
>
> (Hall, 1996b, pp. 31–32)

This dominant concept of ideology – its 'distortions' and accompanying 'false consciousness' – is perhaps best illustrated in two mainstream Hollywood films, both commented on by Slavoj Žižek in *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (Fiennes, Misch, Rosenbaum, Wieser, & Fiennes, 2006) and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Fiennes, Holly, Rosenbaum, Wilson, & Fiennes, 2012). In the first of the two Hollywood films, *The Matrix* (Silver, Wachowski, & Wachowski, 1999), the unenlightened characters are unaware of *what is actually going on*; the surface world they inhabit and see on a daily basis is, in fact, a front for the workings of the subterranean netherworld of conspiratorial agents. Going about their daily life, they have no idea or awareness of what lies beyond their drab routines of work, playing, shopping, and existing. All the while, a vast apparatus unbeknownst to them is controlling every aspect of their lives. It is only after the main character Neo meets Morpheus that he is stripped of his false consciousness by literally being reborn and re-awakening upon seeing the world *as it actually is*. Shorn of his ideological blindness as it were, he then wears sunglasses (following the lead of Morpheus) as if to signify his newfound ability to see through the blinding glare of the ideological facades that society has constructed for its members. Now possessed of a 'true' consciousness – as opposed to being trapped in the ideological blinders of 'false' consciousness – Neo and his fellow comrades (also wearing the sunglasses of true cognition to combat the ideological 'distortions') are only then able to battle the Agents working to keep the system intact from those who would exit the Matrix and destroy it. Interestingly enough, the Agents also wear sunglasses – perhaps to index their own true cognition in recognizing that they are in the very service and employ of the system that can decide to also eliminate them should they ever abandon the effort to keep it running.

Similarly, in another film, *They Live* (Franco & Carpenter, 1988), the main character, named "John Nada" ('nada' in Spanish means nothing), also comes upon special sunglasses that allow him to see society as it actually is, which like

The Matrix, also function as a critique of prevailing ideology. In this film, the conceit is that intergalactic aliens are actually running the world and have hidden their true appearances from humanity. John Nada chances upon this ideological façade after donning these ideology-critique glasses, of which there are only a few hundred pairs that the fellow rebels have been trying to distribute to people in order for them to see the essential truths about their society. These truths that are revealed to the sunglass-wearing hero are hidden messages contained in the seemingly banal advertisements featuring beach vacations and the usual beauty care products saturating the landscape directed at the general populace. These revealed signs include "obey", "conform", "marry and reproduce", "consume", "stay asleep", "no thought", and "money is your God" (Franco & Carpenter, 1988), all of which are seen in black and white (signifying clear-cut truths?) in place of the color-saturated requisite images of models, products, and commodified nature. These media messages in magazines, billboards, and signs serve to keep people docile in this 'false consciousness' ideological sense.

Perhaps though, the most telling scene in this film is not the fact that the hero John Nada can now see behind the veil of these banal advertisements to discover the 'real' truths of society as if those very scales have dropped from his eyes. Instead, it is his own attempt to have his friend to also don the glasses to share in his discovery. Žižek has commented on this in *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (Fiennes, Holly, Rosenbaum, Wilson, & Fiennes, 2012), and in summarizing his analysis here, I will also make an additional observation. This nearly seven-minute long scene features John Nada struggling to forcefully put the sunglasses on his friend, which results in a brutal fistfight between the two until the friend, finally exhausted and beaten, wears the glasses against his will and is physically pulled by the hero to look at the media-saturated landscape in order to see the hidden messages contained therein.

The obvious question is why does the friend resist so fiercely against wearing the glasses? According to Žižek, it is because seeing the world as it is, shorn of any supposed ideological blinders of false consciousness, is an extremely painful act. In losing one's 'illusions' about society, one has to be forced into seeing it, almost against one's will. Žižek argues that the film shows us that in "the extreme violence of liberation, you must be forced to be free, if you trust simply your spontaneous sense of well-being or whatever, you will never get free; freedom hurts" (Fiennes, Holly, Rosenbaum, Wilson, & Fiennes, 2012). However, what Žižek does not mention is that early in the film, the very same friend is actually the one who tells the hero John Nada how bad things really are. His friend relates to John Nada that he had to leave his wife and children back in Detroit to relocate to Los Angeles for work. More importantly, he goes on to comment that "steel mills were laying people off left and right. They finally went under. We gave the steel companies a break when they needed it" (Franco & Carpenter, 1988). He then asks John Nada, "do you know what they gave themselves?" John Nada meekly shakes his head suggesting he does not know the answer. The friend replies, "Raises. The golden rule – he who has the gold makes the rules. If they close one more factory, we should take a sledge to one

of their fancy fucking foreign cars." John Nada gently responds with "You know, you ought to have a little more patience with life", whereupon his friend curtly replies, "Well, I'm all out!" (Franco & Carpenter, 1988).

This raises an important issue that Žižek does not address. Why does John Nada's friend struggle so fiercely against wearing the sunglasses if he himself seemed to already know the structural processes of a system designed by those with "the gold"? In pointing out the systemic injustice of steel companies rewarding themselves with raises at the expense of workers creating the very surplus value for these companies, John Nada's friend expresses his righteous anger and impatience with a society that will immediately cast him aside whenever it is convenient to do so. Since it appears he does not harbor any illusions about the society he is living in, why then his struggle in resisting wearing the sunglasses? Aside from the obvious plot element in the main characters discovering the world is run by nefarious intergalactic aliens, is the film suggesting there is a necessary next step in viewing society from distortion-free glasses? It seems the friend did not need these sunglasses to be aware of what was really going on with the steel companies and their ilk. Also, after John Nada (and eventually his friend) start wearing the ideology-critique sunglasses, they begin to start shooting the intergalactic aliens who are running society along with their collaborators. However, the friend had already advocated a violent response to the system – "we should take a sledge to one of their fancy fucking foreign cars" before wearing the sunglasses. So were these sunglasses giving them the necessary ideological freedom to liberate themselves?

My point in raising these questions is not to quibble with the film's depiction of the heroes losing their ideological blinders in seeing how society really 'works'. Rather it is to point out that John Nada's friend already clearly has the ample good-sense beliefs (Gramsci, 1971) reflecting a sense of outrage against systemic injustice and societal unfairness, which is informed by his street-smart level knowledge about those who are making the rules. Is it that much of a struggle, as Žižek claimed, to take the next step in donning a pair of sunglasses to see things he already knows, feels, and lived from his everyday experiences? If so, what then does this imply or suggest for those of us who are committed to critical awareness and social justice education with students and the general public? How can we mobilize that core of good sense within the sometimes difficult outer shell of common sense that holds people back like John Nada from taking the proverbial sledgehammer to those who are making the rules to suit themselves? Will it take the metaphorical painful struggle shown in the film between the two friends to get people to also don the sunglasses to see the system for what it is? Or perhaps a better question might be: if many people are already like John Nada's friend in that they know full well the system is rigged against them, why don't they take the necessary action? Are they waiting for someone to force them to wear the sunglasses before they can do so? If what Žižek argues is that one must be forced to be free, what then are the implications for critical educational and pedagogical approaches that insist on dialogical engagements rather than imposing – forcing – people to adopt ways of seeing

the world in the name of ideological liberation? In the data chapters to follow, we will see how these conflicting observations play out among the participants' responses to capitalism and if it is working for them or not.

Ideology or common sense? A Gramscian framework

In his book *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, Richard Sennett (2006) argued that "the most basic cultural problem" is that "much of modern social reality is illegible to the people trying to make sense of it" (p. 12). In the face of this illegible social reality (or perhaps a better term might be 'everyday lived realities'), he also maintained that based on his ethnographic research involving interviews with American workers in the 1990s, most people "need a sustaining life narrative" in that "they take pride in being good at something specific, and they value the experiences they've lived through" (p. 5). However, "the cultural ideal required in new institutions … damages many of the people who inhabit them" (p. 5). Part of this new neoliberal cultural ideal adopted by many political, social, and cultural institutions across society now includes universities that have attempted to operate according to a corporate model. This model has long abandoned notions and practices of what is termed "rationalized time" – the orderly, predictable sense of time played out in both the work and life spheres. This rationalized time "enabled people to think about their lives as narratives – narratives not so much of what necessarily will happen as of how things should happen" (p. 23). These narratives we tell ourselves and each other about how things should happen, and what happens when they do not, are an important part of how we co-construct our views and beliefs about our communities, society, and the world.

The Italian philosopher and activist Antonio Gramsci categorized these beliefs as "common sense" and "good sense". His notion of common and good sense provides the framework I employ in examining how people take up the dominant discourses and hegemonic representations of the economy. In Gramsci's (1971) view, philosophizing about everyday life, social relations, and society is not solely the province of professional writers, intellectuals, and scholars; it is also enacted by 'ordinary' people, for "everyone is a philosopher" (p. 323). In what he called a "spontaneous philosophy" of everyday people, these views and practices can be categorized in three domains: 1) language, "which is a totality of determined notions and concepts"; 2) popular religion including folklore beliefs, superstitions, and opinions; and 3) common sense and good sense (p. 323). Gramsci distinguished between common and good sense in that the latter is more akin to the English language meaning of 'common sense', meaning a practical common sense; for example, the proverbial admonition that saving for a rainy day makes sense for working people. In contrast, Gramsci's theory of what he called "common sense" is the commonly shared ways in which people espouse their sometimes contradictory and inconsistent views. As Hall and O'Shea (2013) defined this idea of common sense, it is "a form of 'everyday thinking' which offers us frameworks of meaning with which to make sense of the world" (p. 8). For Gramsci (1971), for any critical engagement, or

philosophy of praxis to occur, "the starting point must always be that common sense, which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude" (p. 421). In this manner, Gramsci's philosophy of praxis "represents simultaneously the valorization and sublation" of common sense, which is "recognized as both the necessary starting point of critical philosophical activity (as the incoherent ensemble of conceptions of the world really operative among the subaltern social groups, expressing and confirming the experience of subalternity)," and because of this, as "one of the obstacles that must be overcome if the subaltern groups are ever to build their own hegemonic project – that is, to exit from the condition of subalternity" (Thomas, 2015, p. 108). Indeed, as Fontana (2002) noted, "how to bring a people to think critically and coherently is the fundamental problem posed by Gramsci, and it is a problem that combines political, epistemological, and educational spheres of activity" (pp. 27–28).

The Gramscian notion of common sense is not another variant or version of the much debated and contested idea of 'false consciousness' (Coben, 2002). Gramscian common sense is much more nuanced in that it can be seen as a fluid and dynamic formation combining factual truths with misleading misrepresentations (Forgacs, 2000). However at this core of common sense, according to Gramsci (1971), is a "healthy nucleus … the part of it which can be called 'good sense' and which deserves to be made more unitary and coherent" (p. 328). As Gramsci argued, "it appears that here again it is not possible to separate what is known as 'scientific' philosophy from the common and popular philosophy which is only a fragmentary collection of ideas and opinions" (p. 328), and thus common sense is "a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes" (p. 422). In addition, common sense "is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space" (p. 419). Instead, it is "the 'folklore' of philosophy, and, like folklore, it takes countless different forms" and thus is "fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is" (p. 419). However, as Green and Ives (2009) noted, "the contradictory nature of common sense is not the product of some sort of intellectual or psychological deficiency on the part of the masses" (p. 23). The contradictions of people's common sense stem rather from "the ensemble of social relations, economic exploitation and the various exclusions they produce and reproduce" (p. 23). Indeed, it is not only the masses, but also intellectuals themselves who have their own common sense. Thus, "for Gramsci the messy conglomerate that is common sense – precisely because it is not any kind of systematic whole – must be teased apart and its separate elements analysed" (Crehan, 2011, p. 283). This is done with the aim of "bringing into being of new, genuinely counter-hegemonic narratives" which has to "start with the world inhabited by the mass of the population … that world is the world of common sense" (p. 283).

My use of a critical public pedagogy approach engaging with the featured participants' discourses of capitalism follows Liguori's (2009) observation that "in order to have an impact on common sense it is necessary to occupy a position 'within the field of common sense'" (p. 124). In this manner, common sense

"is not simply an enemy to be defeated" but instead what is needed is that "a dialectical and maieutic relationship has to be established with common sense in order to transform it (and enable it to transform itself) so that a 'new common sense' will prevail – a crucial achievement in the struggle for hegemony" (p. 124). Gramsci's (1971) important methodological claim was for any critical approach to be "in the form of perpetual struggle" in which "the starting point must always be that common sense which is the spontaneous philosophy of the multitude and which has to be made ideologically coherent" (p. 421). Gramsci's primary analytic aim was "to understand the ways in which the masses think, conceive the world, and perceive their activity, in order to ascertain what elements prevent them from effectively organising and acting" (Green & Ives, 2009, p. 12). Green and Ives (2009) noted Gramsci's interest was to ultimately transform people's common sense into a radical new common sense including "a truly transformed language founded upon a critical awareness that will provide the masses with a foundation to transform their conditions" (p. 12).

Gramsci's observation of how we may hold contradictory and conflicting views can be illustrated in the example of the woman who wrote a letter to President Obama in which she admonished him, "I don't want government-run health care. I don't want socialized medicine. And don't touch my Medicare" (Cesca, 2009). For readers unfamiliar with Medicare, since 1965 it has been the universal health care coverage provided by the US government for its citizens who are 65 and over. The woman's rejection of any "government-run health care" as "socialized medicine" adopts the now all-too-familiar neoliberal common sense that the government intrudes into people's lives threatening their freedoms and liberties. However, her concern about the government not touching her Medicare, which has saved millions of people from the likelihood of poverty, reflects the healthy nucleus of her good sense in appreciating this program's immense value to people like her. This remark regarding her Medicare demonstrates the "apparently obvious taken-for granted understandings that express a sense of unfairness and injustice about 'how the world works'" (Hall & O'Shea, 2013, p. 10). Inasmuch as these contradictory sedimentations of common sense permit "us to hold contradictory opinions simultaneously, and to take up contradictory subject-positions" (Hall & O'Shea, 2013 p. 11), common sense is thus "a site of political struggle" (p. 10).

Hegemony and its practices

Aside from blatant displays of brute force, whether in the form of military and police actions such as mass arrests and tear-gassing of political protesters, intimidations through surveillance and interrogations, the enactments of draconian laws, or any combination thereof, how does power maintain its hold over the populace for extensive periods of time? Gramsci (1971) referred to these forceful violent actions to keep people compliant as "coercion"; however, as he studiously noted, mere coercive acts are not enough to sustain any power over the long term. Beyond relying on coercive violence, what is also needed by power is what Gramsci named as "consent" from the ruled – the active or passive

acceptance by people of those who rule over them in their name. For Gramsci, this consent – this seemingly matter-of-fact acceptance from the many of those few exercising supremacy over them – is the realization of hegemony. Drawing upon ancient Greek notions of hegemony such as the alliance of equals or the leadership among allies in a common cause such as war (Boothman, 2008), Gramsci recontextualized hegemony in the exercise of the modern state's governance over its populace. As Fontana (2008) observed, Gramsci employed his notion of hegemony "as a way of explaining political failure" (p. 85) of those who, in opposing coercive rule, attempted to rally others to their cause. This was in the context of Gramsci studying both the failure of the Italian Communist Party in stopping the rise of Mussolini and fascism in the 1920s, and why a good portion of the Italian people either embraced fascism, or at least appeared to give their tacit consent to it. This historically defining moment of consent led Gramsci to develop his theory of intellectuals and the role they play in this construction and organization of consent (Fontana, 2008). Naming intellectuals as "functionaries" (p. 12), whose job it is to help mediate between the ruling elite formations and those who are ruled through organizing and legitimating forms of consent, Gramsci (1971) located the activities of intellectuals within the space he called "civil society" which includes the education system, the family, and the media.

However, within this space or sphere of civil society, there is conflict and competition since consent is never a given but must be generated, organized, taught, learned, and in this sense, 'earned'. This struggle for the consent from the populace has as its primary purpose to "generate, proliferate, and disseminate a given conception of the world, such that it becomes 'historically true', which, in turn, means its transformation into the 'commonsense' of the people" (Fontana, 2008, p. 96). Hegemony is thus achieved and maintained in the sphere of civil society through intellectuals aiding in the "transformation of philosophy and knowledge into the commonsense of the people; in turn, such a transformation is simultaneously the organization and proliferation of consent" (ibid, p. 96). As Fontana (2008) observed, this struggle over competing and opposing conceptions and representations of the world is indeed the fundamental core of Gramsci's view of hegemony and forms the basis of his whole theoretical and political project. Indeed, Gramsci (1971) argued "every relationship of 'hegemony' is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation … but in the interactional and world-wide field" (p. 350).

However, it is important to stress that hegemony for Gramsci is "never a conscious plot by an elite whose machinations can be unmasked", but rather it is "always the outcome of definite orders of production linked to the organisation of knowledge around that production and an engagement by the intellectuals with the various parts of this process" (Davidson, 2008, p. 64). Hegemony thus "presupposes and requires – indeed, is intimately and inherently defined and characterized by – the development of such a common language and common grammar" (Fontana, 2002, p. 31) of valorized knowledge and its discourses. Any hegemonic aim thus involves a dynamic ongoing process with the production of knowledge selectively framed, limited, and disseminated with the help of invested

intellectuals who themselves enthusiastically embrace and legitimate any system by which the governed are ruled. One illustrative example of this is the ways in which many scholars in the economics departments in US universities at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have set and limited the parameters of research, exploration of alternative theories to prevailing ones, and accompanying paradigms to carefully exclude anything that might challenge the orthodoxy of the field. Alternative economic theories such as Marxist-based and other critical analyses of capitalism are rarely, if ever, introduced to undergraduate students, some of whom then go on to obtain terminal degrees in the discipline without ever encountering and contemplating this literature featuring its theories and views.

For Raymond Williams, who drew upon Gramsci's work, hegemony is not just ideology in the simplistic sense of holding a particular view, but rather is "lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which, as Gramsci put it, even constitutes the substance and limit of common sense for most people under its sway" (Williams, 1980, p. 37). Furthermore, hegemony involves an ongoing complex of cultural, intellectual, and social processes that are involved in the creation, maintenance, and dissemination of "the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived. That is why hegemony is not to be understood at the level of mere opinion or mere manipulation" (Williams, 1980, p. 38). And in this sense, it is important not to regard hegemony as merely manipulation, which is exactly what is suggested in some of the definitions of ideology outlined earlier; for example, a manipulation or a mass herding of the people, indexed by that derogatory portmanteau term, 'sheeple'. Hegemony, for Williams, is much more than this, for it involves "our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world. It is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming" (Williams, 1977, p. 110). As such, hegemony "constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society" (p. 110), and thus "does not just passively exist as a form of dominance" but instead has to continually be "renewed, recreated, defended, and modified" (p. 112). Williams developed the term "counter-hegemony" to remind us that hegemony is never absolute but instead, "continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (p. 112).

These counter-hegemonic moments were noted by Gramsci for, "his discussions of common sense emphasize that there always are many voices to be heard, often in the same statement, that rarely if ever line up coherently" (Watkins, 2011, p. 105). This is crucial to acknowledge for any critical and productive engagement with the common-sense beliefs and discourses held by people, inasmuch as Gramsci's insight recognized "the importance of registering all voices, in all their complexities, rather than trying to parse them cleanly across some unequivocal divide between the politically progressive and the politically reactionary" (ibid, p. 105). Following and building upon his insight, it is thus incumbent upon those of us who are fighting for social justice and equality that the often "contradictory character of common sense at any given historical

moment makes it available to be mobilized in the service of potentially very different political directions. Thus, common sense can become a material force not despite but because of its 'incoherence'" (ibid, p. 106). The issue then becomes how to employ a critical analysis of how people make sense of capitalism because "whatever gaps, dissonances, silences, even contradictions seem apparent to critical analysis in common-sense formations, common sense nevertheless always seems to make sense to those caught within its interstices" (ibid, p. 108). Moreover, people's common-sense beliefs are "a means of actively coping with life … in different ways" (Wolff, 2011, p. 182). People's common sense as a way of coping with their lives can be illustrated in a comment by a shoe store owner in the working-class Mong Kok neighborhood of Hong Kong. When asked about his view of the Occupy Central Hong Kong protesters calling for universal suffrage and free elections in 2014, the store owner replied, "I don't care who the emperor is as long as there is rice in my bowl" (quoted by Chan, 2014, November 28th). This was in reference to his business that suffered a 50% decline in customers because of the protesters who had occupied the streets in front of his store for two months.

In mobilizing and struggling for the emergence of that core of "good sense" contained in many common-sense beliefs, Gramsci thus knew that "workers are neither bereft of awareness of their condition nor passive in the face of these conditions" (Landy, 2011, p. 49), as evidenced in the Hong Kong shoe store owner's comment "*as long as there is rice in my bowl*" [emphasis added]. The owner's conditional demand that basic necessities must be met for any power to continue ruling is indeed that nucleus of good sense with its potential to become critically mobilized. Therefore, for Gramsci, common sense should not be dismissed and rejected outright in favor of some philosophy disdainful of these common-sense beliefs. Being mindful that indeed common sense "provides inadequate foundations for establishing an effective political movement capable of producing political change," Gramsci "suggests that common sense needs to become critical. As Liguori points out, common sense is constituted by a 'Janus-faced' contra-position of fragmentary elements on the one hand and the potential to become critical on the other" (Green & Ives, 2009, p. 9). As the following chapters show, the potentialities for criticality are embedded throughout the participants' common-sense beliefs about capitalism.

It was my aim in this chapter to present to the reader a comprehensive overview of the varying notions and representations of, and debates about ideology to provide an important context for how we can understand and address the ways in which people take up and mediate dominant discourses of capitalism in their lived experiences. The discussions featured in this chapter by Stuart Hall, Slavoj Žižek, Louis Althusser, Göran Therborn, Terry Eagleton, Raymond Williams, and Antonio Gramsci on ideology have offered avenues through which we might continue to explore notions and practices of ideology, rather than merely jettisoning the idea altogether. Indeed, perhaps there is nothing more ideological than claiming ideology either does not exist or is no longer useful as a construct.

3 Discourse itineraries of economic representations

> The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men [*sic*], the language of real life.
>
> (Marx & Engels, 1970, p. 47)

Capitalism loves to talk about itself. The discourses of capitalism have always been in part about representing this historically specific economic system of production, appropriation, distribution, and accompanying social relations as a triumphal arc of unending progress, modernity, inevitability, invincibility, and permanence. The one great challenge to capitalism in the 20th century was state-run Communism, as it was primarily manifested in the Soviet Union and Maoist China. Since the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 and the economic makeover and ensuing rise of China, capitalism has emerged more dominant and victorious than ever, or so it would seem by several carefully selected measures. Capitalism's self-celebratory discourses repeatedly highlight its enviable successes around the world: overall increased wealth of many nations, and longer life expectancies and higher standards of living in those countries compared with 100 years ago. The rise of digital technologies in profitable hardware, software, mobile platforms, and devices enabled by extensive capital investment and production has made many lives – at least those who have the means to gain access to it – seemingly easier, more enjoyable, and more connected than ever before. Mobility has exponentially expanded in the material forms of products and services that are now available to numerous areas around the world, many in real time. More people have become increasingly mobile in their search for employment opportunities, living accommodations, positive recognition of their identities, and holiday getaways. Many of us who are living in the so-called 'developed' countries can see the ample evidence of material abundance and prosperity displayed and offered by the high-end boutiques and shops in wealthy urban areas such as London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, as well as the ubiquitous big chain stores in local suburban shopping malls. Representations of material wealth and affluence dominate many media, of which the various advertising landscapes so integral to our cities and suburbs are one obvious example. It would seem that by these selected measures and

appearances, capitalism is alive and healthy, and just as importantly, apparently here to stay forever, for what possible alternative could there be? As Colin Leys (1990) observed regarding Thatcherism, "for an ideology to be hegemonic, it is not necessary that it be loved. It is merely necessary that it have no serious rival" (p. 127).

One aim of this book is to explore the extent to which this is true – is the ideology of capitalism so hegemonic that there really exist no serious rivals, at least in people's ideas, attitudes, imaginations, and even fantasies? Furthermore, a related intention is the need to examine how discourses of capitalism dialogically engage with the discourses of other alternative economic systems such as communism, both in historical practices and theories. This chapter first presents the historical contexts in which these hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses of capitalism have dialogically co-evolved with one another. This is done to provide the necessary ideological, historical, and political references that appear and reverberate directly or indirectly throughout the participants' responses to whether or not capitalism works for them which are featured in the next three chapters. Accordingly then, the following section presents the discourse analytic framework of Bakhtin and Vološinov – the Bakhtin Circle – and how it dovetails with a Gramscian approach to discourse analysis. This is done to ground the methodological approach I will be using in analyzing the participants' discourses, which concludes the chapter.

Marx is dead?

In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Eastern Europe Communist countries that eventually included the once seemingly unassailable Soviet Union in the span of just two years, many pundits and scholars declared that Communism as a practice and even as a concept and theory was for all intents and purposes dead and buried in the so-called 'ash heap of history'. Among those conspicuously consigned to history's vanquished and discarded relics was none other than Karl Marx, the German political economist, philosopher, historian, journalist, activist, and revolutionary. It seemed he had a good long run of being a thorn in capitalism's side that lasted almost 150 years before this announcement by experts and opinion makers eager to finally throw him out with the rest of history's rubbish after the Soviet Union's collapse. After his death in 1883, Marx was praised, and indeed subsequently elevated to deity-like status in Russia after the Bolsheviks seized power, and the same occurred in other countries where Communist parties took control. This deification was extremely problematic inasmuch as Marx himself once famously declared in an 1882 letter to Eduard Bernstein, "Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste" – "If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist." Marshall Berman (1998) observed that:

> What happened to Marx after 1917 was a disaster: A thinker needs beatification like a hole in the head. So we should welcome his descent from the

> pedestal as a fortunate fall. Maybe we can learn what Marx has to teach if we confront him at ground level, the level on which we ourselves are trying to stand.
>
> (p. 12)

So why should we continue to care about Marx in the 21st century, more than 25 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the abandonment of any socialist aims by the Communist Party in China? In his book, *Why Marx was Right,* Terry Eagleton (2011) argued that Marx, and the political theory that bears his name, "more than any other political theory … seeks to deliver a judicious account (of capitalism), in contrast with mindless celebration on the one hand and blanket condemnation on the other" (p. 164). Indeed, as Eagleton noted, Marx rightly admired the historical achievements of the capitalist class for their "resolute opposition to political tyranny, a massive accumulation of wealth which brought with it the prospect of universal prosperity, respect for the individual, civil liberties, democratic rights, a truly international community" upon all of which "socialism itself would need to build" (p. 164). In light of the Soviet Union and China's political practices in the supposed name of 'socialism', it is clear that it is not Marx who was wrong. Beginning with Michel Foucault in the 1970s, many in academia followed suit in the 1980s and 1990s by developing and employing various poststructuralist approaches while either dismissing or misrepresenting those who continued to use Marxist analytic frameworks. While these frameworks were being accused of facile economic determinism, important innovative theoretical work by Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006), Resnick and Wolff (1987, 2006), Ruccio (2008a), Ruccio and Amariglio (2003) demonstrated that poststructuralist approaches were not necessarily incompatible with a Marxian-based analytic. But Engels had already addressed this criticism:

> According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining factor in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Neither Marx nor I have ever asserted more than this. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the *only* determining one, he transforms the proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase.
>
> (Marx & Engels 1975, p. 394, emphasis in original)

One key related storyline in the dominant narrative of capitalism is its revolutionary nature dynamically displayed in its abilities and ongoing need to continually transform industrial arrangements, production and distribution methods, and accompanying necessary technologies in systemic pursuit of maintaining and increasing profits. Yet strangely, the ones who celebrate capitalism the most insistently "tell us surprisingly little of its infinite horizons, its revolutionary energy and audacity, its dynamic creativity, its adventurousness and romance, its capacity to make men [*sic*] not merely more comfortable but more alive" (Berman, 2002, p. 110). Ironically – and this would not be lost on the authors themselves – it was none other than Karl Marx and Friedrich

Engels who wrote most eloquently and indeed admiringly of this very vibrant nature of capitalism in a famous passage from *The Communist Manifesto*:

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.
>
> (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 476)

Marx observed that capitalism's revolutionary nature goes beyond the mere constant changes in technologies ("revolutionizing the instruments of production") – as impressive as these may be – because these advances involve both the relations of production and its ensuing social relations. To take just one fairly recent example of capitalism's carefully remaking *selective* social relations in society, it was only in the 1970s in the US that White middle-class women finally re-entered the outside-of-the-home – and salaried – workforce in significantly growing numbers, some 30 years after they were an important salaried workforce in factories during World War Two, hired for the war effort.

The various re-makings of social relations are not limited, however, to the ways in which people are economically positioned with regard to one another in their roles in the production, distribution, and appropriation processes of capitalist-organized economies. These re-makings have also now extended to involve the complex mediating relations and practices people have with the discourses and representations of capitalism. Indeed, capitalism's revolutionary and quite agile ability to absorb and incorporate the very critiques of itself is something I believe Marx and Engels had not quite foreseen in *The Communist Manifesto*. Capitalism's cultural absorptions and incorporations of critiques have been done by either attempting to neutralize many of them through sophisticated discursive re-framings, which I will highlight and address in this book, or rendering the questionings and criticisms themselves highly profitable. Such monetizing practices now include stamping the ever-ubiquitous image of Che Guevara on clothing, coffee mugs, and accessories, as well as slogans emblazoned on t-shirts such as "Fuck capitalism", with the word 'capitalism' written in the same logo and font style as the famous soft drink brand. These

have the intended effect of bestowing upon those who adopt and publicly display these seemingly rebellious stances the coveted veneer of what is deemed by some as 'cool' and 'hip' as Jim McGuigan (2009) argued. What have been identified as the essential characteristics of being cool are supposedly "recognizable in all its manifestations as a particular combination of three core personality traits, namely narcissism, ironic detachment and hedonism" (Pountain & Robins, 2000, p. 26, as cited by McGuigan, 2006). These supposed 'countercultural' practices of mocking and seemingly rejecting the system by being 'edgy' and 'alternative' in the last 30 years or so have become a central selling point in consumer culture (Heath & Potter, 2006), and indeed being cool has become "the dominant ethic of late consumer capitalism" (Pountain & Robins, 2000, p. 28, as cited by McGuigan, 2006). Of these three personality features or rather practices of acting cool, ironic detachment perhaps best serves capitalism's propagation of its permanence. As McGuigan (2006) pointed out, "it is not very cool to become too heated about the issues like some decidedly uncool revolutionary Marxist" (p. 150). An ironic detachment embodied and enacted in a "don't care attitude in conjunction with disgust at the system: 'whatever', with its sneer and feigned indifference" (p. 150) essentially serves capitalism's hegemony quite nicely. Moreover, this very detachment lends itself to being monetized as in the aforementioned examples of apparel and accessories loudly proclaiming a studied rebellious yet safely non-threatening attitude to the prevailing socioeconomic order.

Are avenues of questioning and/or challenging capitalism foreclosed by critiques being absorbed into this consumer culture through the marketing and selling of these iconic images of Che Guevara and anti-capitalism catchphrases? Or do these spaces of materialized and commodified manifestations of critiques allow for initial and indeed continuing conversations on the possibilities of exploring serious alternatives – emergent counter-hegemonic discourses – to the present system of socioeconomic arrangements? These absorptions and profit-making inversions of capitalist critiques are thus perhaps not to be discounted or easily dismissed, as seemingly facile as they may be, however. This is a crucial feature of capitalism's discourses about itself that need to be addressed and explored for the ways in which any meaningful challenges to this system can be articulated and just as importantly, heard – or even ignored – across the mainstream media, social media, and the rapidly expanding blogosphere of Web 2.0. These challenges must contend with the many common-sense beliefs regarding the invincibility and seemingly ahistorical permanence of capitalism. For example, how does one address the notion that "there is no alternative" to capitalism, as Margaret Thatcher famously once declared, especially after 25 years and counting since the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite bloc countries?

And yet in spite of all these triumphal narratives about itself, the capitalist-based economic system has had 12 major global recessions and 15 major financial crises since the end of World War Two. These frequent periodic meltdowns and ensuing crises are not the occasional aberrations or 'hiccups' of capitalism; indeed, they are built into its very fabric, which Karl Marx documented in *Capital*. All of this raises the question: Is there a legitimacy crisis for capitalism

in the face of these continuing instabilities of financial crises and accompanying recessions and depressions? It would appear so as evidenced by a recent Pew survey of Americans regarding their view of the US economy in which it found that 62% of them stated that their economic system "unfairly favors powerful interests" (Pew Research Center, 2014). Yet in this same survey, they were evenly split regarding the question if government aid to the poor does more harm than good, with 48% saying it did, whereas 47% believed government aid is more beneficial. So while almost two-thirds of those surveyed viewed the economic system as unfair and against their own interests, half thought that government aid to those in need would not work. However, beyond government aid and/or raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations to redress these perceived economic disadvantages, there does not seem to be any other alternative asked about or suggested in the Pew survey – or in any other surveys on the economy I have seen, for that matter.

The end of the world?

Thus, on the surface of all this, it appears that it is pointless to discuss or even think about other possible alternatives to capitalism that go beyond these occasional remedial measures in the face of recurring crises and recessions. The mere idea of a possible alternative *system* is almost never raised in these surveys or discussed in mainstream media stories on the various growing economic inequalities because apparently there is no need for one to even exist. As the noted Marxist literary scholar and cultural critic Fredric Jameson (2003) wrote, "Someone once said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism. We can now revise that and witness the attempt to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" (p. 76). Perhaps a slightly less dystopian view is offered by Mark Fisher (2009), in his book *Capitalist Realism*, in which he argued people now have "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (p. 2).

However, it seems that many people in the US and the UK who primarily identify themselves as 'middle class' increasingly do have the sense that things are not working as they used to, at least compared with the still fairly recent 'good old days'. Particularly for those Americans who have lived through the 30-year period of the post-World War II social welfare settlement that lasted until the 1970s in which capital accommodated organized labor demands in the wake of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal resulting in a social compact in which the middle class of income earners was largely created from annually increasing wage salaries, the low cost of borrowing money to buy homes, and the widespread availability of affordable consumer durables, it is not hard to see why many would see the system not working for them lately. Thus, to what extent would they view their economic systemic arrangements as the "only viable" one as Fisher argues? Indeed, with the arrival of the Reagan administration and continuing through the Clinton, Bush, and Obama years, many

Americans have experienced many of the following realities: 1) the systematic de-unionization of their workplaces, primarily in the manufacturing sector; 2) the outsourcing of well-paid manufacturing and technology-oriented service jobs to China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and other countries where the workforce are paid one-tenth of the American salaries; 3) declining wages and salaries in the face of threats of downsizing and/or outsourcing of jobs; 4) the dominant service sector in which the federal minimum wage is $7.25 an hour, forcing many to work two or even three jobs, and/or rely on food stamps and public assistance despite working over 40 hours a week; 5) the forced early retirement for those in their late 50s or early 60s so that corporations can save by avoiding having to pay higher salaries to these more experienced workers; 6) permanent unemployment or underemployment for many who were laid off after age 40 for the same aforementioned reason; 7) the growth of part-time jobs at the expense of full-time ones across all work sectors including tertiary education, which has seen the rise of what is called the 'adjunctification' of the faculty in which 75% of all university faculty in the United States are now part-time adjunct (i.e., temporary, non-fulltime) instructors; and 8) the increasing burden of both consumer and student loan debt that has many paying off their loans for years extending into decades, preventing them from accumulating even a modest amount of savings.

While just one of these aforementioned factors alone would be enough for widespread concern and anxiety, the cumulative impact of all these interrelated situations weighing upon those affected – the majority in several countries including the US and the UK – has resulted in several opposition movements in recent years. These movements include the Occupy Wall Street movement that started in September 2011 and spread across the country and its sister movements in the UK and elsewhere, and the Tea Party and the UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) in the US and UK, respectively. On the surface, Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party in the US could not seem more diametrically opposed. The Occupy Wall Street movement created the now well-known discourse of the "1%" versus the "99%" in highlighting the growing economic inequalities in the US (but also applicable in many other countries). In addition, they called for a restoration of a democracy in which the government would be held more accountable to the needs of the 99% rather than the corporate elite of the 1%. The Tea Partiers, on the other hand, demanded less federal government intervention and overreach, sought to reduce the federal debt, and wanted corresponding cuts to taxes on incomes, and less spending on selected government programs such as public assistance, education, and health care. US government expenditure on the military, which actually forms a much larger share of the overall budget spending compared with the money allocated to social welfare programs, education, and healthcare, however, is not mentioned in the Tea Party's proposed cuts.

In writing about the protest movements following Seattle in 1999 before they shrank in the wake of the September 11th, 2001 attacks, Fisher (2009) noted "since it was unable to posit a coherent alternative political-economic model to capitalism, the suspicion was that the actual aim was not to replace capitalism

but to mitigate its worst excesses" (p. 14). This doubt was evident in the many different voices in the Occupy movement. Several were arguing for a libertarian capitalist model of economy because they saw the more powerful government institutional stakeholders such as the Federal Reserve Bank being the primary culprit causing the economy's collapse in 2008. Others named several banking firms such as J. P. Morgan that needed more government regulation to get capitalism 'under control', suggested by the somewhat dubious phrase 'corporate capitalism', which is meant to highlight the worst excesses of a system. Fisher argued that these calls for change can be seen as being safely contained within the socio-political and cultural dynamic in the US and other Western democracies allowing for this type of dissent to function as a safety valve. He maintained that because the activities of previous movements (and this also applies to the Occupy Movement) "tended to be the staging of protests rather than political organization, there was a sense that the anti-capitalism movement consisted of making a series of hysterical demands which it didn't expect to be met" (p. 14). These protests, Fisher claims, can thus be viewed as a "kind of carnivalesque background noise" (p. 14) to business as usual.

The people's carnival then and now

However, perhaps this carnivalesque background noise is not to be dismissed that easily. In his book *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin (1984b) observed that the carnivals during the European Renaissance functioned on several levels. On one level, they did serve the important role for the power elite at the time in allowing the populace to reclaim public spaces as a performative space in which this acted as a type of safety valve for the people to release their pent-up anger (Brandist, 1996b). This manifested itself in various ways in people wearing transgressive, profane, and sacrilegious costumes and performative masks in disrupting and upending their mundane and oppressive everydayness: the daily struggles to survive, their feudal social relations with the nobility and the Church, and the accompanying hegemonic 'truths' of the 'natural' order of things. These very acts of transgressive performances against this naturalized order of things in their everyday lives, however ephemeral during the brief length of the carnival, called into question the very notion of what constituted the 'natural' state of things through its emphasis on the so-called 'grotesque' – the often comic and hilarious reminders of the body in all its functional glory (e.g., eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, and fornicating) that represented the allowable agentive acts of the community. Just as importantly, these acts also served as illustrative demonstrations, however grotesque and comic, as possibilities of *another world*, not in the sense of the 'hereafter' as the Church would have it, but rather in challenging and indeed mocking the power-invested prevailing notions and discourses representing the then-current state of things as permanent, fixed, and *without any alternatives*.

Bakhtin argued, however, this carnivalesque display of another world leads to a second important function of the carnival. It was these very agentive acts in

the medieval public space that temporarily erased the socially-constructed relations of the era through their communal collectivities displayed by the costumes, masks, and performances that brought about a suspension of these hierarchical relations. As he noted, "all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (Bakhtin, 1984b, p. 10). These free and familiar contacts were essential to the carnival function for people were "reborn for new, purely human relations" during carnival time such that "these truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced" (p. 10). As such, people enacted and thus experienced this alternative society for a precious few days in which everyone was treated and interacted with on an equal basis, which gave the carnival much of its true appeal beyond the mere merriment of drinking and celebrating. In fact, one could argue, both of these enjoyments were interrelated. However, carnival culture was "not so much *counter*-hegemonic as anti-hegemonic, at its extreme threatening the very concept of discursive truth, but always orientated against the fear-inspiring official, ruling stratum" (Brandist, 1996a, p. 102, emphasis in original).

Therefore, it is one thing to imagine and offer that another world is possible but it is also necessary to present and recognize these possibilities in material and performative practices, however fleeting these may be. Both the Rabelaisian carnivals and the Occupy Movement share much in common beyond mere background noise for they materially demonstrated and powerfully illustrated how we can reconfigure our social relations, which called into question both the nature and naturalizing of the state of things that privilege and benefit those in power. Occupy and its affiliated movements around the world may have lacked the traditional political organization of bygone movements such as the US labor movements in the early and mid-20th century, or the Civil Rights movement in the US during the 1950s and 60s, but they could hardly be faulted for this, as they had precious little to build upon because mass political movements directly challenging capital have been non-existent in the US for quite some time. Indeed, those labor and civil rights movements in the US had long been dismantled, co-opted, accommodated, or pacified to some extent in multiple intersecting ways by the government and the accompanying corporate interests. In addition, part of the by now well-known strategy of Occupy was to avoid making these very "series of hysterical demands" as Fisher (2009) unfortunately framed it, for the Occupiers reasoned it was precisely because these so-called "hysterical" demands could not be made without any real power and organization behind them.

And yet, in the 2014 midterm elections in the United States, voters in Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota, states which consistently vote Republican, the dominant right-wing party in the US, overwhelmingly voted by a margin of almost 2 to 1 in favor of approving their states' ballot initiatives to raise their state minimum wages. This crucial fact is evidence that in fact many people recognize that something is wrong and broken, or at least not working

for the majority of them. It is open to debate, however, whether these people who voted to raise the minimum wage attribute their sense of something being broken directly to capitalism itself, or to a whole other range (but not necessarily disconnected or unrelated) of other issues. As David Harvey (2011) argued, "the attribution of low living standards to scarcities in nature (rather than to the oppressions of capital) has been periodically resurrected" (p. 72). Indeed, he points out that "in the times of economic turmoil since 2006 a wide range of environmental issues, varying from peak oil and rising commodity prices … to global warming, have been invoked as underlying explanations for, or at least components of, our current economic difficulties" (p. 73). Other explanations of the economy's decline include the neoliberal narrative of government interference in the marketplace; e.g., arguing that there is too much regulation interfering with companies. However, voting to raise the minimum wage would of course contradict this view. Another explanation comes in the form of blaming the Other, whether it is another economic powerhouse competitor such as Japan in the 1980s or China in the present, or immigrants taking away jobs. And still another explanation proffered has been President Obama himself, for any of his imagined and actual policy enactment failures during his eight-year presidency (2009–2016). Nonetheless, it is clear that the majority of the general public in the US clearly knows, or at the very least feels, something is very wrong with the economy.

In fact many people in the US and elsewhere are increasingly recognizing that their economy has not been working for many for quite some time. Their economic common-sense making helps them to organize and make sense of their daily lived experiences into some semblance of a coherent narrative that is then repeated and reinforced among themselves and across communities through numerous mediations including the news media and social media. The formations and iterations of a common-sense economic narrative are one of the most pressing critical issues to address for those of us who identify with the broadly defined 'Left', be it of the liberal, progressive, or radical strands encompassing the many historical and current movements for social justice and equality. It is throughout this complex terrain of common sense where people's beliefs about 'the way things really are' in the world play out in engaging with, and drawing upon each other's viewpoints and ideological assumptions, as well as adopting selected elements of conventional wisdom, folklore, and the knowledge discourse formations from the media, academia, and government. These dialogical, intertextual, and interdiscursive common-sense beliefs, whether privately held, voiced to close friends or family members, or publicly aired on social media and the Internet are in turn also manifested and enacted in the very real everyday social and material practices that reproduce and shape how we see the world and our everyday lives. Thus, as Gramsci (1971) reminded us, these common-sense beliefs are not to be dismissed and ignored so easily, for they have material consequences. But the nucleus of "good sense" indexing most peoples' sense of fairness and outrage over injustices was clearly evident in the US voters turning out to approve the increase of minimum wage salaries. However, the fact that

many of these same voters consistently vote for a political party that purportedly abhors any government interference in the 'free' market illustrates the extent to which these voters' common-sense beliefs are shaped by powerful hegemonic discourses materializing in their voting time and time again against their own interests.

Gramsci and the Bakhtin Circle: Language and ideology

In examining how hegemonic discourses of capitalism are taken up, co-constructed, and mediated by everyday people, I draw upon the discursive analytic framework of the Bakhtin Circle (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984a, 1984b, 1986; Vološinov, 1973) and their notions of language, ideology, and discourse. Indeed, the important parallels and similarities of Gramsci with the Bakhtin Circle on language and ideology have been noted and addressed in detail (e.g., Brandist, 1996a, 1996b; Ives, 2004a, 2004b). They both employed "a strikingly similar pragmatist recasting of the Marxist theory of ideology which anticipates many of the themes of contemporary post-structuralism while embedding the realm of ideas firmly in the social practice of different social groups" (Brandist, 1996a, p. 94). Brandist (1996a) noted that the German philologist Karl Vossler's influence on Gramsci and the Bakhtin Circle had hardly been recognized previously. Vossler had "implicitly acknowledged ideologies as existing in social, semiotic forms and defined by their relation to other competing ideologies," which was "directly adopted by both Gramsci and Bakhtin's group in the late 1920s but *reaccentuated* so as to correlate with the sociological stratification of society as defined by Marxism" (p. 99, emphasis in original).

Bakhtin's (1981) notion of "authoritative discourse" and "internally persuasive discourse" can be seen in several ways as conceptually paralleling Gramsci's common sense and good sense. In Bakhtin's view, discourses "seek to bind other discourses to themselves according to two basic principles: either by establishing a relation of authority between the enclosing and target discourses or by facilitating the further advancement of the target discourse *through* the enclosing discourse" (Brandist, 1996a, p. 103). Authoritative discourses work on the first principle, whereas internally persuasive ones the second. As Bakthin (1981) noted, authoritative discourse

> demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it. The authoritative word is located in the distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers.
> (p. 342)

In contrast to this, "when someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Bakhtin observed that:

> In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else's. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is *not finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new concepts that dialogize it, this discourse is able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*.
>
> (pp. 345–346, emphasis in original)

In a similar manner, Gramsci's common sense has a certain authority fused to it in that it inherits in part the "word of the fathers" in its folkloric tales, superstitions, religious beliefs, and traditions. Likewise, his view of good sense is akin to internally persuasive discourses in their more open and dialogical interanimating engagements with new contexts, conditions, material, and values allowing people newer ways to mean in co-constructing counter-hegemonic views of the world. And the advancing of any target discourse through an enclosing discourse in the Bakhtinian sense (Brandist, 1996a) echoes Gramsci's point that any changes to common sense "require a critical perspective to be elaborated *from within* common sense" (Green & Ives, 2009, p. 23, emphasis added).

Related to Bakhtin's authoritative and internally persuasive discourses and Gramsci's common sense/good sense, Vološinov (1973) argued ideology is not merely contained within the realm of the epistemological, or simply residing in our consciousness, but that "consciousness becomes consciousness only once it has been filled with ideological (semiotic) content, consequently, only in the process of social interaction" (p. 11). Thus, it is through our social interactions that enable semiotic content in its "material embodiment of signs" that allow us to make common sense of the world in that "every ideological sign is not only a reflection, a shadow, of reality, but is also itself a material segment of that very reality" (p. 11). The vast and intricate tapestry of ideological intertextualities – and here 'text' is defined as encompassing all social semiotic multimodal systems – is produced through "both the sign itself and all the effects it produces (all those actions, reactions, and new signs it elicits in the surrounding social milieu) occur in outer experience" (p. 11). This is clearly demonstrated in the ways in which the participants socially interacted with the multimodal material sign of Steve Lambert's *Capitalism Works for Me!* in voting true or false.

And similar to Gramsci's view of hegemonic common-sense beliefs, for the Bakhtin Circle, ideology is "not significant for what it 'represents' or reflects, but for how it functions as an effective force in the social world with the

capacity to shape socio-historical processes in important ways" (Gardiner, 1992, p. 71). Gramsci's view that common sense itself is fragmented and contradictory is echoed in the Bakhtin Circle's conception that ideology "does not represent a seamless whole or a highly systematic world-view, but rather a disparate and heteroglot complex of meanings, discourses, and symbols which are culled from a wide range of textual sources, historical periods and social experiences" (Gardiner, 1992, p. 77). Just as in hegemonic and counter-hegemonic struggles over common sense, the Bakhtin Circle viewed sites of ideology as "the terrain of semiotic contestation and struggle" (p. 77) since people "only relate to social and natural reality through the prior mediation of a culturally-constructed system of codes and signs" (Gardiner, 1992, p. 148).

Moreover, Vološinov (1973) argued that we must also look at how a word is situated, contextualized, and thus realized in our social interactions; or how "the *word is oriented toward an addressee*, toward *who* that addressee might be" (p. 85). This is crucial for any analysis of public discourse because "a word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (p. 86). For such a word as 'capitalism' with its historical, ideological, and material authority fused to it in the Bakhtinian sense, this is indeed a shared and contested territory. In public sites such as online mainstream media and social media enabling viewers to post comments in which they exchange, negotiate, mediate, contest and co-construct meanings, who gets to determine the meanings they take up and circulate? How do particular words or phrases that acquire intellectual and cultural capital through their social circulations become oriented toward an addressee? Here the dynamics of power can be seen operating in these orientations toward addressees by the choices of one word over another, and which words carry more 'weight' or more legitimacy among addressees. A word or phrase may thus be a shared terrain upon which people or particular groups of people take up and continue its circulation adding to the increased currency of it, or not. However, the question then becomes, how is any discursive terrain marked, mapped, and demarcated, and by whom? As Bakhtin (1981) observed, "each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" (p. 293). We can ask whose intentions are heard more, and thus count in any specific context, and why?

This leads to another question: Are people "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 6)? Here again, the issue of power is clearly at stake here, for we can also ask who has the particular power and capital to indeed populate a word with her or his own intentions and accent since the word is "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). With the word 'capitalism', these "others" possibly include powerful stakeholders and their institutionally driven and legitimated discourses, which everyday people may appropriate in differing ways, ranging from an uncritical uptake to a critical or even cynical reiteration in mocking these discourses. For everyday people who appropriate and at times even expropriate the word in their language and discourses, they

are continually faced with "forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents", which "is a difficult and complicated process" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 294). This difficulty becomes more overt whenever a word that we encounter and employ in our everyday social interactions – whether it is face-to-face talk or through mediated online encounters – comes with its own authority (Bakhtin, 1981). This of course has significant implications for how we co-construct our common sense and good-sense beliefs because as Vološinov (1973) argued, "it is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around – *expression organizes experience*" (p. 85, emphasis in original). The hegemonic attempt to control the ways in which we express ourselves is therefore the attempt to organize our lived everyday experiences of the world in motivated ways for "expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction" (p. 85). This of course has important implications for how we might consider co-constructing and disseminating counter-hegemonic expressive narratives that frame our experiences differently.

My analytic approach to discourses of capitalism

Inasmuch as any researcher is in some way part of the social object she or he is analyzing (Horkheimer, 1937, as cited by Jay, 1973), my own analytical stance and engagements with how the participants make sense of capitalism have been shaped by both my own lived experiences detailed in Chapter 1, and how I interpret the larger cultural and social dynamics of our capitalist-based society. Mindful that although academics themselves are certainly exploited in this neoliberal era of increasingly corporatized universities, those of us who may have "never worked in a factory … will have a very difficult time convincing workers that their view of the world is superior in any way to that of the capitalists whose ideas seem so much more congruent" (Ives, 2004b, p. 81), I have attempted to engage with the participants' views in a dialogical and maieutic manner using both the Bakhtin Circle and Gramscian framework outlined above. That said, it should be clear to the reader by now that I am not pretending to adopt an impartial stance supposedly free of any bias in analyzing how the participants take up the discourses of capitalism. All researchers have their biases, including political ones, and indeed those claiming the mantle of neutrality in their analyses are themselves adopting a political stance, unwittingly or not. Pretending not to have a priori political bias regarding capitalism is disingenuous at best and deceitful at its worst. I am interested in furthering the conversation about capitalism and its effects on us and society because I feel strongly that it is literally destroying both humanity and the planet on which we live. To understand, however, why some people accept capitalism or embrace it although they are not part of the 1%, it is thus imperative to critically address the different ways in which people make sense of capitalism and what exactly they mean by it.

Jacques Rancière (1998) observed, "disagreement is not the conflict between one who says white and another who says black. It is the conflict between one

who says white and another who also says white but does not understand the same thing by it" (p. x). Referring to endoxa, which form the basis of 'common sense', Fairclough and Graham (2010) argued that "in any given community, endoxic propositions are often contradictory, and will have many meanings and interpretations within that community. They are an important focus for dialectical investigation for precisely this reason" (p. 310). So although people use the same term 'capitalism', it can (and often does) mean entirely different things to some. That is why I provided in Chapter 1 the definition of capitalism developed by Marx in *Capital*, and which I will be using to dialogically engage the participants' various meaning-makings of it. I do this with two goals in mind. First, my employment of this analytic framework by Marx and other economists (e.g., Wolff, 2012, 2015, 2016; Wolff & Resnick, 2012) defining what capitalism actually is, as opposed to what some may think it is, is done to clearly delineate the hegemonic ideas and discourses taken up by the participants. Although there is the risk of positioning myself as "the ultimate arbiter of meanings" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 33), what is at stake is the identification and deconstruction of hegemonic discourses of capitalism, rather than pointing out who is wrong and who is right about capitalism. My critical highlighting of some of the participants' argumentations also goes beyond merely identifying their logical fallacies or inaccuracies, nor is it meant to be a form of shaming. Rather, it should be viewed in the attempt that in order to further the conversation in asking if capitalism is really the best economy that serves the greater whole, I believe there needs to be a better informed public understanding of what capitalism is and how it works in practice. As Blommaert (2005) argued, "whenever the analysis of language aspires to be critical, it needs to engage the world in which language operates" (p. 17).

The second goal is to use this working definition of capitalism to explore how we can find meaningful ways through public pedagogy to help develop counter-hegemonic discourses to discredit and disabuse the dominant discourses in circulation. Again, it is not intended with doctrinaire aims in mind; rather, I employ the Marxian analytic and definitional framework because I believe it "represents capitalism's most persistent, most developed, and most profound self-criticism" (Wolff, 2016, p. 6). The challenge is to ground any counter-hegemonic discourse in the good sense held by many people regarding economic inequality, fairness, and a participatory democracy at the workplace. But for this to happen, a greater shared understanding of capitalism's mechanism and effects must be developed.

In addition to the Marxian framework to engage with the participants' discourses, I also have drawn upon discursive analytic approaches rooted in mediated discourse analysis (e.g., Norris & Jones, 2005; Scollon, 2001a, 2001b, 2008; Scollon & Scollon, 2003, 2004, 2007). In contrast to some critical discourse analysis (CDA) approaches (e.g., Fairclough, 1989, 1992, 1995) that only concentrate on texts without addressing how specific social actors take up discourses in their contexts, mediated discourse analytic approaches are more suitable in that they take as one of their main tasks "to explicate and

understand how the broad discourses of our social life are engaged (or not) in the moment-by-moment social actions of social actors in real time activity" (Scollon, 2001a, p. 140). Thus, a mediated discourse approach takes "the mediated action as its unit of analysis" in that the featured discourse is "in fact, displaced from that action, often at quite some distance and across a wide variety of times, places, people, media, and objects" (Scollon, 2008, p. 233). As a discourse is taken up at different sites by different social actors with varying power levels of institutional and individual meaning-making abilities, the discourse is recontextualized and semiotically transformed – or resemiotized (Iedema, 2003) – via its multiple itineraries (Scollon, 2008). Hence, the use of the term "nexus analysis" illustrates "a way of capturing the kind of analysis that we need in order to trace these discursive displacements from a crucial moment of action" (Scollon, 2008, pp. 234).

My unit of analysis focuses on the socially-mediated actions of the participant passersby engaging with the artwork, *Capitalism Works for Me!*, utilizing the nexus analysis approach that views any social action as a nexus point of "the *discourses in place*", and "some social arrangement by which people come together in social groups (a meeting, a conversation, a chance contact, a queue) – *the interaction order*, and the life experiences of the individual social actors – *the historical body*" (Scollon & Scollon, 2004, p. 19, emphasis in original). The discourses in place here are the urban landscapes of the artwork situated in the neighborhoods in which the interviews took place, the majority of which were in Times Square, New York City, Boston, and London, and to which many of the participants refer in their responses. The interaction order here entails the social relationship constructed in these public spaces between the interviewers working for Steve Lambert and the passersby who voted "true" or "false" on the artwork – if capitalism works for them. The historical bodies of the interviewees are featured in what they reveal about their lived experiences in their responses on how they voted.

In analyzing the participants' discourses of capitalism, I have attempted to avoid merely conducting an ideology-critique of their responses. This is more in line with a CDA approach that is more appropriately aimed at those in power who disseminate their discourses accordingly, often in the form of carefully written texts and speeches. In contrast, my participants' texts were in spoken form, and 'off-the-cuff' as it were since they were merely passersby of the artwork. Rather than conducting a detailed linguistic analysis of their comments, I have opted instead for a broader thematic and content analytic approach in identifying the discourses in social circulation the participants drew upon in commenting on capitalism. Furthermore, inasmuch as my participants are clearly not in any significant power roles (as they indicated as such in their interviews), my critical approach strives for what Blommaert (2005) argued "should be an analysis of power *effects*, of the outcome of power, of what power *does to* people, groups, and societies, and of *how* this impact comes about" (pp. 1–2, emphasis in original). In this manner, in analyzing the interviewees' discourses of capitalism, I strove to unearth their "differing layers of sharedness, coherence, and historicity" (Blommaert, 2005, p. 160).

Thus, with the aim of developing and furthering critical public pedagogy approaches, I have tried to engage on the very terrain of the participants' common-sense constructions of how capitalism works, if they think it works for them, and how they see their roles, identities, and life experiences in a capitalist society. As such, this "requires taking practical everyday life-experiences and insights seriously as a 'spontaneous philosophy' of the people which needs to be developed further" (Rehmann, 2014, p. 130). This has been done with the Gramscian aim so that "public pedagogy can work at the *intersection* of education and politics" (Biesta, 2012, p. 693, emphasis in original). In my analysis, I have also aimed to avoid what Stuart Hall (1988) observed was the "illusion of the intellectual" – that "ideology must be coherent, every bit of it fitting together, like a philosophical investigation" (p. 166). In addressing the contradictions of the participants' discourses, I have looked for their ideological articulations in the configurations of "different subjects, different identities, different projects, different aspirations" (p. 166).

The fairly sizeable number of the data sample of 312 participant interviews was the result of the artist Steve Lambert and his staff being able to travel to multiple cities during the exhibit's various tours during the past several years. The notable advantage of my gaining precious access to these many interviews, made possible by the artist's generosity, is, however, somewhat mitigated by my not eliciting this data in conducting the interviews and interacting with the participants directly. In their responses in the following three chapters, I occasionally note that perhaps their replies might have gone in another direction if the interviewer (usually Steve Lambert's staff member) had asked a different follow-up question, as I might have done in retrospect. This of course is not to criticize the interviewers' approaches, but rather to highlight a limitation in analyzing interview data I myself did not carry out. In addition, this is not in any way a representative sample since it depended on willing passersby of the artwork to voice their views.

All 312 interviews were orthographically transcribed, and checked for accuracy. While watching each interview multiple times, I would mark on the transcripts the themes and particular discourses that participants drew upon in their responses to the interviewers if capitalism worked for them or not. The participants have been identified as "P1," "P2," and so on, in order of their featured appearance in each chapter. Any other identifying details such as their workplaces were omitted and indicated as such. In coding and classifying their opinions about capitalism, I adopted an argumentation framework approach (Richardson, 2007; Richardson & Stanyer, 2011). Richardson and Stanyer (2011) define argumentation as a "written or verbal exchange of views between parties with the aim of either justifying or refuting a standpoint in order to settle a difference of opinion" (p. 986). Inasmuch as the interviewer(s) were not arguing with the participants being interviewed, nor were the participants arguing among themselves, here a broader view is needed that would take into account an argument scheme directed at the world at large debating the merits (or the lack thereof) of capitalism. Thus, by employing this scheme, which is "the means by which an

arguer defends his/her standpoint" (Richardson & Stanyer, 2011, p. 986), I grouped the participants' views on capitalism according to specific discursive framings and narratives as the means they used to support their standpoints. After going through and highlighting each interview in this way, I named and listed the thematic threads on a separate document. For example, I called one thread "I've done it" to signify those participants who felt their own personal success was a testament that capitalism works not only for them but also for society at large, and in another one, "It's been the only system that ever does work" that reflected some participants' feelings that all other alternative economic systems have been utter failures. I then grouped the interviews in these thematic threads and selected those in each thread that were the most in-depth in terms of their insightfulness, provocation, and argumentation, which totaled 50 out of the 312 interviewed. I further categorized the interviews into those that were aligned with the dominant hegemonic discourses of capitalism (e.g., 'there is no alternative', 'suits human nature', and so on), and those that demonstrated a challenging counter-hegemonic discourse (e.g., 'it's not working for me'). For the hegemonic discourses, I examined these for any fissures or cracks in the dominant narratives and delineated what constituted capitalist common sense and the kernels of good sense contained therein. Regarding counter-hegemonic discourses, I addressed how these contested the dominant representations of capitalism, and also examined the tensions between the dynamic co-constructions of hegemonic common-sense views fluctuating with good sense ones, sometimes in the same utterance. The participants who drew upon hegemonic discourses of capitalism are featured in Chapters 4 and 5, and those who questioned and contested these discourses are presented in Chapter 6.

4 Common-sense beliefs

"The only system that ever does work"

'I've done it' … or is capitalism doing it for me?

In these next three chapters featuring the selected 50 participants discussing capitalism and how it has shaped their lived experiences, I invite readers to examine their own views, assumptions, and beliefs about capitalism while engaging with both the various discourses the participants draw upon and my own analytic mediations. In this first section, the participants draw upon a discourse that displays a tension between attributing their professional success to their own agencies, hard efforts, and individual motivations on the one hand, and citing capitalism as the main or even sole factor enabling their success on the other. The participants do not always delineate a clear-cut division between their individual agency and the structural system in which they live and work. Instead, at times, some of the participants seem either to credit both simultaneously or assign one or the other to their specific achievements or the lack thereof.

A male participant interviewed in London began by offering this observation (he is indicated as 'P1' and the following participants are referred to as 'P2', 'P3', and so on in this chapter):

P1: I just think I look at the world and I see that capitalism helps the world, not necessarily in a balanced way but overall. Hopefully it helps people to be able to eat, to put a roof over their heads and have a comfortable life.

I (INTERVIEWER): And how does that affect you personally? Do you feel like that's been the case in your life?

P1: Yeah, definitely. It certainly has. Sort of things that I've done over 30, 40 years have basically made me enjoy fruits of hard work and success.

I: And was it always the case? I mean you seem like you're in a good spot now, like 30, 40 years ago–

P1: – It's always been the case. So from days when I had, you know, sort of little part-time jobs working in a bar earning some money when I was a student to running a business that I do today.

How do we come to see the world in certain ways instead of others? What aspects of this world do we selectively choose to understand, accept, and recognize, while ignoring or refusing to acknowledge other vantage points?

Scholars such as John Berger (1972) in his seminal book, *Ways of Seeing*, and Nicholas Mirzoeff's (2015) *How to See the World*, have addressed how dominant visual representations in art and various media have helped shape our perceptions of society. The ways in which we see the world stem from a multitude of factors, of which they are (indirectly) determined and influenced by one another to varying degrees (e.g., the media, school, the family, religion, and historical-cultural values). P1 first indexes his own perspectival agency by employing a first person voice ("I look at the world") to frame how he sees capitalism in the world. Then, in constructing an agentive subject position for capitalism in his first comment, along with his verb choice, "helps", P1 seems to portray the economic system as a benevolent benefactor.

He appears at first to credit capitalism for having done things to help people without mentioning that it is people who, through their labor and time, are the ones producing the material wealth of society. However, he then seemingly contradicts the agentive subject position he articulated for capitalism in claiming the agentive mantle for himself with his follow-up comment, "sorts of things that I've done over 30, 40 years …" Therein exists the ideological binary tension between his own agency and that of capitalism. His announcement of his achievements could merely be a tacit acknowledgement that such a system exists that has allowed his hard work over several decades to result in professional and material success. Nevertheless, the comment helps to set up a familiar hegemonic discourse that he draws upon in his ensuing reply:

I: Why do you think it doesn't work for some people? Why do they say it doesn't work?

P1: I'm not sure. I'm not sure I really understand why they say it doesn't work for them. I think it has to do perhaps with individuals' levels of determination and motivation and wanting to succeed rather than have things simply given to them.

I: But it doesn't work?

P1: Well, it's definitely not fair and equitable for all. And, I guess to some extent, you know, wealth creates more wealth. If you haven't got wealth, it's an unbalanced society.

I: The thing you said before, maybe you could speak to it a little bit more about how overall it benefits everyone. How does that work?

P1: Well, it creates an economy. Overall it creates wealth, it creates jobs. It creates, in a developed world; you can see how it's progressed through with, not necessarily democratically. But it's just allowed people to sort of move up the curve all the time. You know, people have lots and lots of different material things these days. Most people have hopefully got a roof over their head, they've got food on the table, clothes on their, on their backs. And I think it's helped … deliver that.

In his rationale of why some people believe capitalism does not work for them with the attribution of this belief to constructs of "determination" and

"motivation", P1 adopts the discourse of 'winners' and 'losers', which is prevalent in capitalist society. This discourse insists that those who have succeeded in society are justly anointed as 'winners' for their hard work and intelligence. Those who have not succeeded, i.e., being unemployed, poor, and in debt, are 'losers' because they simply did not want it as much. Thus, this winners and losers discourse places the onus squarely on a person's efforts or supposed lack thereof. Yet, within this capitalist common-sense belief that if people just work hard(er) and not expect 'handouts' from the government (which has been adopted by neoliberal proponents), P1's next comment evinces a kernel of good sense in his observation that capitalism is "definitely not fair and equitable for all." The interviewer did not follow up on this, which might have led to a more nuanced discussion exploring how and why capitalism is not equitable for everyone and the ramifications for any society that becomes "unbalanced" as a result of wealth disparities. This is not to criticize the interviewer's choice, but rather to highlight that although P1 adheres to a qualified endorsement of capitalism, he seems to briefly display a Gramscian good sense of capitalism's inequity.

However, in his answer to the interviewer's follow-up question of capitalism benefiting everyone, P1 continues to attribute a powerful singular agency to capitalism through his choice of the active subject-verb phrase, "it creates wealth … jobs". In doing so, his discourse framing occludes the agency of people who are reproducing the economy through their labor, and instead, valorizes the agency of the system itself. By further employing the verbs "allowed" and "helped deliver", P1 indexes a subject position for capitalism for which people should feel grateful in that it has permitted them to move up in life, and be housed, well fed and clothed. Perhaps inadvertently, he ignores peoples' roles in working and producing the necessary material needs for their survival. But in doing so, he helps create a negative ideological space in which people are absent in doing the very things he attributes to capitalism, which is in fact a common discourse often circulated in the media. If people are not accorded recognition for their agentive roles in this capacity, what might it mean then when they take up other agentive positions, such as challenging their work conditions for better pay?

Other participants also articulated a dynamic tension between attributing their material success to capitalism (as an enabler) and to their own efforts, as we see in this Times Square participant's comment:

P2: I voted for capitalism of course 'cause I'm the kind of free enterprise exemplified for everybody.
I: How do you exemplify it?
P2: Because I built my entire business and everything from the ground up. I mean that's capitalism. It's going out there and creating value for other people and then – that's what capitalism is: it's creating value for other people. I make a ton of money. I get a big tax bill and you know, that's how it works. It's about generating your own business and making something happen.

P2's self-narrative has long been a common theme in US history – the 'American dream', which is elaborated later in this chapter. He clearly identifies his sense of self as embodying and enacting "free enterprise", which is a model for others to follow and emulate. Sharing another common-sense discourse of capitalism held by many, for P2, building a business "from the ground up" is the essence of capitalism. To a certain extent, this ideological recasting of capitalism as the efforts of one person who builds a business by her/himself is so entrenched and perpetuated in cultural representations in the US (and elsewhere) such as Hollywood movies and television shows that it would appear to be extremely difficult to disabuse people of this notion. This of course is reflected in P2's repeated use of the first person pronoun "I" in taking full credit for his business success without acknowledging how his employees were an integral and indispensable part in making his company (and by extension, him) successful. His definition of capitalism as a mechanism for "creating value for other people" is a hegemonic one that portrays capitalism as an active force helping people, which is an interesting conjunction with the naming of his own agency in making things happen.

The aforementioned discourse binary is, in the end, a false one inasmuch as it is either capitalism or a motivated individual embodying the capitalist spirit that creates wealth and value. What seems to be missing in this discourse of wealth creation is a collective group – in this context, the participant's employees – who produce the surplus value. This omission, unintentional or not, is nevertheless indicative of how certain agents are usually never included in both the personal success stories and the triumphal narrative of capitalism itself. Thus, in this manner, it can be seen as another form of fetishization in the Marxian sense. Just as commodities are detached from the social processes that brought them into material existence, business ventures and companies are often presented and seen as stand-alone entities and the heroic personification of either the founder or the CEO, rather than the people who helped bring them into being – the employees.

Another often-repeated discourse of capitalism is that it is an incentive-driven system since it holds up the promises of generous monetary rewards and ensuing financial well-being if one is willing to work hard, as this participant argues:

P3: OK, so in a capitalist society, you know, there's got to be a certain level of people that are rich and there's got to be a certain level of people that are poor, and that means a certain amount of people got to kind of fall in between, in the middle class. It actually motivates people to work hard to not be poor and to actually reach that top level of being rich. So the motivation of being I guess wealthy or having means is, is what drives me to continually get up every morning and go to work and make a better life for myself. Yeah, I think that's pretty much about it.

These constructs of how we mediate and take up powerful hegemonic discourses in our materialized social actions are amply demonstrated in P3's

argumentation framing of capitalism motivating people to work hard in order to avoid being or staying poor, with the perhaps even more important incentive to become rich someday through these efforts. His use of the informal modal expression "got to be" in rationalizing the different socioeconomic strata under capitalism can be interpreted in several ways. At first, P3 seems to be saying that capitalism is inherently unequal and divisive. Yet, his modal use also appears to suggest that because there is this division, we have no choice but to try to escape being poor. However, this raises these interrelated questions: If everyone does try her/his best to work hard, can we all 'succeed'? In other words, why then are there those who are left behind? And, if there are always poor in a capitalist society, what would be the motivation if you felt you had no chance to become rich someday?

P3's daily routine of getting up every morning to go to work is derived from his socially mediated striving, based on the belief that his hard work will inevitably result in a sense of fulfillment at having a better life. This promise, rooted in a heretofore powerful ideological narrative of the 'American dream' borne of capitalism, as he states, is what helps enact his daily practices and belief. His everyday enactments driven by the capitalist dream illustrate Bakhtin's (1981) notion of the chronotope. Bakhtin argued "what is at issue here is that special connection between a man [*sic*] and all his actions, between every event of his life and the spatial-temporal world" (p. 167). It is this relationship that Bakhtin designated "as the adequacy, the direct proportionality of degrees of quality ('value') to spatial and temporal quantities ('dimension')" (p. 167). And in this manner, seen through a lens of a Bakhtinian chronotope, which would "invoke and enable a plot structure, characters or identities, and social and political worlds in which actions become dialogically meaningful, evaluated, and understandable in specific ways" (Blommaert, 2015, p. 109), it is clear P3 has found meaning in his life through a common societal chronotope. This also raises several questions: If this discourse narrative of motivation sustains and reinforces P3's daily actions and beliefs at this point in his life, what might happen if his hard work and efforts do not result in him becoming wealthy or having a better life someday? How then would he think of his efforts within the context of this common-sense belief? Would he abandon or reject this narrative of capitalism holding out the financial rewards of hard work or would he blame himself as a 'failure'?

This belief and accompanying social practice of working hard to get ahead has also been strongly connected to the familiar immigrant success story in American culture. The following participant's comment is in this vein, in which he credits capitalism for his family's success. Moreover, he also seems to equate capitalism with freedom and democracy:

P4: Well, I voted yes because capitalism so far has worked very well for me and my family. They immigrated here about 100 years ago from Italy and Ireland, all successfully started their own businesses. I just graduated from college. I'm here now on work (*in New York City*). Seems like it's going to be working out for me as well. I like the idea that you can just start an LLC

(*limited liability company*), get licensed to do anything, advertise anywhere, talk to anyone. You know, you have freedom. It's a beautiful thing. For the people who have been voting no and false, I question why because you can start a new life tomorrow and be whatever you dream of. If we didn't have capitalism, we may as well just be sitting and waiting for handouts from our government as they do as they please. Here, in capitalism, this free economy, it's a beautiful gift that our ancestors fought and died for. I think we need to make sure that we remember that and keep it.

There is a powerful appeal in the notion of having freedom – "a beautiful thing" as P4 calls it – in being able to reinvent oneself in following one's dreams. This has been a familiar theme in 20th-century American novels and films in which the main character refashions her or his life in the remaking of self in a society that not only enables this to happen, but also encourages those who have the desire and drive to do so. Thus, in this framing by P4, the enactments of the performative self are defined and decided within and by a capitalist-driven discourse. In this manner, his naming of capitalism as "a beautiful gift" suggests this economic system as one which we should be grateful to receive, with perhaps the implication that those who are critical of it are being ungrateful in their rejection. And inasmuch as this gift was ostensibly bequeathed to us by our ancestors, to question or attempt to change it approaches an almost heretical act in his discursive framing. This is indicated by his claim that "our ancestors fought and died for" capitalism, which also appears to conflate capitalism with democracy as a joint historical factor in the American War of Independence with Great Britain, which predated the Industrial Revolution. The discourse of a free (market) economy as the economic equivalent of a political democracy has been an integral element of both neoliberal discourses (e.g., Harvey, 2005; Hayek, 1944), and the Cold War discourses (mainly propagated by the US) suggesting any alternative to capitalism was only totalitarianism. This has long since been a powerful common-sense belief which was further entrenched in the Reagan and Thatcher era.

With these hegemonic narratives collocating constructs of 'freedom' and 'democracy' with capitalism defined by selected practices (e.g., 'free' to do what you want, work for whomever, buy and sell anywhere) that appeals to many whose sense of freedom has been partly shaped by these discourses, it is a perplexing challenge for those of us who are critical of capitalism. How can discursive notions of freedom (often framed as in P4's argument) be disentangled from a common-sense belief that capitalism is the best (or only) economic system allowing and enabling this freedom? Continuing in this vein, another Times Square participant draws upon this discourse:

P5: The reason capitalism works for me is it's the basis of a market economy. I've been in all sectors of our economy from government work, non-profit. I've worked for a large corporate organization. I'm 76 years old and now I work for myself. I'm a glass artist and I determine what kind of products I

> sell. I determine the price of the product. I have free rein over where I get the raw materials for my products. And I determine who I will sell it to. I don't advertise. My advertisement is the product line itself. People see what I've done and they would like me to do something for them. My wife and I … came to New York to visit with our grandson … and he is a good demonstration of capitalism too because he's a college graduate. [He and] his girlfriend are both working and they both have jobs. They're doing extremely well so capitalism is not a dirty word to me.

P5 employs another interrelated discourse of capitalism allowing a market to function freely. His opening comment seems to imply that market economies did not exist before capitalism, which as noted in Chapter 1, is not historically accurate since feudal and slave-based economies also used various forms of market mechanisms to enable people to determine prices and decide what to buy and sell. Nevertheless, the image of people freely choosing among sellers and traders in an open bustling marketplace has long been a visual theme in art, film, and television. These repeated visual representations of the market have been dialogically imbricated into a discourse that depicts capitalism as a 'free market', where one is able to buy and sell anything, including one's own labor. In this sense, perhaps it is besides the point that P5's historical characterization of capitalism is inaccurate, for he may be drawing upon these embedded representations. However, it is important to remember that markets are "a conceptual device that serves to hide and disguise those particular corporations that stand behind and work those markets to pursue their interests" (Wolff, 2016, p. 126).

How P5 portrays his glass artwork business could easily be a description of an independent artisan's enterprise in 16th-century feudal Europe. However, the discursive narrative of his professional life trajectory appears to define and identify his agentive sense of self almost as the embodiment of capitalism, as evidenced by his repeated use of first-pronoun active verb phrases – "I determine" and "I have free reign." This agentive self-identifying as a capitalist is an appealing narrative within the larger discourse of winners (people who can become capitalists) and losers (those who do not). And yet, going on the assumption he does not employ anyone else in his current work as a glass artist, the participant is not, and has never been a capitalist. In both his government and corporate sector work, he was an employee, having his surplus labor value he produced be appropriated and distributed by someone else. As an artist working on his own now, he is not using anyone else's surplus labor either. Despite these contradictions, his proud self-narrative stems from a naturalizing discourse about those who have 'succeeded' in any job they held as proof that the system rewards hard work and effort. This discourse in turn, as we have seen in this participant and others' interviews, has been enacted and mediated as viewed through their work-life practices and trajectories.

When P5 mentions that his grandson is "a good demonstration of capitalism", he further reiterates this discourse of agentive self and embodiment of the

system. Both Participants 4 and 5, in their imbuing the word 'capitalism' with keywords such as 'freedom' and 'democracy' demonstrate what Vološinov's (1973) work argued – that "the word has the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change" (p. 19). It is thus noteworthy that P5 concludes with "capitalism is not a dirty word to me". This seems to be an implied rebuttal that others have said so, in the sense that Bakhtin meant when he observed certain words are "overpopulated with the intentions of others" (p. 294). The fact that P5 has perceived that others have resemiotized capitalism to be a "dirty word" speaks to a kind of counter-hegemonic ideological undertone that the participant explicitly acknowledges in seeking to dismiss this. If capitalism enables freedom and free rein for all people to choose to live the life they wanted and worked for, why would it ever become a "dirty word" to anyone in this manner?

The next participant employs this discourse of being able to succeed in a capitalist society using race as the framing:

I: Does capitalism work for you?

P6: It does and I viewed it more of a racial standpoint, seeing how I come from bad parts of Brooklyn. I don't even want to tell you where, but I've strived to work hard to where I am now. I graduated high school, no problem. I graduated college, no problem. No kids. I don't smoke, don't have any criminal record, nothing. And if I can do it, I'm pretty sure there are other people that are gonna see this and do the same exact thing. It's not hard. I understand the city job isn't for everybody and neither is the American Dream, but when you put your mind to it, you'll realize it has more benefits in the end. It's better than sitting down on your parents' couch smoking weed for no apparent reason.

I: So what do you think capitalism is?

P6: Well, it's more of – the wealthier you are, the better off you are. And the poorer you are, the worse you are. That's pretty much how I've interpreted it over the years. And I'm not wealthy at all, but I'm making it work.

I: So even though you're not wealthy you're saying that capitalism – it does work for you?

P6: It does, because it's – being wealthy or poor is kind of more of a label. Anybody can be wealthy and anybody can be poor. Take the richest man right now, he can mess up in a gamble or something and lose his money, then he's right along with the poor people. And the person he lost it against can be a poor person and now be the wealthiest man. So it balances itself out.

I: OK. So you think capitalism is more of a balancing act.

P6: Yeah.

I: And no one really has a guarantee.

P6: Best way I could put it.

In rebutting the racializing and racist portrayals of urban poor (primarily Black and Latino) prevalent in mainstream media, P6 appears to dialogically engage with a dominant neoliberal discourse that was made famous by Ronald

Reagan's denunciation of "welfare queens" who were supposedly driving luxury automobiles to collect their government checks. Like Participant 5 who presented his life as a testament to hard work resulting in professional and material success, P6 also draws upon a similar narrative of lifting himself up by the proverbial bootstraps as indexed by his comment, "I'm making it work." In his belief in the power of his agentive self to make the system work for him so far, he taps into the discourse that has long exerted a powerful hold on many Americans until fairly recently. This discourse claims capitalism is the most equitable economic system in history in that it has given the best chance of material success to people willing to work for it. What this discourse ignores are the histories of the long struggles by workers to wrest concessions from capitalists to make a living wage. And although for a significant period of time in American history (from the early 19th century to the 1960s) real wages for US workers rose every decade (Wolff, 2016), since the 1970s, wages have stagnated and even declined. Yet even within that period of steadily rising wages, workers were still exploited. The economist David Ruccio explains thusly:

> In Marxian theory, the rate of exploitation (s/v) is the ratio of surplus-value (s) to the value of labor power (v). The value of labor power is, in turn, equal to the exchange-value per unit use-value (e), or price, of the commodities in the wage bundle (q), or the real wage. So, we have $v = e^*q$ and, in terms of rates of change, $\Delta v/v = \Delta e/e + \Delta q/q$. Mathematically, exploitation can increase (Marx referred to it as relative surplus-value) if the value of labor power is decreasing ($\Delta v/v$ is negative) even if real wages are going up ($\Delta q/q$ is positive) as long as the change in the price of wage commodities is negative ($\Delta e/e$) and its absolute value is greater than the change in real wages ($|\Delta e/e| > |\Delta q/q|$). For example, in terms of numbers: if real wages increase by 10 percent (workers are buying more things) but the prices of the items in the wage bundle (food, clothing, shelter) decrease by 20 percent, then the value of labor power (what capitalists have to pay to get access to the commodity labor power) will decrease by 10 percent. Voilà! Higher real wages can be (and, throughout much of the history of U.S. capitalism, have been) accompanied by rising exploitation.
>
> (Ruccio, 2016, August 17)

Yet from everyday perspective of being able to buy necessary goods and for some, perhaps eventually a modest home and car during the era of rising wages speaks to why certain common-sense beliefs continue to be held by people despite factual evidence to the contrary. However, P6 seems to contradict this view of a chance at upward mobility through hard work by seeming to suggest that unfortunate things happen despite one's efforts. The interviewer interprets his example of a rich man suddenly becoming poor in the follow-up questions that frame capitalism as a "balancing act" in which no one "has a guarantee" with which P6 agrees. Interestingly, this view is more aligned with the notions

of 'luck' and 'fate' as if capitalism were indeed a roll of the dice, rather a system that rewards those who work hard for it.

In addition to many of the participants collocating capitalism with the "market economy," "freedom," and "free enterprise," some define capitalism as "opportunity":

P7: I feel like, we, for better or for worse, we live in a country where opportunity exists to improve your life financially … I've been poor and I've been not poor, and I'm not poor now and that's a lot better than being poor. I'm a big believer in the power of a hard day's work, whatever that means to you. I'm also a believer in distribution of wealth, especially for those who need it the most. There are people who for any number of reasons can't function in our capitalist society and can't figure out a way to earn money and can't figure out a way to keep a roof over their heads. So clearly, just because you earn money doesn't mean you forget about everyone else around you. So, but it's mostly about the opportunity, the opportunity to earn and to have the ease of day-to-day life that comes with that. It's about opportunity … you know, the capitalist system in our society is one giant imperfect thing and it can always be tweaked and fixed and made better. But I think my main point is to say that compared to a lot of places on Earth, we still have a tremendous amount of opportunity. And I think as a society it might be important that we figure out ways to even the playing field a little bit because clearly things are a little out of control right now in terms of the distribution of wealth. However, opportunity still exists.

P8: Capitalism works, in my opinion, it works for me because it is opportunity. I just think that equal opportunity is everybody's equality. If we all have the same opportunity and the same opportunities to excel, what we do with those opportunities, um, that is our equality. And for me personally, the story that I was kind of asked to tell, my uh, my grandmother worked in a bar in Goose Bay, Labrador, and met my grandfather. And you know, my mother essentially immigrated to our country 60 years ago. So we were very, very poor and even though we grew up poor I had an opportunity to go to college. And you know, through a little bit of luck and hard work, you can make it in our country. So I think the bottom line, even if you fail, and I have done that twice also, if you just – the harder you paddle, the luckier you'll get. And I think that capitalism is what gives everybody the opportunity to excel. We all rise to our own level of ability. And without capitalism we wouldn't have that opportunity.

P9: I voted yes for capitalism. And the reason is capitalism is the largest opportunity for freedom of your own choice to work as hard as you want to work and to have at least a chance, not the guarantee, to live a very nice life.

I: How does it affect you personally? How does it work for you? How do you benefit from it?

P9: Well, I'm a guy who was born basically to a blue-collar family, and I had no assets at the time. I went to school, paid my way through school. And

today I'm a multimillionaire because I worked hard to create my own businesses with no capital. But I could create my own capital with basically what's called work. Working every day, seven days a week until you gain momentum. And you gain momentum for yourself and for your family. And so that opportunity affords itself – if you're willing to work, capitalism will work in your favor. The alternative of socialism and a dictatorship gives you no chance of doing this.

I: Do you mind if I ask you what kind of businesses you run?

P9: I have an engineering company and I have a steel company and we started with our own capital. We did not borrow any money from a bank. And what we did was, we said basically we would leverage all the money we earned as we earned it, put it back in the company, buy equipment and resources. And as a result, we've hired hundreds of people who now have jobs because we did that.

All three participants assign capitalism the agentive role in having created opportunity for them and society. As mediated through their narrated lived experiences, they each dialogically echo a long-standing discourse of the US as the 'land of opportunity' for those willing to work hard enough. P7, however, does acknowledge that capitalism has its flaws despite the abundant opportunities it offers. His argument stance can be characterized as the optimistic/optimal view of capitalism in which it needs the occasional tune-up or minor repair so that unequal wealth distribution does not get out of hand. This mechanistic method that sees the occasionally necessary adjustment of capitalism is the Keynesian approach, as discussed in Chapter 1. There is no need for an alternative or even a major overhaul as it were, but simply a few "tweaks" here and there as P7 says to ensure a fairer and more equitable society. P7's twinned discourses of optimal repair and opportunity ideologically function in interdiscursive ways, for this surface-level criticism of capitalism has become part of capitalism's own narrative about itself – not only the opportunity it offers to people, but also its own flexibility, confidence, and openness in inviting others the chance to make it even better. Thus the notion of being 'given' the opportunity by capitalism to improve one's life can be seen in this manner as then having the opportunity to 'give back' to the system in the form of maintenance and improvement ("fixed and made better" as P7 terms it).

P8 draws upon the presuppositions that capitalism equals opportunity, which is then equated with equality. Citing his own family as the classic immigrant story, once again there appears the discursive tension between the agentive efforts of one's hard work and capitalism being the agent in making lives better, without which there would be no chance. However, the conclusion seems to be the same – that one should be grateful for the opportunity given to us by capitalism. P9's views are also in this same vein, and which also echoes the aforementioned Participant 6's agreement with his interviewer that no one has a guarantee in a capitalist society despite his or her hard work. This lack of any guarantee to a "very nice life" appears to be the residual ongoing antagonism

toward anything smacking of a state socialism in which people were guaranteed to have a job for life, a place to live, and to a daily existence without unnecessary hunger or significant deprivation. It also ties into the prevailing neoliberal discourse that one has a choice to be motivated and work hard to succeed, which any (social safety net) guarantee will presumably extinguish. And if one chooses to work hard, only then will capitalism work in one's favor as P9 confidently asserts, providing his own professional success as evidence. Establishing capitalism as the bastion of opportunity, freedom of choice, and individual agency to act upon one's dreams, he mentions its ideological and historical nemesis: the dreaded "alternative of socialism and a dictatorship" (here neatly ideologically collocated) that forecloses choice and opportunity. Citing his own life narrative of having made it without bank loans or any extended family-provided or networked-financial capital, and who now employs hundreds of people, he draws upon the discourse of capitalist as the proverbial job creator in his self-presentation. He views his success through the prism of his own efforts in overcoming a blue-collar background through working seven days a week; however, there is no mention of all those who worked just as hard in his employ so that he and his business could succeed. This narrative omitting the contributions of these collective others helps to propagate the discourse of capitalists being the benevolent job creators, for whom once again, we should be grateful for our jobs.

Their country as proof that capitalism works

In this section, some of the participants interviewed in Times Square, New York and Cedar Rapids, Iowa argue that the long-term economic success of their country – the US – has been proof that capitalism works. They do so by using various argumentative frames including history as evidence – in particular the collapse of state-run socialist economies, the narrative of the 'American dream', and repeatedly using the word "freedom" as a synonym for capitalism. This Times Square participant begins by defining capitalism within the ideological binary frame that socialism as the alternative to capitalism has not worked and can never work because of our "human nature":

P10: I voted for capitalism. They asked me if it's working in my life and yes, it is.
I: How is capitalism working for you?
P10: Well, the alternative is socialism and if you look at how America is, I came from extreme poverty. And um, I had a child very young. I worked my way – worked and went to school. Now I practice anesthesia. I couldn't do that in a capitalist country. I couldn't do that in a lot of other places I've been as a missionary. I think capitalism works because it's based on merit. If you work hard, you can achieve what your goals are. I think a lot of people believe that socialism is the answer and that's kind of a mentality that if you look at the countries that are capitalist like Greece, they're in turmoil. They're bankrupt. We don't want to go that way. We should merit the people who work hard. There should be reward for that.

I: Sorry, you said if you look at countries like Greece that are capitalist –

P10: No, that are socialist, sorry. I'm sorry. They're more – the European Union, there's no – it's kind of a, like a salaried position versus an hourly position. If you get paid the same regardless of how much effort you work, a lot of human nature is not to work that hard 'cause I'm going to make the same anyway. I know that because I'm a manager too and I can see that hourly positions, a lot of times if you set a salary then at a certain rate, they'll go home early. They won't put in their full amount of times. Some people, they'll just have that in them. But I think if you reward people for hard work and effort, I think that it works in this country. Like I said I came from extreme poverty and I'm not in poverty anymore. You know, I worked my way out of it. And I think a lot of people have the mentality that they can't get out of it and that it's because of capitalism that they can't get out of it. And that's totally wrong. That's a wrong way of thinking.

I: So do you think that capitalism is, that it could be any better?

P10: Oh yeah, I do. I think if the government would stop putting all the regulations on these companies and let the market be – and stop bailing people out that are going to fail. If you don't know how to manage something then the end result is you fail. And that's OK to fail. You learn from that. You grow from that. You pick yourself up and you start over again. But I think to always enable people and have an entitlement mentality is a very, it's a deadly thing for what our country has always stood for. This is the land of opportunity and it's always been said – people come here because they know no matter what they were born into, they can get out of it if they work hard. And I don't want to lose that. That's what makes America, America.

P10 foregrounds the discourse of the 'American dream' – a longstanding national(ist) narrative about its proud culture of socioeconomic and material success for those who have worked hard for it. It is a phrase that is repeatedly used during US presidential elections by candidates running for office, by leaders in times of political and economic crises, and in the media that either celebrates it or questions if the dream has died. James Truslow Adams, in his *The Epic of America*, written in 1931 during the depths of the Great Depression, defined it thus:

> That dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement … It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position.
>
> (pp. 214–215)

As highlighted in the previous section, we see the discourse of opportunity is intertextualized throughout James Truslow Adams' narrative. This dream or idea of a society in which people are able to strive freely without the hindrance or chains of one's "birth or position" (with of course no acknowledgment of racial and/or gender bias and discrimination) is set within the frame of opportunity. This notion of opportunity – with no guarantees as other participants observed – is an integral element of the hegemonic common-sense belief that if one has not succeeded in American society, it is because she or he did not work to their highest innate capability to take full advantage of the opportunities that were openly available to them. And yet, it is important to remember that James Truslow Adams writes it is "a dream of social order," not an actual description of reality. Is it something that people can work together to strive for in creating a more equitable society in which merit and ability will really be valued over birth or position?

P10 shares this hegemonic narrative that the US is indeed the "land of opportunity" as she argues, disclosing that she was once poor but worked her way out of poverty, just as the previous participants mentioned escaping from working-class backgrounds. She is careful to implicitly point out that hers is not a case of exceptionalism. Instead, her success was possible because of her country. However, her or anyone's chance at success under capitalism, and by extension in her framing discourse, the country, are under threat from a common enemy – the government. This neoliberal discourse she adopts, which has become a common-sense belief in the last 35 years, has been largely disseminated by many US politicians. This discourse would seemingly contradict their own positions of power – for if government really did stop interfering with the market, would not the politicians' own authority be diminished?

This discourse of unfettered or pure capitalism is mediated through P10's comment that to "let the market be", the government must abandon corporate regulations and "stop bailing people out that are going to fail." It is not clear whether her choice of the word "people" here refers to those dependent on government assistance, or the corporations bailed out by the Obama Administration in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis or the collective both, but nevertheless, in her framing argument, pure capitalism is dialogically tied to the land of opportunity discourse. These two discourses are further interwoven with her third discourse – that of "human nature," which has been used to justify our supposedly inherent capitalist nature to compete, and/or to be lazy if there are no financially-driven incentives. Using this notion of capitalism as a naturalizing human motivation to succeed is set up by P10 to discredit socialism, which she frames as a "mentality" that can only lead to chaos and bankruptcy. This discourse she draws upon that socialism is antithetical to human nature has been in social circulation in the US since the beginnings of the Cold War in the late 1940s. In the ideological battles with the Soviet Union, it was important for US capitalism to present itself as being inherent in our (better) nature, rather than socialism, which was portrayed as being a totalitarian constraint on it. This seems to have shaped P10's discursive formations of capitalism as

merit-based opportunity versus socialism as an entitlement mentality. In this discourse, we can choose only between infinite agentive possibilities or a passive mindset. Framed in this way, it is not hard to see why capitalism seems more appealing.

The next participant explicitly mentions the American Dream in insisting that it "is not dead":

P11: I voted true. And you know, honestly I say capitalism can work. Capitalism has worked for me and my family. The only thing I can say is it just needs a couple of changes, that's all it really does. And like all economic systems, they're always going to have their failings. It's not some ideal that we can just throw out. I think if we work towards making it better, like trying to tweak it a little bit, I think it can work for everyone. I think it can benefit anybody who actually strives for the American Dream. Because honestly, the American Dream is not dead. I think it's still out there and people who want to strive for it, they can strive for it.

I: What are those tweaks that it needs?

P11: Well, the problem is, there isn't really any monitoring systems that are in place. Yeah there are, but some of these monitoring systems are a little lenient, just giving slaps on the wrist. They're not really heavy on like stopping certain catastrophes from happening. Like with the banking system, that really – there has been no changes whatsoever towards the banking system to prevent what would happen again in 2008. Something like that would help. Also, it would help not just the American people but any sort of people who are living in a capitalist society to be able to afford their needs.

P11 here also collocates capitalism with the American Dream, and by extension, throwing out capitalism involves abandoning both. Directly echoing P7's comment, P11 believes that capitalism just needs a few "tweaks" to work for everyone. This view held by P11 that capitalism can be carefully monitored and tweaked through stronger regulations of corporations to keep it running for everyone has long dominated the political and economic discourse, not only in the US and UK contexts, but also in other societies that have had capitalist economies since the 19th century. However, this raises the question of why the evident fear of changing the present system beyond these tweaks? Is it merely the lack of imagination or knowledge of any other possible alternative ways of organizing a system of economic production, distribution, and appropriation? There have of course been a plethora of ways suggested for the past 150 years at least.

Moreover, there are documented examples of alternative economies that exist around the world (e.g., Gibson-Graham, 2008; Gibson-Graham, Cameron, & Healey, 2013) that demonstrate capitalism is not the monolithic behemoth we must embrace. For example, the Mondragon Corporation in the Basque region of Spain has its workers involved in important decision-making on a democratic collective basis, and similarly in the US, Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland,

Ohio have common ownership and democratic decision-making at their workplaces (Wolff, 2016). Since these types of non-capitalist enterprises and economies (albeit on a smaller scale) have worked in practice, why then the repeated belief that capitalism just needs the occasional tune-up? Is it the fear of trying something radically different? Or is it merely the ideological denial or even perhaps fear that an alternative economy can actually exist in the present day, which in fact it has? Why does this apprehension take hold among people whose material and social interests are not being served in the present economy? Is this rooted in the anxiety of the possible loss of one's own freedom as well as the idea of freedom in society, which has been such a dominant thread throughout the discourses of capitalism, at least in the US context?

This discourse thread of 'freedom', which has also been part of the American dream narrative, is reinforced again here through this participant's imbricating it with capitalism:

P12: Well, it works for me for the sheer fact there's so much opportunity. You know what I mean? Really the question is opinionated so it's everyone's opinion on how it works for you. Um, it works for me because the opportunities are endless in a capitalistic society like the United States and it's the greatest society yet to date on the planet. So … it works for me all the way around I believe.

I: So what do you do? And how is the US the greatest society? What is it about capitalism, like what does capitalism do?

P12: What does it do? I mean it's not dictatorial. It's not dictatorial, for one. You have the ability to do just about whatever you want to do: start a business, work for someone till you retire, which is kind of dying itself. Or do your own thing basically, you know, self-employed.

In his framing argument of equating capitalism with freedom and opportunity, P12's use of the word "dictatorial" as capitalism's dreaded Other raises once again the specter of its ideological and historical nemesis stemming from the Russian Revolution and the ensuing Cold War. Due to the mainstream media and politicians' instillation of fear in the 1950s among the US populace, a common-sense belief held by many Americans (and perhaps other people around the world as well) views communism only as a dictatorship. This is not entirely inaccurate inasmuch as the governments of the Soviet Union and Maoist China in their historical policies and practices could be characterized in some ways as certainly "dictatorial." However, as I related in Chapter 1, when I explained to my students the characteristic features of capitalism – that only a select few make the important decisions on distributing and appropriating of surplus labor value (i.e., profits) produced by the many – one student quickly remarked, "that sounds like a dictatorship to me." So why has capitalism escaped from being labeled "dictatorial" as well?

Gramsci (1971) argued that within shared common-sense beliefs, there exists a nucleus of good sense – that which observes and acknowledges contradictions

that threaten to render the common-sense belief to become senseless and eventually discarded. However, he stressed that a philosophy of praxis must engage with common sense by basing itself first on it in order "to demonstrate that 'everyone' is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity" (pp. 330–331). In P12's common-sense argument that one has the ability to do whatever one wants in a free (anti-dictatorial) society, which would include working for a company until retirement age, he displays a dose of good sense by adding this "is kind of dying itself." This is in contrast to P10's argument that this very kind of guaranteed job and lifelong salary is damning evidence of socialism.

This tacit recognition of the upheavals in the US economy in which a person working for a company her entire working career is a near anomaly now indexes in some ways the shadow side of the notion of endless opportunities as P12 was exclaiming in the first part of his interview. This conveniently and paradoxically adds to the discourse of capitalism that a lifelong job with one company actually limits one's opportunity and freedom to pursue whatever dream or desire they wish to seek, as part of a possible justification for downsizing, layoffs, or outsourcing jobs overseas. This also conveniently absolves corporations from having any responsibility or loyalty to their workers who may have wanted to work there until their retirement age. Therein lies the illusion of everyone supposedly having the freedom to exercise one's labor power as a commodity to be sold to the highest bidder, for our labor power can only be realized if it is put into place by actually working (Marx, 1976). Opportunities only exist if there are jobs available.

An integral part of the American dream narrative imbricated within a discourse of capitalism is the success story of generations of immigrants and their descendants embracing honest hard work to make it in society:

I: So does capitalism work for you?

P13: Yes, it does. I actually voted yes because I think it's what makes this country great. I believe in capitalism. I believe in the right way of capitalism where it is for the benefit of everyone. I always say money is good. You can't live without it. And if you can help make money for others, that's even better. So I think the true essence of capitalism lies in making money the right way.

I: So how does it work for you? If you care to elaborate.

P13: OK. I work in the field of finance myself. So I used to help make money for others. I won't name the company I worked for. But I love finance. I love investments. I love mergers and acquisitions. That's what I've been doing for a long time now. For me personally, I'm the son of a first-generation immigrant so I think it's testimony that only in this country can you be successful for just part of hard work and honesty. I feel capitalism is a good word and I think it should be used in the right way. It has worked for me and my family so I'm pretty happy that way.

I: Do you think capitalism is being used in the right way today?

P13: I think the majority of people are following capitalism the right way. There's always bad fish in a pond. That's there in socialism. That's there in dictatorships. Those are there in democracies. Every system has its bad eggs. But I think overall that's what makes America great.

Again we see the view held by many Americans of the historically situated linkages between capitalism and their country's economic and material success. The attribution of the so-called American success story (both on an individual level and celebrating the national self-narrative) to the capitalist system itself ("it's what makes this country great"), rather than to people's efforts (both individual and collective) is an indication of how personal and communal agency is ideologically subordinated to a structural system seen and believed to be the ultimate agent. This belief then reinforces that it is this system alone that is almost religiously infallible in its traits ("I believe in capitalism") and thus venerated in its sole ability to make a country great. It is not the people who labored, sweated, and built up the economy and the country; it is the economic system itself that has made the country's success possible. As an almost quasi-religion in its own right, capitalism in P13's view, demands to be followed "the right way," which he uses four times in his comments. However, it is not clear from P13's comments how money is to be made in the right way.

When P13 states he believes those who are not "following capitalism the right way" are "bad fish in a pond," it is also not clear if this refers to those who are opposed to capitalism whether through their activist engagement calling for reform and even revolution, or those merely displaying passive resistance in rejecting an all-consuming 24/7 work ethic. Perhaps his characterization of "bad fish" refers to those taking advantage of the system through unethical and illegal practices such as insider trading instead of making money the right way for others. His claim that there are bad eggs in every system, be it capitalism, socialism, dictatorships, or democracies, is a familiar argument, which is namely that human nature is an ahistorical, timeless, eternal, unchanging fixed entity that has at its core, greed and baseness existing irrespective of the type of society or system in place. The participant draws upon the mediatized discourse that criminals are "rogue actors blamed for capitalism's cycles" (Wolff, 2012, p. 50). These "bad eggs" might include the so-called 'banksters' taking advantage of capitalism. This well-known portmanteau in the US dating back to the Great Depression era of the 1930s suggests that some bankers and high financiers behaving badly (i.e., not making money the right way) are in effect, gangsters. Or are these bad eggs only the ultra-wealthy such as billionaires who have the means to use every available tax loophole to avoid paying their share of taxes to the federal government (Scheiber & Cohen, 2015)? Or is it the case that their criminal activities "are … more effects than causes of capitalism's cycles" (Wolff, 2012, p. 50)? Where then are the checks and balances in capitalism that can address these so-called "bad eggs"? In blaming the bad eggs for crises, this

"perpetuates the ancient art of scapegoating, deflecting blame on convenient targets when in fact the system is the problem" (Wolff, 2012, p. 51).

As with most discourse narratives of the US being a great nation, one aspect includes the lament from some of how things are not the way they used to be. In this example, a participant in Cedar Rapids, Iowa indexes the fear and anxieties of a great country in slow decline due to unnecessary government interference, which has been a cornerstone of neoliberal discourse in the past 35 years:

P14: With the current regime we have right now, it's not working as well as I'd like it to because my expendable dollars are being confiscated more and more but overall capitalism is the way this country was uh, formed, the way this country is ran, the way this country um, is meant to be. We are a capitalist economy. We're not a socialist. We're not a Marxist. We're a capitalist economy.

I: And for you in your life, it's working?

P14: I am a high school graduate and a naval, a 4-year Navy veteran who never stepped foot on a college campus yet I have made pretty well in the 53 years I've lived on this Earth because hard work and dedication to God, country and family, and to do the right thing, you keep at it and it will work out for you. Absolutely. So capitalism, we've got to keep it going strong, keep it going strong. So yes, capitalism is the way to go. Socialism isn't. Marxism isn't. Communist isn't. And this current regime we have right now is taking us so socialist it's getting nuts. We've got to back it off, folks. Let's get back to reality. (*laughs*) I love this country. I love this country with all my heart. I've dedicated my life to it. God, country, family. Let's get back to values and we will prosper again. There's no doubt in my mind. There's some great people out there, some good young people out here too. We've got to keep ourselves focused. Don't be a sheep. Don't follow. Focus. Know what you want in life and go get it, and you will succeed.

Echoing the well-known neoliberal refrain that undue government interference inhibits and ultimately wrecks capitalism as it should work – that is, without constraints – P14 here also dialogically echoes the aforementioned 'dictatorship' discourse of capitalism's Other by calling the Obama Administration a "regime" in claiming it is socialist. In collocating capitalism with "God, country, family" (values which will make the economy prosperous again), he also sets up an agentive dichotomy by advising people not to be sheep, which presumably happens in a socialist regime. What they might be following is not clear, however, and seems to contradict his own belief in being faithful to God, country, and family. By grounding these values in the agentive frame of one's own hard work resulting in the assured ensuing success, P14 draws upon the cult of the individual so valorized in capitalist cultural discourse (e.g., novels, films, and television shows such as *Mad Men*) in dismissing those without

direction. What he presents has a powerful emotive appeal, one that has traditionally wrapped not only the American people in the flag, but also capitalism itself. If capitalism is synonymous, or rather imbricated with God, country, and family, how then to disentangle it from any of these values? How can one elaborate any meaningful critique of capitalism to appeal to those who are losing their jobs and facing foreclosures on their homes while still being patriotic? At the time of this writing, this is clearly illustrated with the recent Brexit vote by the UK and the popular appeal of Trump in his 2016 run for the US Presidency, in which nationalist discourses were employed and then taken up by disenfranchised workers to decry the ravages in their local communities by global capitalism.

His common-sense belief in "God, country, family" is not to be dismissed easily, for these values are important to many people around the world. One kernel of good sense may be when P14 says we need to get back to these values so "we will prosper again." However, this is in the context of his railing against the Obama "regime" insofar as he believes it is remaking the country and the economy as "socialist." This is the same stance that many people in the Tea Party in the US adopt in finding who is at fault for the economy's collapse. If he thought capitalism was truly working, it might seem there would already be plenty of prosperity, not a need to return to it. Like many others, his observation is accurate though. Indeed for the many who have directly experienced declining or stagnant wages, losing their jobs, and having their savings wiped out, the news that the economy is not working is not news to them at all. But for this participant, the diagnosis is not the economic system itself, but the government that needs to be changed.

It is also crucial that a critical public pedagogy – a philosophy of praxis – engage with a comment that is quite common among many, which P14 echoed: "I love this country with all my heart." One ideological legacy of the Cold War is that socialism is antithetical and indeed hostile to the very fabric (imagined or not) of American society. The result is that if one identifies as being a socialist, then one must be virulently anti-American. Loving one's country is one thing; however, how is it that capitalism becomes part of this love so that any suggestion of alternative economic arrangements and relations of production becomes threatening to a person's love of country? It is a mistake for those of us on the Left to dismiss this participant's patriotism, for it is shared by a good many people from his generational background and upbringing. As Stuart Hall (1988) argued in the wake of the defeat by Thatcher in the 1980s, many on the Left in the UK refused to "see that it is possible to connect with the ordinary feelings and experiences which people have in their everyday lives, and yet to articulate them progressively to a more advanced, modern form of social consciousness" (p. 171). Therefore, what is needed here in response to this participant is a way to engage on his (and many others') terrain of common-sense patriotism that country does not equal capitalism, loving your country does not necessarily mean you have to love capitalism, and if you do, that capitalism certainly does not love you back even if you have had a nice job your whole life – which in these times, has become increasingly a rarity.

"It's the only system that ever does work"

In this discourse thread, the participants in New York and London compare capitalism with the economies of current and former Communist Party-run countries. Not surprisingly, capitalism comes out ahead by certain standards they cite in the arguments. This participant compares North and South Korea in making his case for capitalism:

P15: I voted yes. I believe in capitalism. I think capitalism has brought more people out of poverty than any other system. You know, I guess you could just look historically. You can see what happened with the Soviet Union. You can see what happened in China under Mao. And now that they've gone to capitalism how much the people have gotten out of poverty. I've traveled to China a lot so I've seen it firsthand over the years. Just the quality of life, certain things, you know, most of the quality of life is better. Just Beijing, just a city like Beijing in the last 10 years, you can't – like what people were doing before, I mean I used to see horses carrying coal down the street. You don't do things like that anymore with technology and just the wealth that's going into these cities. People from the countryside that were dirt poor that are moving into the cities in Beijing, in Chengdu, Hong Kong, Shanghai, it's just the transformation in that city, that country is just remarkable. And I'm just using that as an example 'cause that was a Communist country. But even if you look at other countries that are so-called socialist or Communist, there's just – I'll give you an example. Why is North Korea the way it is and South Korea the way it is? South Korea is a capitalist society; North Korea is a communist society. North Koreans live in abject poverty. South Koreans have one of the longest life expectancies and one of the best standards of living in the world. In fact, it's funny, you can tell – and I was reading – I don't know if this was in *The Times, The Post* – where North Koreans on average are three inches shorter than South Koreans because of the nutrition. That's how bad it is. And why is that? It's because of the political system and economic system that they live in.

P15's appraisal of the successes of capitalism and the relative failures of the economic system labeled by him as "so-called socialist or Communist" is a popular common-sense approach that selectively employs empirical evidence – for example, comparative average heights and life expectancies of people living in South and North Korea – to prove that capitalism works. By choosing certain countries in his argument that capitalism lifts more people out of poverty than other economic systems, P15 is being factually correct when certain measures are applied to these countries. In the case of China's economic trajectory from the 1950s to the early 1980s onto its way to becoming a global financial power, capitalism has indeed brought several hundred million people (out of a population of 1.3 billion) into a 'middle class' level and lifestyle in the past 30 years. However, what is not included in P15's appraisal is that alongside the rise of

the new middle class in China (along with the entrenchment of the newly enriched Communist Party elites), there have been growing wealth disparities across the population evidenced by hundreds of millions more thrown into poverty while struggling to find jobs in urban areas. According to a working paper by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China is now one of the most unequal countries in the world (Talley, 2015). What is omitted from P15's framing of China's success, is that in adopting a state-run and party-controlled version of capitalism, the Chinese government has exacerbated social and political tensions among its populace stemming from these disparities.

Similarly, in his selective citing of these two countries in his argument, P15 ignores other countries such as Cuba, where education and healthcare for all have improved the majority of lives compared with previous conditions in pre-Castro Cuba. And while there is no denying that North Koreans on average indeed have shorter life-spans and body height than their counterparts in the South, this also raises again the issue of the common-sense belief that there is only one possible alternative to capitalism – that of a Communist Party-run economy that makes autocratic decisions without any democratic say by workers, and which inevitably leads to failure. This parallels how decisions are also made by a similarly select, self-appointed corporate board of directors in capitalist enterprises. However, when these capitalist enterprises collapse, as in the case of General Motors, they are deemed "too big to fail" and thus get bailed out by the government.

The next participant draws on both the agentive self-assertion of having made it on his own without help from anyone, and what he sees as the paucity of alternatives:

I: Does capitalism work for you?
P16: It does actually. I think it works for everybody.
I: And how do you think it works?
P16: It's less destructive and more productive than any other type of organized society there is.
I: And how does it work for you in particular?
P16: How does it work for me in particular? Well, if you have good habits and you work hard and you stay straight, you'll have a better life.
I: So you have a better life because of capitalism?
P16: Capitalism doesn't do anything for me; I do it for myself. I don't need somebody to tell me to do anything. I don't want anything from anybody. I'll rise on my own effort, as will everybody else. You know, a lot of people think the government should give them everything. Well, the government that gives you everything, it can take away everything.
I: OK, so you think capitalism works for you but you don't need it?
P16: You know, the premise is a little, kind of off. As a society we have to organize somehow. We're 350 million, wherever you're from. I mean what are our choices? Communism? Socialism? Capitalism? Capitalism sucks the least out of all of them, put it that way. That's probably the fairest.

> Everything else is worse. Where else do you want to go? Russia? Tehran? China? Cuba? North Korea, the workers' paradise? Maybe not. In my opinion, for whatever that's worth.

As he presents himself in the interview video, P16 enacts an identity that can be described as a gruff no-nonsense type of persona based on my reading of his greater New York area working-class accent and his noticeable facial expressions; e.g., a sardonic, skeptical, almost sneer-like movement of his mouth, eyes, and eyebrows while answering the interviewer's questions. His spoken pragmatic and visual performative elements enacted together can be characterized as 'an average Joe' persona with the good sense (in Gramsci's terminology, actually his common sense talking) to know when people are talking 'bullshit' or not. This is indexed by P16's repeated use of the pragmatic marker "you know" in making his case for capitalism. In addition to it being a textual monitor in crafting a thematically coherent argument and a social monitor to involve his interviewer, P16's "you know" also functions as a metalinguistic monitor. This third function is a crucial element of his average Joe performativity for by using "you know", P16 "informs the addressee about … his commitment to the truth of the proposition or judgement of the importance or value of what is being communicated" (Erman, 2001, p. 1339). This pragmatic marker is indicative of his plain-speaking manner, which is powerfully appealing in his performative common-sense articulation.

One can contest his argument that capitalism is "less destructive" than other societies and their economies. If what he means by "destructive", that is, economic policies and practices that lower material and living standards for the majority in a specific time-frame, then yes, capitalism in most instances has not been overly destructive for a given time period. However, if measured by the system's impact on the environment, then "less destructive" seems more problematic. There is also again the dominant neoliberal discourse that P16 draws upon in his claim that he alone has done things by himself, without anyone (the government) helping him. Declaring himself to be independent from anyone and anything, he echoes the neoliberal accusation that many people feel they are owed something by the government. His comment that "the government that gives you everything … can take away everything" is a dialogical echoing of Reagan's famous line that "government isn't the solution, government is the problem." The government (or its 'overreach' in regulating) has been a central ideological target of neoliberal discourse, which in fact belies the realities of the "*remaking and redeployment of the state* as the core agency that actively fabricates the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real and consequential" (Wacquant, 2012, p. 68, emphasis in original).

But perhaps the most powerful common-sense appeal by P16 is his dismissal of the historical attempts and experiments with different economic systems. As he points out, societies do have to organize in a coherent manner; the issue of course is how. And in this, he asks what the choices are, and then proceeds to

list only the familiar ones: "Communism? Socialism? Capitalism?" His ensuing answer to his own question, "Capitalism sucks the least out of all of them … everything else is worse", is indeed difficult to dispute in many ways. Framed in this manner, when it comes to being compared with the images some people had of the former Soviet Union with its long queues for food and other essential household goods (as popularly depicted in Western media for decades during the Cold War), capitalism does "suck the least" compared with them. But this common-sense thinking and framing in effect closes down (or at least attempts to close down) any meaningful discussion of how we might organize our resources, labor, and the production and distribution of surplus value in more effective and efficient ways truly benefiting a majority rather than a select minority. Although capitalist economies in the West have had beneficial aspects, it would appear that it is almost an anomaly of all humankind's endeavors that this particular way of doing things is fixed in stone without any possible revamping or alternating it in any way. P16's belief that capitalism sucks the least is a compelling street-smart argument stemming from a prevailing hegemonic discourse that sidesteps this very point.

Some of those interviewed have drawn upon the common-sense belief that capitalism and democracy are essentially one and the same. To the extent that these two systems have been intertwined historically, socially, and economically to varying degrees in the US and elsewhere, and despite their accompanying tensions at times, it would appear natural many people in the US would continue with this belief. However, one seeming paradox is when some see a democratically-elected government as being the main obstacle to the proper functioning of capitalism (as opposed to the other way around):

P17: I voted for capitalism. It's the only system that ever does work. It's the only system that brings any kind of fairness, any kind of opportunity. You know, any place on earth where you don't have capitalism, you may have equality, but you have misery to accompany the equality.

I: So, I know you wanted to comment on the vote. How do you feel about that?

P17: I think it's outrageous that it's even close, let alone that capitalism is losing. I mean, I think that's kind of reflected in what's going on in the country today. You know, that's why we're on this downhill slide, you know, because people don't appreciate the opportunities of capitalism. They would rather live in this world of entitlement and let supposedly somebody else pay. You know, somebody else, but sooner or later, you're going to run out of somebody elses.

I: So, you're saying that part of the reason we're in this economic slump is that people don't believe in capitalism and that they're trying to get too much from the government?

P17: Of course, they want to be completely reliant on the government. They want the government to make all kinds of decisions for them. Here in New York we have a mayor that wants to decide how much soda we can drink, you know, it's really getting that bad.

I: So, I haven't seen the front of the sign, you know, since this morning. What's the count at now?

P17: Well, when I voted, it was 409 against capitalism and 360-something for it, and as long as the attitude is like that, in this country, we're going to have, you know, major problems. I'm sure if you did the vote in Detroit which just went bankrupt it would probably be unanimous against capitalism, but meanwhile, when Detroit was the capital of capitalism and the auto industry was centered there and people believed in capitalism it was a bustling, very rich city. Now it's like what Hiroshima would have looked like if we were really mad.

I: Anything else you want to add?

P17: That's it. Vote for capitalism while you still can vote.

P17 has mediated the longstanding neoliberal discourse in blaming the economy's post-2008 recessionary slump ("we're on this downhill slide") on people being ungrateful for capitalism. It is not altogether clear if he includes everyone in the US or just those who he noted had voted that capitalism is not working for them at the Times Square installation. Employing the ideologically charged neoliberal keyword, "entitlement", P17 frames those who are critical of capitalism as also-rans or prototypical loafers who are dysfunctionally enabled by the government that constantly usurps their freedom of choice. Supposedly wanting the government "to make all kinds of decisions for them", these people are stripped of all agency in his narrative. This is an important tenet of neoliberal discourse – that by having an active and interventionist government that seeks to rein in capitalism, it denies people their own agency in exercising their freedom in making choices on their own. He refers to the New York City mayor at the time, Michael Bloomberg, and his proposal in 2012 to ban oversized soft drinks from being sold in the City for health and dietary reasons as a prime example of things "really getting that bad." His adoption of the neoliberal argument can be seen in his insistence that only by eliminating these constraints on our freedoms (the ability to choose soft drinks), can capitalism truly function as it was designed: to provide endless opportunities and fairness for all.

P17's oppositional framing (those against capitalism are losers) in effect closes down any space for dissent or critique of capitalism. He also reinforces this by framing capitalism in terms of an almost religious faith in his argument that when people believed in capitalism, Detroit was prosperous as a result. Comparing the urban decay of Detroit to the atomic bomb devastation of Hiroshima, it seems he blames both the city and the auto industry's financial and economic difficulties on people not having enough faith in capitalism, rather than the auto companies deciding to outsource thousands of manufacturing jobs directly leading to the city's decline. Finally, his admonition to "vote for capitalism while you still can vote" equates capitalism once again with democracy, which is somewhat ironic given his complaints about his own government.

This participant interviewed in London also relates capitalism with democracy in dismissing the former Communist countries' historical efforts to create an alternative economic system:

P18: The question hasn't got much oomph to it – "does it work for you?" I mean, it's like, but I was talking with the lady and … she says she works in the arts. I said do you, do you get funding for your work? Yes, she does. She gets it from capitalism. We pursued it further. What else could there be? She used the word 'alternative'. And I said, I asked her, "what *is* an alternative?" I won't be rude. And she said, she doesn't know if there's one yet but there could be one out there. The thing is that there isn't one at the moment. The only alternative there's been in the last, in my lifetime – thank goodness it's gone now – and in the last couple of hundred years – has been Communism, which is an abject failure. At the moment, there's no other alternative to capitalism as a way of running a political economy. It can be bad-sided by ignorant socialists like the recently – Labour Party – who, who played the idea that capitalism is all about greedy bankers and people wanting profits. They didn't at all talk about one of the most successful capitalists in recent years: Bill Gates, for example, who is giving and is giving and will continue to give billions away to people who need it, organizations who need it, countries who need it, through his capitalism. At the moment, there is nothing to, to, nothing that could be given, to be established as a political economy. To go on about profit and greedy bankers is infantile in the extreme. Infantile in the extreme. Wasn't it Churchill – I won't take away your time any longer – but wasn't it Churchill who said – it was democracy, "democracy is not a good way to run the country until you look at the alternatives." And until we come up with something better, then there is nothing better. Small scale, a dozen people living in a commune and growing everything they want and everything else, lovely, lovely, lovely, lovely. Good luck.

Along with several other participants, P18 dialogically adopts the authoritative discourse of Thatcherism in his recurring use of the word "alternative". He employs "alternative" to discredit the woman who disagreed with him and to point out how other attempts at constructing different economic arrangements have failed. In this manner, his use of "alternative" illustrates both Vološinov's (1973) observation that "a word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor" (p. 86), and Bakhtin's (1981) claim, "each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" (p. 293). The dialogical echoes of "alternative" have resonated in the ensuing 35 years since Thatcher began using this discourse to dismiss critics of her policies and practices. Particularly with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it has since attained a common-sense belief to answer the question – 'what alternatives are there to capitalism?' – none. And although the word "alternative" may have

begun to lose some of this context with the passage of time, it is nonetheless as populated as ever with ideological intentions and implications. This is evidenced by the 2016 US Presidential race in which Bernie Sanders, a candidate for the Democratic Party nomination, was labeled a 'socialist' by many in the media. However, rather than proposing any serious alternative to capitalism, he merely offered palliative measures to redress its more egregious wealth disparities.

Using a similar argument strategy as the previous participant, P18 also attempts to shut down any meaningful debate about capitalism by castigating critics of capitalism as "infantile" and assigning them the caricature of the proto-1960s hippie dropout living off the land. In addition to his dialogical adoption of Thatcherism and this 'just grow up' discourse, P18's third discourse is the narrative of 'caring' capitalism. This can be characterized as those 'good' capitalists who have reached the pinnacle of success and now want to give back to society. This differentiates them from the 'bad' capitalists who are seen as 'selfish' and thus 'uncaring'. Thus, the system itself escapes critical scrutiny since the evidence of those being 'good' can be seen as a testament to the system enabling first their financial accumulation, and then to recycle part of this wealth back to the public. Bill Gates, according to P18, falls into the good capitalist category because of his foundation's work.

His fourth discourse compares capitalism with democracy in its supposed lack of viable alternatives when he refers to Winston Churchill's speech on government in the House of Commons in 1947. Set in the burgeoning Cold War context amidst the challenges of home-based Left movements in the UK, Churchill actually said, "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." By explicitly citing a widely-cherished historical figure like Churchill, P18 cements his argument in the presentation of a sensible adult lecturing those too childlike in appreciating what we have.

Another familiar theme reiterated through a common-sense belief is that capitalism suits our human nature due to the latter's seemingly inviolable genetic makeup governing our needs and desires, whether base such as insatiable greed or more noble ones exemplified in imagination and creativity:

P19: I voted true because I think capitalism is good for everybody. There is no alternative system better than capitalism for the well-being of the people. And capitalism means money, if you don't have money, you don't have wealth, you don't have a rich society, a welfare society. It creates jobs. It is the only system that's suitable for human nature. It involves creativity, imagination, risk taking, investment. Everything we use, you look around us, this camera, your earphones, my reading glasses, my t-shirt, my shoes, my pen – everything we use, we owe to capitalism. Somebody thought about it. Somebody took the risk to invest money. Somebody innovated it. Somebody marketed it, and a lot of people earn money out of it, working

in the factories, businesses. The guy who sold me the reading glasses made money out of it because somebody thought about it. This is what capitalism's all about. And you cannot ask a rich, well-to-do society and be against money and capital. It's like you love omelets, but you hate eggs type-of-mentality, which I disagree with.

I: So, you think capitalism creates a prosperous society. And, in particular, you used the word welfare. What did you mean by that, because …

P19: Well, I meant well-being of people. Prosperity, that's what I meant by welfare. Not in the other meaning.

I: Are you talking more in an abstract, general sense or because, I mean, clearly like the United States is going through a, you know, depression really, and so capitalism maybe just isn't working here, and it is on a grander scale? Or what do you mean?

P19: Capitalism, free market economy, it all depends on expectations. People think they're going to be better off tomorrow than today, they will spend their money. Then you have a good economy, uh, prosperity. But, if people's expectations are lower, they think, they're not going to earn as much money six months from now, or they may get laid off six months from now, then they will not spend their money, then we go into a recession and recession leads to depression. The trend in capitalism is always upwards. Occasionally, you will have your small ups and downs periodical, but the general trend is always up. All of this wealth that we have around us, we owe to capitalism.

The idea that human nature is a fixed static entity or domain that has been genetically passed down to us since the emergence of the human species is an old and enduring myth that has served power and its interests well for centuries. Culture, history, evolution, and societal changes are all irrelevant in this ideological construct. In one ideological scenario, the portrayal of an unchanging human nature is almost always painted in dark colors or shades to justify humankind's more unsavory activities. For example, war happens because it is supposedly in our human nature to kill one another over territory, or there is greed in society because it is also in our nature to hoard and grab the lion's share of resources for ourselves at the expense of others. A fiercely competitive society which supposedly reflects our human nature has been used to legitimize capitalism through the discourse of winners and losers – if you are a loser, it is because you did not have the will to compete hard enough.

On the other hand, the apparently better aspects of human nature are also used to validate a dominant arrangement and its practices. For example, human nature according to P19 includes "creativity, imagination, risk taking, investment", all of which he uses to justify the only economic system suited for our nature and wellbeing. These four characteristics have been part of the discourse of capital entrepreneurialism widely disseminated via social media such as TED talks on YouTube and featured in bestsellers celebrating the current era of tech startups and the so-called 'sharing' economic models of Uber and AirBnB in

which everyday people can supposedly work for themselves. By suggesting capitalism is the natural reflection and outcome of our best human nature embodied in these character traits, P19 frames his Thatcherism discourse in pseudo-biological terms.

Throughout P19's comments though, there is again the ideological tension between attribution of agency versus the system for society's wealth. People's agency, which has been presented as a critical missing component in neoliberal discourse as discussed above, is given prominence here by P19 for how people have innovated, marketed, invested, as well as working hard at their jobs in a capitalist system enabling all of these to happen. However, in his concluding remark that all we have is due to capitalism, he in effect ultimately gives primacy to the system itself for bestowing wealth upon us rather than the people who have labored to create wealth for others.

Lastly, this participant interviewed in Times Square observes this about his life:

I: How does capitalism work for you?

P20: I don't think about this enough but I'm doing well. I'm here today in Times Square, one of the biggest consumer spectacles in the world, one of the most impressive consumer spectacles in the world. And I did that with money. I did that by buying stuff. I did that, well, because people work. My parents work. I sort of have a job. I have a TA fellowship but it is work. But I did that because I bought a bus ticket. I'm here because I bought breakfast this morning. I have people working for me, I suppose. People in the Europa Café over there, the guy who drove the bus. To the best of my understanding.

I: So your lifestyle is possible because of capitalism, is that what you're saying?

P20: I would say so. Fair or not, my lifestyle is definitely possible because of capitalism. The world I live in is possible because, seems possible, because of capitalism.

P20's concluding remark, "the world I live in is possible because, seems possible, because of capitalism" is an astute observation of his everyday life and the world he inhabits. He has looked around him and sees a community of people working in ways that enabled him to buy things such as food and travel fare, and in turn, both he and his parents also work in ways enabling others. His observation of the actions of others and his own framed through the discourse that our reality has been inescapably shaped by capitalism illustrates a certain discourse in action contextualized within his immediate site of engagement (Jones & Norris, 2005). His claim to a consumer agency – "I did that by buying stuff" – in creating the spectacle of Times Square speaks to how our lived identities have been shaped and enacted through the neoliberal discourse of consumer as primary identity in capitalist culture (Chun, 2016). And yet, his observation is incomplete, for in some ways it demonstrates how Stuart Hall (1996b) defined his version of false consciousness – that people have a grasp of only one or two elements of the larger whole not because they are deluded but

because they have access only to the available concepts and categories which they use to view and describe their world. For this participant, it seems he is observing solely what he sees as the dynamic energy of Times Square – the bustling commercial atmosphere of people busy doing their jobs amid the excitement of the space. He sees people working, which is true enough. If one sees a large number of people working in any vibrant societal space such as Times Square, then one might conclude that capitalism is indeed working.

But is there anything else for him beyond his immediate circumference of engagement to see what is happening on other scales (Jones, 2016)? What are some other categories and concepts that he could use to see what he has just described to the interviewer? In an almost parallel manner to the 1988 film by John Carpenter, *They Live* (discussed at length in Chapter 2), this participant describes only what he sees before wearing the metaphorical sunglasses, or rather, he has been socialized by the hegemonic cultural dynamics in looking at the world (Mirzoeff, 2015). It is in this way of looking that he can only imagine at this point that the world seems possible because of capitalism. The physical, material reality he observes is no less valid than another person's view; however, one might turn it around by asking, in what ways has the world been made *impossible* because of capitalism? And, how might an alternative world be made possible in the future if we move beyond capitalism?

Capitalism continually seeks to escape limits on its growth. However, its own discourses attempt to limit our imaginations on other worlds we can create, other worlds we can someday enact and embody so that our own lives can be made possible beyond capitalism. A dominant discourse, as we have seen in this chapter, is how it attempts to restrict our notions of agency so that it can only be enacted and recognized accordingly within its system. This discourse, along with the discourse that capitalism equals freedom and love of one's country, are interdiscursively connected to the discourse that capitalism is the only system that works, or if flawed at times, it is easily fixable. This will be further explored in its various framings by other participants in the next chapter.

5 Hegemonic discourses of capitalism
"Nothing is perfect"

It's flawed but it could be fixed

In this chapter, I continue the exploration of more common-sense beliefs about capitalism and the role it plays in people's lives. These commonly shared beliefs are rooted in historically, socially, culturally, politically, and materially lived contexts. These contexts in varying combinations and to different degrees of circumferences and scales have been mutually mediated and shaped by discourses of capitalism as they have evolved in the 20th century, particularly since the advent of the 1929 Great Depression, which was capitalism's greatest crisis until the 2007–2008 one. One such hegemonic discourse in constant circulation is the acknowledgment that capitalism is not perfect as it stands now, both from liberal and neoliberal ideologies. This notion of capitalism as flawed at times is framed as a machine suffering from periodic breakdowns. These consist of financial stock market collapses and ensuing mass unemployment, periods of inflation or stagflation, interest rate hikes, or any combination thereof.

This discourse and the accompanying material practices advocate only a tune-up of sorts. Much like any other mechanism that may malfunction occasionally, a careful maintenance and monitoring schedule is dutifully required to keep capitalism running smoothly. Following this analogy, it is almost as if capitalism requires a highly competent and responsive repairperson to provide the necessary attention and care to fix these breakdowns. As explained in Chapter 1, this is essentially the Keynesian approach to the economy in which the government's role is to regulate and rein in the excesses of capitalism from running amok – preventive cures as it were so that these crises could be avoided. This liberal discourse, that capitalism can be fixed, repaired, and monitored, became widely taken up during the Roosevelt Administration in the US during the 1930s and 1940s through its material enactments resulting in the social welfare state, and continued into the early 1970s with the Nixon Administration. The countervailing rival discourse, which has come to be known as the neoliberal one, is that capitalism would be perfectly fine were it not for the government causing it to malfunction through inept interference. The neoliberal discourse insists that if only the government would leave capitalism alone and let the free market work

as it was intended, then the economy would sort itself out, bringing even greater wealth to society.

These two tensions within a more encompassing discourse of capitalism – that is, not questioning capitalism itself, only its 'minor flaws', if any – illustrate what Susan Gal (1989) observed as "what is called dominant discourse is itself rarely monolithic, but rather a field of competition for power among elites" (p. 361). And in this manner, "our cognitions and speech-acts only become meaningful within certain pre-established discourses, which have different structurations that change over time" (Torfing, 1999, pp. 84–85). The pre-established discourse regarding whether capitalism is flawed or not, which is hegemonic in what it includes and excludes from consideration, will be evident in the ways in which the following participants take up this discourse reflecting their own lived experiences partly shaped by it. Their responses illustrate what Suzanne Scollon and Ron Scollon (Scollon & Scollon 2000) have argued, that social actors "must position themselves on an agentive cline from extreme fatalism (there is nothing a person can do about the future) to extreme agentivism (we can be whatever we wish to be)" (p. 2). Of course, as Scollon and Scollon caution, we should not "read social agency directly from the language itself" (p. 3); however, the participants' possible and potential agentive acts could be indexed from how they position themselves along this cline regarding how they view and narrate their roles within a capitalist society, and whether they think capitalism is fine as it is or flawed in some way.

The first participant featured in this chapter (labeled "P1" here, with subsequent participants numbered accordingly) was interviewed in Times Square, New York. He presents himself as the classic immigrant success story in the US, and compares it with the country he left:

P1: I'm a physician in this country. I came here when I was a young boy from India, grew up under a very socialistic system. I think capitalism works. It has its faults like everything else in life but I think for the vast majority of people it works. It's improved life in India in the last 20 years. We don't have starving people. We've improved the basic level of healthcare. We've improved basic sanitation and living standards. We have a long way to go under capitalism in India but it's a lot better today than it was when I was growing up. And I've been here in this country and capitalism has allowed us to have the highest standard of healthcare anywhere in the world. I have patients from around the world. Billionaires from Europe, the Middle East, they come here for healthcare. I think it's sad that the average American can sometimes not have basic healthcare so we do need to work on that.

As we have seen with other participants, there is again the clinal tension among articulated agencies in relation to capitalism. From his initial agentive subject position indexed by his first person pronoun use, P1 proceeds to employ the third person pronoun ("it") in reference to capitalism and then switches to the plural "we" in conjunction with the verb "improve" to describe life in India.

Is it capitalism that has improved life there or people themselves who have mitigated their conditions? Two things of note emerge from his stance that capitalism works. First, his assertion about higher living standards in India might be true to the extent there is a new middle class, which by some measures, comprises approximately 300 million people. However, as Arundhati Roy (2014) has pointed out in her book, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, along with this new middle class in India, there are also now over 800 million people living in poverty supporting them. Second, P1 reveals (perhaps inadvertently) a contradiction characteristic of capitalism in society. In the context of his claim that capitalism has improved healthcare in India, and that it "has allowed" (verb choice noted) Americans the highest standard of healthcare in the world, he illustrates how capitalism structures access to a healthcare that has become profit-driven in the US. Although healthcare facilities and medical personnel might be excellent, in the absence of universal medical coverage this system is highly stratified in terms of who can afford it in the US. The physician says as much when he knowingly remarks that the global elite select their healthcare in the US, but then admits that many Americans may not have any at all. In P1's unintentional illustration of capitalism working for those who can afford it, he exposes how the system strives to commodify our basic human needs.

This participant uses the discourse of capitalism with progressive aims:

P2: [Capitalism] works for me in my lifetime because it's what we have now. That doesn't mean that you don't want to work for things you believe in. As a progressive person, as a person who identifies myself as a progressive, I see that you can use the tool of capitalism to move in a progressive direction, towards, towards being able to help people … my opinion is that yes, because without people earning money, they can't give to support charities that they have. Of course the counterargument is just that fact that we need people to make money to support charities is a whole valid argument. There's never one answer to a question like this … You know, I could be the opposite, I could be a very conservative person. Obviously then capitalism fits into that lifestyle in general. And they don't – it's all about making money because then the money trickles down. It's the whole trickle down theory. So I think that this works if someone really thinks about it. I don't know whether, if it's a valid point to make it a competition or not, but that is America. So I think capitalism works for me in my personal life because what I do after I earn the money is I can then support things that I believe in. My lifestyle allows me to support things that I believe in. I'm not driven, I've never been driven by earning a lot of money. I don't need to have a lot of money to make my life complete. But the society I'm in, the capitalistic society I'm in, I'm able to use those aspects of my life that I earn to help support things I believe in.

P2 names himself as a progressive, which has varying meanings in the US political and historical context. On issues related to cultural politics, being a

progressive usually means supporting same-sex marriage, and racial and gender equality. Regarding matters of US foreign policy, however, there has often been a division among many self-identified progressives. Some progressives have unequivocally supported US military interventions since 2001, believing these wars have kept the country safer from international threats. Other progressives have adamantly opposed any military action (including drone strikes) which increased during the Obama administration. On the economic front, being a progressive often entails backing a range of Keynesian approaches to the systemic and endemic crises of capitalism. These can include increasing government expenditures on infrastructure to create more jobs; raising taxes on the wealthy to ensure enough revenue for public services and institutions, and greater regulation of corporations and banks to rein in their speculative investments that endanger the economy, which has often precipitated a financial crisis (much like the one in 2007–2008).

It is perhaps in this economic sense that P2 sees his progressivism at work – using "the tool of capitalism … towards being able to help people". However, rather than mentioning progressive action such as greater taxation on the rich for example, or substantially raising the federal minimum wage ($7.25 USD an hour) to help alleviate some of the financial burdens many working people in the service sector endure, he explicitly promotes charity as capitalism's preferred tool to help those most in need – the discourse of 'caring' capitalism as we have seen in the previous chapter. His common-sense belief that people need to make money in order to help others is grounded in the tradition of noblesse oblige in the US – the tacit assumption held by some that those who have much more have an implicit responsibility to share with those who have much less. However, this notion and practice of noblesse oblige of the elite has been transformed in the past 30 years. Today billionaires like Eli Broad and Bill Gates do their charity work in the form of privatized and profit-driven charter schools, which is part of the neoliberal drive and governance to shift public ownership and control of resources such as K-12 education to privately-held ones.

And yet, there is the kernel of Gramscian good sense in P2's acknowledgment that charity is needed in capitalism, and only made possible if there are enough wealthy people willing to donate. He further identifies himself as someone who is the opposite of a conservative. P2 frames capitalism as being aligned with a conservative lifestyle, defined as "all about making money" for it to "trickle down" to the rest of society. His stance that this conservative approach to capitalism is the ideologically opposite practice of directly giving to the less fortunate should be considered in the context of his next statement that capitalism works for him because it allows him a certain lifestyle to support the things he believes in. It is perhaps this stance that illustrates his progressivism and his attitude towards the society in which he lives: those who spread a part of their wealth around through charity are deemed preferable to those who would merely let their wealth trickle down to the rest of society. And indeed, this has been a core component of one strand in the American progressive tradition. If P2 had elaborated more on what he acknowledged was the counterargument of people donating to charities in the first place, this small but significant nucleus

of Gramscian good sense in his recognition might have been further developed. One terrain on which common-sense beliefs can be interrogated is why the giving of money to others less fortunate counts as being progressive. Dr. Martin Luther King's observation in this regard seems apt: "true compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring" (King, 1967).

A participant from the UK expresses a view in the similar vein:

P3: Well, in the end I voted that it doesn't work for me, that it's a false statement, that capitalism doesn't work for me. But it was a really tricky question for me. And I started thinking that I was going to say true. It's a question that I've thought a lot about. And the version of capitalism that I guess I've experienced does work if you look on an individual basis for people like me, people born into the Western society with White skin and an English accent, using the pound sterling, but I guess there's two issues with me being able to press 'yes' on that button. One is that I think the version of capitalism that we see around us here is not the true version of capitalism, and that really the capitalism that I am a fan of is one that I guess you would call 'servant capitalism', the idea that the people in charge of those capitalistic institutions would actually have a desire and a responsibility, recognize their responsibility to make that institution work as well for everybody as possible, and I think the problem is we don't have that expectation of capitalistic institutions. And so actually really greedy people get to run the organizations or at least even if they weren't greedy when they started, that paradigm sucks them in. And I think the other thing is, to find out whether you can answer true or false on whether capitalism works for you, it depends where you draw your circle of responsibility, like what 'me' is. And if you define 'me' as your individual self, then you can quite easily answer the question 'yes' or 'no' based on your experiences. If it relates to you and your family, and the people you've met and you can see, then it becomes slightly more complicated. But I guess the version of the world I'm hoping to be a part of and wanting to see come to fruition is a world where the 'me' that we draw, the circle around 'me' is actually one that includes everybody. So if it's not working for everybody, if it's not the model that works for the most amount of people, then we should change it. So that's a very long way to say that I started thinking maybe it does work, then I realized that the 'me' that I want to draw is one that includes everybody and therefore it doesn't work. And we need to find ways to change the expectations of the leadership.

There have been countless historical arguments among the Left on what constituted 'true' socialism or communism, with many factions arguing for one version over another. Indeed, in countries in which there were revolutions in the name of communism and subsequent Communist Party-run governments, people were either imprisoned or killed for not being 'true' believers in a

particular party's 'correct', i.e., 'true' version of communism. Interestingly, P3 dialogically echoes this historical discourse and practice of naming ideological heretics when he argues that the capitalism we see in society is "not the true version". For him, the best version of capitalism is what he terms "servant capitalism", adopting the discourse of a caring, 'progressive' capitalism, which the previous participant was employing. The notion of CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) and members of corporate Boards of Trustees serving the general public through their company is actually a prevalent one, as it almost always merits a mandatory mention in many Fortune 500 company mission statements and is usually a featured highlight in their annual reports. One aspect of corporations serving the public takes the form of voluntarism, which is sometimes demonstrated by the CEO (or as the participant says, "the people in charge of those capitalistic institutions") being photographed at a site of volunteer work such as a shelter or a literacy center.

However, Muehlebach (2011) argued that in the context of northern Italy, this culture of voluntarism has now been extended to the notion of everyone being good citizens, including the unemployed who are encouraged to 'volunteer' their services – essentially to work for free. As she observed, "voluntarism allows volunteers to stage what appears to be a nostalgic scene of social usefulness and public utility, one that uncannily approximates Fordist work in its public recognition, legal sanctioning, insurance, and rhythm and regularity" (p. 74). Both the unemployed and underemployed are encouraged to view this "unwaged activity" of voluntarism as "a currency through which they acquired some belonging and social utility" (p. 74).

P3's discourse of servant capitalism is very much aligned with this affective labor in which people strive, or rather 'volunteer' to do good things – to make capitalist institutions work more 'progressively' serving the larger good. To the extent that it does not, he supports change, but this change seems limited to the agentive acts solely on the part of those willing (or perhaps forced?) to do so. The structural aim and practice of capitalism has never been to be the servant of the people inasmuch as the system runs on the transfer of the surplus from the many to only the few. This much perhaps P3 tacitly acknowledges when he argues that a capitalism that is not serving the people leads to greed. His advocacy of a capitalism which would serve the people and the greater good is framed within another discourse – that of responsibility to the larger community beyond oneself. It is within this concluding good-sense discourse that P3 realizes that capitalism does not work for everyone. However, in resolving his ideological conflict, P3 does not seem to consider any real meaningful alternative, but rather views existing capitalism as not living up to its ideal – that of a caring, serving one.

Speaking from a very different lived experience, another participant also dialogically takes up the discourse of a community and responsibility, framed as returning to ethics:

P4: I had a chance to talk to Steve (Lambert) and I voted for capitalism even though I'm a member of the Delaware Tribe of Indians. We're based in

Oklahoma. We're originally from Manhattan. We've structured our society around community. And I feel that capitalism has an important part. The government has given us grants and allowances in order to build casinos. The money from the casinos then helps our tribal members as well as education in the university. It's helped me pay for my university. I feel that capitalism is a good thing. We started off on a good foot, but we ended up off a track somewhere. I think we need to re-analyze about what direction we're going and understand that it's not always about money. It's about taking care of our community and the people that are hurt, as well. It's good to make it, it's good to develop and make money, but I feel it's more important to help out the people that are hurt, to help bring them up because if this ship sinks, then we all go down, and I feel that capitalism is a great concept, but again, yeah, we're off the mark somewhere. We've gone off the tracks.

I (INTERVIEWER): What would you think would fix capitalism?

P4: I feel we need to get back to ethics. In a university, we're all taught about ethics and no matter what industry or anywhere. Our first class of introduction to any degree that we take, we learn ethics. And I feel when we start getting money thrown at us, we forget our ethics, we forget where we're from and where we came from, and I feel we need to remind ourselves where we came from and how we started because we weren't all started rich. We didn't all start with a lot of money. We all worked hard for – especially us artists. We all worked hard for the direction that we want to go. And just we need to remember, we need to get our ethics back. That's what I think.

I: I'm really curious about something. Feel free to engage me or not about this, I know it's kind of a contentious issue, but I know that there is an ideological argument where, you know, like, I've heard from native people saying, well, they kind of disagree with capitalism because, I mean, that was the foundation for this country, and, therefore, the genocide of the natives.

P4: Yeah, um, we deal with that a lot right now. There's a couple movements going on. I don't know, more up in Canada, that we're dealing with it. Both we've gone – I can talk about the past and a lot of us natives like to hold on to what's happened in the past, but we can't do that. We need to move onto the future, OK? In order for us as a community, Delaware tribe of Indians or any community, in order for us to survive, we need to play the game. We need to play the game because we're already gone past the mark. There's no way we can turn back, OK? But in order to play the game, we need to remember our values and that's what I mean about ethics … And I think that when you've got an abundance of money I think it's time to share. So I think there's got to be a middle. I think there's got to be a middle somewhere. And, that's what a lot of natives feel now. I mean, we're trying to play the game. We're trying to play the American capitalism game, but we're trying to do it with morals, and it's a difficult thing to do. It really is.

P4's observations on how his community has benefited from casinos raise an important question, and one that has been debated among many activists on the Left: To what extent should outsiders expect or even demand that a particular community (in this case, the Delaware Tribe of Indians) that has suffered occupation, genocide, dislocation, marginalization, and poverty for centuries reject or even stand up to the entreaties of present-day capitalism in the form of reparations consisting of financial income from casinos on their reservations? To those of us outside this community who have had significantly much more access to material resources throughout our lives, how do we as critical theorists and activists engage with this community's attempt to follow the ways of capitalism to survive? As P4 noted, it is difficult to do so following his community's values. Is it actually possible to play the "American capitalism game" as he put it, in any ethical and moral manner that adheres to community values, and if so, what does this form of capitalism look like? And if it is not possible, how can one engage in a dialogue that would prompt people to reconsider having to play the capitalism game, especially those who see it as the only way to survive?

P4's authoritative and internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin, 1981) display the conflicting discursive tensions between his community's lived traditions and capitalism's insistence on people playing the game if they want to thrive. On one hand, he seems to attribute capitalism's role in helping his community; however, he acknowledges those that capitalism has left behind. So, while accepting the hegemonic notion that capitalism works, he also takes up an opposing discourse grounded in cherishing both his lived identity and his community's embodied cultural principles. The friction is apparent in his framing of capitalism's drive for monetary accumulation as being antithetical to the community's ethical values. This systemic dilemma P4 poses in his internally persuasive discourse resonates with critiques of capitalism based on moral and/or religious frameworks (e.g., Pollack, 2015). Can there be a capitalism that is moral and just for everyone? And if not, how do people who follow their moral and/or religious faiths reconcile the religion-based critiques of capitalism articulated by some religious leaders such as Pope Francis (although others praise capitalism) with discourses equating capitalism with freedom, democracy, and hard work in order to play the game?

This participant in London elaborated on capitalism being flawed but still salvageable:

I: Why did you vote in favor (of capitalism)?

P5: The reason why I was telling that in every stage of life there is a certain way you look at the world. And I think capitalism, if you asked me 10 years ago, I would have voted very strongly for it, with a lot of conviction. But now when I think the market is like this, the emerging markets like India and China, whereby you are not – capitalism is very good but it's not equally divided. And I'm not blaming capitalism but there's a huge rift or contrast in the living standards of a lot of people because the rich are

getting richer in emerging markets. Capitalism is a fantastic concept in Western established countries who are already prosperous – America, Canada, or whatever. But certain countries like Brazil, India, China, the contrast because of capitalism is growing more, uh, in the lifestyles of the normal people, common people. So I wish there was kind of a nice mixture somewhere but, in an ideal world, but that might not happen, so. But compared to other concepts, living standards and everything, I would still vote for capitalism, but I wish it could be tweaked a bit, uh, to favor the common person. Capitalism seems to be favoring the rich and powerful, as globally.

I: What doesn't capitalism give us?

P5: Capitalism doesn't give us – if you want to put it – and that's a niche thing to say – uh, spiritual, uh, satisfaction. You're running after money all the time. You're always wanting things, not needing them. I think is a huge difference. You can have a pair of nice shoes but you always want to have another pair of Adidas luxurious trainers although you don't need them, but you always want them. You want a Rolls Royce. You don't need a Rolls Royce. You can't drive faster in London anyway. You always want to have those lovely things. So I think there's a kind of greed involved, which is not good.

I: Always needing, always –

P5: Yeah. Greed is good, like Gacko [referring to the character Gordon Gekko in the 1987 movie *Wall Street* directed by Oliver Stone] or whatever his name was, said. But greed can also be not very satisfying if it goes out of hand. So capitalism can sometimes encourage, encourages greed, which can maybe misdirect the younger generation. Uh, but of course, the reward – nowadays in this modern world – financial reward is the best reward, that's where people get motivation. A lot of people do that and I think that's what the world is sticking by at the moment so, but I'm not complaining. It's all good. It has to be refined, tweaked in a way so that everyone else benefits from it, not just a handful of people, not just a handful of companies as well. That's my perspective.

To what extent should history matter? Should it be foregrounded or at least referenced in any conversation about capitalism? Does history have to be mentioned at all? In his opening comments, P5 attempts to explain what he sees as the disparities of capitalism's performance in the so-called "emerging" markets of China and India, and in the already wealthy countries in the West. Yet, in ignoring somewhat the history of capitalism's developmental trajectories in Western countries such as the United States and Canada (the two examples he cites), as well as the struggles between labor and capital in those countries, he paradoxically cites his own history in his shift in thinking about capitalism. Again we see here the dynamic discursive tension between the participant's Gramscian common sense ("capitalism is very good") and good sense ("but it's not equally divided" and "seems to be favoring the rich and powerful").

P5's good sense in seeing the system for whom it is designed is, however, tempered and alternately shaped in some ways by his common-sense belief (which we have seen is shared by other participants) that capitalism could still be tweaked or adjusted to help those who have not benefited from it. The interviewer did not follow up on this comment, but instead asked the participant what capitalism does not give us. This steers the conversation in another direction and leads to another discourse the participant brings into play: the idea that capitalism is all about greed and rampant consumerism, and thus is antithetical to what he says is "spiritual satisfaction".

This framing of capitalism as an economic system that encourages and appeals to, or is even aligned with the supposedly base human nature as being inherently greedy is a familiar theme in justifying capitalism's existence. The participant is astute in pointing out the consumer culture that is now so prevalent in prosperous countries the world over in which endless spending on products is encouraged, and indeed exalted as proof of one's success. Indeed this was already predicted by Marx and Rosa Luxemburg in their analyses of the systemic problem of surplus goods and the need for them to be absorbed to maintain rates of profit. So in this sense, P5 seems to suggest that capitalism has to create a culture of greed in order to maintain itself and that it needs the endless expansion and production of consumer goods.

However, to what extent is the lack of resistance on the part of some people to acquiring these "lovely things", that is, expensive footwear and automobiles, an indication of one's inherent greed or the symptomatic display of the very culture that has been created? For example, much has been made of how some impoverished people living in inner city neighborhoods across the US wear expensive athletic footwear and apparel. They are sometimes framed in the media as being 'irresponsible' or 'reckless' in their spending because their low incomes (or lack thereof) do not justify the level of expense involved in these purchases. In addition to such framings, there is another important point to be made here, which is relevant to the discourse of greed P5 draws upon. It is what Stuart Hall (2011) noted as the neoliberal discursive figure of "the customer" (p. 715), which, in combination with the "taxpayer", is a role that the media promulgates as the only two available types of activity for engaged and responsible citizens. For those who are unemployed or are low-wage earners, they are typically viewed as not sharing the costs of society, and indeed seen as taking advantage of whatever meager benefits remain after the dismantlement of the social welfare state in the US and UK. Thus, the only role left for them is the customer – and in their performative acts of wearing high-priced apparel that might seem to some as 'inappropriate' given their low socioeconomic status, they are in effect showing that they too belong to the community in their role of active customers purchasing brand-name goods.

This London participant believes that capitalism can work only if reined in properly:

P6: I voted and in terms of today I've put false. Capitalism, capitalism as we stand currently isn't doing very well for us.

I: OK. Does it work for you in your life?

P6: It can work. Capitalism, when it's for the majority, when it's for the benefit of the masses rather than the few, it can be a brilliant thing. When capitalism has a degree of regulation, that it keeps it under control, allows for innovation, allows for innovative business ideas, um, for the benefit, that benefits the masses, that's a wonderful thing. When the actual benefits of capitalism are for the few, for the employers, and the workers, the ill, the disenfranchised, the minorities start receiving the short end of it, then no, it's not a good thing. And that seems to be where things seem to be heading at the moment.

I: So the question was, does capitalism work for you? Can you not separate yourself from the totality of things?

P6: Capitalism can work for me. I just don't think that following the last election, it's not, the Tory model of capitalism is not working. Capitalism in itself, yes, yes. Capitalism can work for me. I voted no 'cause I voted in the context of where we stand right today at this moment in time.

I: Fantastic. So do you, do you think it can work but do you think it needs mediation, you said regulation –

P6: – Yes, it needs, responsible capitalism, regulated capitalism, capitalism which has the interests of the masses. We can with the NHS (National Health Service), do we have to privatize the whole thing or can we actually go in there and train people properly, if, you know, it was on the news today about outsourcing nurses at £2,000 a shift because that's the model and then we end up with the American model: the most expensive, inefficient um, health service in the world. That's not responsible capitalism in my book.

I: What do you think capitalism doesn't deliver?

P6: Um, Fairness. Well, what sometimes it ends up not delivering is fairness, peace of mind. It ends up with the situation we have at the moment – people feeling fearful, feeling under threat, uh, fear of losing their jobs, fear of losing their homes, fear of paying bedroom tax 'cause the disabled need an extra bedroom. So you know, at a negative level, yes, capitalism can empower, can motivate, um, can produce profits, but do those profits necessarily – are they spread around equally? Sometimes they are. Not always the case. If you look to the Scandinavian models, maybe there's a better model of capitalism that uh, happens up there.

The discourse that capitalism can be made to be more responsible only when well regulated is taken up by P6 throughout his argument. This discourse has based its ideological appeal mainly upon the historical period of the postwar era from the 1940s to early 1970s, during which capitalism seemed to be working for the majority of workers in the US and UK, evidenced in their high employment, rising wages, and access to consumer durables such as homes and automobiles. Since the neoliberal assault beginning in the 1970s however, this discourse was turned on its head – that capitalism would only work in the long

run for everyone if it were left alone – in its 'unfettered' or 'pure' (uncontaminated by regulatory measures) form.

P6 frames capitalism as not working when it is in its neoliberal form – "the Tory model" and works only when it adheres to the Keynesian model. However, even with this discursive notion of a responsible, i.e., regulated form of capitalism, he still does not think capitalism delivers fairness, nor does it bring "peace of mind" inasmuch as its profit-driven instability wreaks havoc on people's lives, making them fearful of losing their jobs and homes. How and why the idea that a capitalist economy can be remade and reined in to benefit the masses is important to explore since capitalism's fundamental characteristic is that it is a system designed otherwise. In addition, with the usage of the ideological adjective of "responsible" being collocated with capitalism, how does this help shape our views in accepting a 'better' version of capitalism? How did this notion of being responsible become detached from public-elected governance and assigned to a capitalist economy instead? The economist Richard Wolff (2012, 2016) has repeatedly pointed out that notwithstanding the good that has come out of Keynesian policies – the social welfare state mitigating the so-called 'excesses' of capitalism – reforming capitalism is only temporary because sooner or later, capital will reassert itself as it did with the advent of neoliberal regimes eliminating exactly those Keynesian policies. In the end, does capitalism ever cater to the interests of the masses?

Self-identifying with capitalism

In this section, the participants identify in various ways with capitalism in their lives and perceived social roles.

P7: I voted that capitalism is working, so I voted true. And why? OK, I think I have a little bit different perspective than probably many people do on capitalism. I'm an environmental engineer. I also have my MBA and I'm currently a furloughed federal employee. So I have a broad vision of what capitalism is and what it really means. For me, capitalism means that you are environmentally responsible, socially aware, and that you are financially profitable in our society. So you're really trying to advance the value of society as a whole. And if you just look at capitalism as the dollars that you're putting into your bank account, then um yeah, we would say that capitalism is failing because there's a small percentage of the population that's getting all the cookies so to speak. They're keeping all the money. But that's not capitalism. That's a skewed view of capitalism in my opinion. Yes, I believe people need to be productive members of society and with that how we decide to trade us with money, but at the same time we need to look at what we're doing to our environmental resources and what is the value that we're adding to the world as a whole and to the environment. And then also how are we advancing society, because all human beings are a part of society and a part of this whole world experience. So if you don't

> have the balance in all three of those areas, then you are not a true capitalist and you are not advancing. In my personal life, which was how the question was framed, um, I believe that my value as a federal employee is important. I work with a government agency and I think we do the best job we can to help people out when they need help the most. And I try to be socially responsible and participate in activities to advance society as a whole. And I think that I'm financially responsible for myself and for my family. And so I think that I've achieved that balance, um, for myself and I think capitalism is working. And it makes me really, really sad when I look around and see people who just put – equate capitalism to the financial and how big they can – how fat they can make their wallets.

In order to identify with an institution, an organization, a community, a culture, a system, a society, or any of the combination thereof in all their complex, interwoven instantiations, representations, and enactments, it seems at least one necessary part of this identification involves a projection of one's own desires or fantasies onto this landscape as seen through a variety of lenses. These include but are not limited to: making sense of one's life as it is narrated and shaped by a system; viewing and judging others who have either embraced or rejected this system as you define it; and remaking and recontextualizing the meaning(s) of the system to align with the imaginary that one replays to align or suit the sense of self. This can be said of any organized system and its institutions such as the nation-state in which the 'true' and 'patriotic' believers debate with others what has made the country great or what will make it great again.

In P7's case, this seems to apply to capitalism as well. Her stance, as indexed by her comment, "I have a broad vision of what capitalism is and what it really means," appears to be that of the fervent believer. For her, the meaning of capitalism includes being "environmentally responsible" and "socially aware". These attributes are usually not associated with the documented realities of many a global corporation and their practices worldwide. To be sure, she adds the element that no one can dispute is the primary aim of capitalism – "financially profitable". In this mix of reality and desired meanings, she in effect recasts capitalism as being something that is balancing all three in the name of advancing society. It does not matter in some ways that the first two have often conflicted with the last criterion. She almost contemptuously dismisses those who view capitalism as nothing more than the few "getting all the cookies" and "keeping all the money" by insisting this is not capitalism at all. For her, being a true capitalist entails embracing not only the financial but also the greater good.

She relates all this to her own identity enactments as a good citizen in society: holding down a job, saving money, and giving back to the community. Since she is a government employee rather than say, being a CEO or tech start-up entrepreneur, one question would be: how and why does she feel so committed to capitalism? This is not to denigrate or discredit her lived and work experiences, but rather to question why and how people in her position,

with no clear vested interest in capitalism, rush to name the true version of it when defending it against heretics. In other words, why has she become a disciple and a firm believer, with a strong desire to validate her desired imaginary of capitalism's essence? Has capitalism become a religion in a sense, so that it will be beyond reproach? Why is it threatening for people like her when others dispute their version of capitalism? This stance in some ways parallels the many internecine historical (and to some extent current) struggles within the Left as political parties have claimed the mantle of being 'true' Marxists or communists.

The next participant also sees his role serving the greater interests of society in the name of capitalism:

P8: I voted for capitalism and the reason I voted for it is because it's what pushes along what we call society, the economy and just the world at large. I own a business and without capitalism, we wouldn't have, you know, the important successes that we need to ensure that these people that work with me are living their livelihoods and also protecting their families and taking care of their children and taking care of their personal responsibilities. And if it wasn't for that entrepreneurial drive and spirit which is really the fundamentals of capitalism, I don't know if I want to know what that world would look like.

I: It sounds you run a pretty successful company where all your employees are really happy.

P8: I like to think so.

I: What kind of business do you run?

P8: I own a branding agency. I'm in partnership with a couple other guys.

I: Anything else you'd like to add?

P8: I just think that what you guys are doing here is fantastic. I think it's important to have a conversation and talk about this especially in this day and age where people are polarized and siloed into one area or another, I think it's important for us to just talk it out and maybe there is a point where we can bring a little bit more of a dialogue towards, you know, muting down the capitalistic police and bringing a little bit more liberalism to our community and our society.

I: One more thing, how do you feel about the votes out there right now?

P8: You know, I'm kind of surprised. I thought it would be skewing a little bit more towards capitalism, but as I see it, you know, capitalism to a lot of people doesn't work, and I think that, again, going back to polarization there is a small group of people who are taking advantage of that. I bring honesty to my capitalism through hard work and entrepreneurialism and building business and sharing. So, to a certain extent, I'm for it because it's brought positive attributes to my world and people around me. But, I could see that others have taken advantage of it and you see it right now with government and with big corporations, and I would be feeling the same way, too.

As with several previous participants, P8 attributes an active agency to capitalism in its granting people their livelihoods so that they can take care of their families and responsibilities. This hegemonic discourse of capitalism maintains it is the system itself that allows all this to happen, not the very people themselves who sell their labor everyday in producing the surplus wealth in society. If what the participant is claiming for capitalism, is it unique? Did feudalism also not allow people to take care of themselves and their families by giving serfs plots of land? Is "entrepreneurial drive and spirit", which P8 says is the essence of capitalism, the sole factor that "pushes along" society and the economy? Is this discourse of entrepreneurialism always limited to one person or can it also be taken up and enacted by a larger collective of workers deciding together to change something? Why is entrepreneurialism almost always defined as the agency of one, rather than the multitude?

Part of any common-sense narrative about running a successful company is that the employees are one big happy family, and P8 talking about his own workers is no exception. However, in popular culture, examples abound of dysfunctional workplaces where the employees are anything but happy. One example is the television show *The Office*, which was aired in the UK from 2001 to 2003 and then later was recast for an American audience from 2005 to 2013. The characters in both versions display discontent and dissatisfaction with how their workplace is run; indeed, this is part of the show's comic appeal and popularity. The popularity of both shows is perhaps a reflection of how workplace dynamics resonate with many.

Much like the previous participant, P8 makes the distinction between people like himself who are doing capitalism the right way and those who "have taken advantage of it", such as government and big corporations. His good sense is revealed in his observation that because of this, capitalism does not work for many people. By drawing this distinction, as many small company holders would, the participant sees the havoc wreaked by large corporations. His identity as an owner is one of an honest, hard-working, sharing, and thus caring one, which are traits usually not attributed to either government or global corporations these days in the popular imagination and discourse. In this sense, he might identify being the proverbial 'little guy' (gender noted) and not the problem as such.

In contrast, the following participant in London, who could also be viewed as the 'little guy', adamantly defines himself as a capitalist:

P9: I'm an actor by trade.
I: So tell us, does capitalism work for you?
P9: Well, I was just explaining … that I mean on the surface it does work for me. You know, I'm very part of the privileged elite. Definitely. But is it working for me ethically? No, I don't think it is. There's too great a gap between the rich and the poor, especially now. And, and also the Tory government coming into power and making massive cuts to welfare, it's quite cynical. And uh, no, capitalism doesn't work for me.

I: So you say you're one of the privileged.
P9: I am one of the privileged.
I: What do you mean by that?
P9: I'm able to do my art. I'm an artist essentially and that is, regardless of what you think, that's part of the privileged elite.
I: And where does the capitalism affect your life personally – I mean as an artist and an actor?
P9: Well, fuckin' hell, I mean, I'm a self-employed man so essentially I'm a capitalist. I'm self-employed, I have to do all the taxes myself. I've got to go out and get my own business. I've got to be my own business. Like, I mean I'm a capitalist, totally. I mean it's a walking contradiction really.

P9 presents a common-sense definition of a capitalist being a self-made person who runs her or his own individual business – in his case, selling his acting talents in the mold of the entrepreneur of the self (Foucault, 1988). Despite being against capitalism, he feels he is part of the "privileged elite" to the extent he is a working actor, which is indeed somewhat of a rarity in that approximately 90% of actors are unemployed at any given time (McMahon, 2012). However, the issue here is not if he is actually an elite member of society, but rather why he feels he is a capitalist measured by this criterion of being his own business – seeking employment as an actor (presumably he does not have a manager). As he rightfully points out, he needs to go out and find work. In this manner, how is he any different from any other person needing to sell her or his own labor commodity? By having to sell his labor as an actor in order to make a living, the participant is not a capitalist, but instead a worker.

Why is this distinction important? It matters because the ways in which people mediate through their self-identifications the various and conflicting definitions of a capitalist have critical implications for how we manage, co-construct, and enact our common-sense beliefs about capitalism in society. P9 objects to capitalism, especially how his government is implementing policies favoring the elite, but somehow identifies himself as being part of the elite simply because he is a working actor. Would it make a difference if he changed his self-identification from a capitalist to worker? For any shift in common-sense thinking, this question needs to be explored regarding who identifies with being a worker, as well as what counts as being a worker – is it only working in a factory, or for example, does teaching at a university count too?

If we use the criterion outlined in Chapter 1 delineating those who are in the position of determining how the surplus produced by employees is to be appropriated and distributed from those who are not in this position, then being a worker would include the overwhelming majority of us. This defined category of workers is far more encompassing than a category, for example, that traditionally views those who are without university degrees and/or doing primarily physical labor as being workers. The cultural shift from a discursive identification from a worker to being an entrepreneur has been well documented (e.g., Fisher & Gilbert, 2013; Foucault, 1988; Hall, 2011). We see this in

the discourses of the so-called 'sharing economy', with companies such as Uber presenting drivers as working for themselves in the entrepreneurial spirit. By encouraging drivers to identify as individual entrepreneurs (or as capitalists as P9 might term it) rather than workers, this discourse helps perpetuate further distancing from any identification of one's role as worker.

The next participant defines capitalism in a similar vein:

P10: I do a lot of branding and I'm very interested in word association and what words mean. And I think capitalism has somewhat of a negative brand association with it because people are, are confusing the word capitalism with greed. And this is the conversation I was having with your colleague. When people think of capitalism they think of these big multibillion-dollar companies that are out there creating war so they can sell their goods, manipulating the media to justify the war, making billions of dollars living very well, while the rest of us, the 99.9% of us have to struggle. But what about the other 99.9% of us that are deciding that we want to be able to have the freedom to start our own businesses and to try to have a better life for ourselves and our family? Nobody pays attention to that, and that's capitalism as well. Like the person who is in a Third World country who is creating a product and selling it, trading with people, that is capitalism. So you cannot say that capitalism is bad. If people choose to do bad with capitalism, that's bad. If they choose to support their families and make a living, that's good. But I would never ever just brand a word with one way because capitalism is a philosophy and what people choose to do with that is either good or bad, like anything in life. So that's my idea of it.

P10 appears to make a distinction between capitalism as she sees it practiced by global corporations in their choosing "to do bad" – resulting in what she suggests is a "negative brand association" – and the capitalism she views in everyday people making a living by selling and trading their products with others. The first version has been called corporate capitalism, to distinguish it from the proverbial 'mom and pop stores' that have traditionally been seen as good examples of small business capitalism. In the latter, ordinary people are able to sell and ply their trade in the free market, unfettered by powerful interests such as institutional investors and boards of trustees. This is what P10 frames as a "good" capitalism in which people are just trying to make a living and supporting their families. This is what separates them from those who are imbuing capitalism with "greed":

P10: OK … a lot of people, when they see capitalism, they're confusing capitalism with greed and they're forgetting about the other people that aren't greedy. And not everybody is greedy and not everybody is bad. I think a lot of people in this current world will get behind something and jump on the bandwagon without doing the digging or without stepping out and thinking about how it affects the rest of the world. And I think as long as the

> capitalism you're doing isn't hurting anybody or killing anybody, then why is it a bad thing? Like, you're here because of the hard work that your parents did, whether it failed or not, for 20 years, it put food on your table. I'm not saying that what I'm doing is easy but I'm able to do it and it's putting food on my table. So I'm not buying private jets and building arms, but it's still is the same thing.

P10 dialogically echoes a prominent discourse that emerged during the 2011 Occupy Movement, which argued that the main culprit was corporate capitalism working in conjunction with a government that abandoned the concerns of most people ("the 99.9%"). Some Occupy protestors I observed and interacted with during my involvement in the movement insisted that the capitalist system itself was not the problem. Instead, only some greedy individuals and certain corporations that were gaming the system were at fault. This particular view is reflected in P10's argument that distinguishes a capitalism that is not hurting or killing anyone from one that profits from death and destruction.

Is there such a thing as a good capitalism, one that does not involve greed and ruin? A good capitalism that allows people to start their own small business, to work hard to put food on their table and to have a better life? This narrative is something that has been traditionally promised to people in the US for several generations since the 19th century. Indeed, many people have benefited to varying degrees from exactly this type of capitalism in having their own business and achieving a middle-class lifestyle. To the extent that their small or family-owned businesses do not build and sell weapons of mass destruction, pollute the oceans, or significantly contribute to climate change, one can categorize them as good things. And to the extent that their small businesses enabled the owners to live a comfortable but not extravagant lifestyle (a modest-sized home, a car, and some savings in the bank), again, this is a good thing, as many would agree.

The main problem however is one of scale, both in its complex interconnections on the micro and macro level. On a micro level, for example, the owner of a small business may employ a few employees who are paid an hourly or weekly salary that is not commensurate with the surplus they produce for the owner, and who do not take part in the decision-making regarding how profits are to be divided up and shared, if at all. The familiar counter-argument to this of course is that the owner put up the necessary capital in renting or buying the space in which the store or business is located, purchasing the stock, equipment, and tools, and paying for advertisement, all of which are the means of production. Shouldn't an owner then solely reap the benefits from her or his investment of capital? As the participant argues:

> P10: What we're talking about now is running your own business and there is a great responsibility. A lot of times I will go without but I'll never let the people dependent on me go without. The bottom line is if you own the business, if you are the capitalist, you're the one who gets paid last and

> you're the one who suffers the most because the company needs to run and the employees need to be maintained because this is your baby. So capitalism is a great responsibility and the person who is the capitalist or the entrepreneur, if you're going to talk about it in that way, is the one who is probably gaining the most but the least, and has the bigger risk because at the end of the day, you're the one left with what's left and there might not be anything left.

Taken in isolation, this one example of an individual small business owner seems reasonable enough in terms of the effort and risk taken on by the owner. This is often framed as capitalism being "a great responsibility", in the sense that employees need to be taken care of by their employer, bills and creditors need to be paid on time, and so on. However, this notion of responsibility can be turned around. Although a business owner might have invested her capital, where does capital come from? It is generated from the surplus originally produced by workers, and it is also the workers who make it possible for the owner to recoup her investment above and beyond the original amount. Aren't then the workers responsible for the success of the business, no matter how small or large, and by extension, the owner(s)? Who is ultimately responsible for the success of any company? If the workers are indeed responsible for the success but are neither paid accordingly, nor allowed a say in how profits are shared, is that a good capitalism without greed? And if we view all these small businesses, not independently, but on a larger macro scale, at what point do their practices constitute good capitalism? After all, the Walmart Corporation started as a mom and pop store.

The State and capitalism not working together?

A primary neoliberal discourse has been that capitalism is hampered and eventually crippled by government interference in its attempts to regulate the 'free market' system. But it is not just capitalism that suffers; we who enjoy freedom in our society are also under attack. Our individual freedom is what is really at stake as Friedrich A. Hayek (1944) argued in his book, *The Road to Serfdom*, which was published during World War Two. Hayek warned that the most dangerous threat to our freedom was undue government meddling in re-engineering society through macro socioeconomic planning and policies. In arguing that the free market is the only tried and true mechanism for any free society, Hayek claimed "a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy" (p. 241). The following three participants all draw upon this Hayekian neoliberal discourse that unfettered capitalism is our only sure road to real freedom:

> P11: The question was 'does capitalism work for me?' And after talking with many of the people that are running this event, they equated capitalism with the current economic system that America is under right now, which I

do not believe those two things are equivalent. I think that capitalism is a completely free society unimpeded by government at all, where everyone is responsible for their own choices. All decisions and trade is fair. A capitalistic society, the government only has the role of protecting people and their private property. Other than that, the government is not involved. That is not at all the system that we're living under. The closest that comes to that would probably be Hong Kong. Now, I'm doing well in this system currently. I do not think this system is a great system. I think our current government is very, very – or our current economic system is very bad. There's a lot of crony capitalism going on with maybe the big corporations being in cahoots with the government. Again, that isn't capitalism. That isn't capitalism in its truest form. I agree with capitalism but I do not agree with the system that we have. Just because I'm doing well does not mean that it's a great system.

P12: The reason why I voted for capitalism because I think that right now in this country there's a hatred that's going on for the wrong – I think we're aiming our hatred for the wrong thing. First of all, we haven't had true capitalism in that last couple of decades so far. We've had what I call crony capitalism, meaning that the capitalism there is, the capitalism basically, there is a shadowy figure that's basically guaranteeing bailouts, guaranteeing side money, that's controlling the strings behind the scenes. See right now, back in the early days of the country you had true capitalism. You had true competition. You had a system where the government stayed out of the business arena. See, right now today, the reason why you had all the bailouts on Wall Street, you're having so much money being thrown away, you know, the President just gave 800 billion dollars for a bailout that really didn't stimulate anything. And that's because the government – but there's a perception that Americans have that the government is always going to bail everybody out, especially from the corporate standpoint … The government right now is in bed with corporate America. And the reason being why, is that some of them, because the role of government, the government has become a situation where the government is in everything.

P13: I enjoy the freedom that it gives, not feeling like the State is determining how I live my life. Capitalism for me has meant that I do an interesting job, a job that I feel challenges me as well. Um, I feel like in the future, in a couple of years' time, if I wanted to move into a different line of work I could do that easily, equally if I had a really good idea and wanted to set up my own business with some friends I could do that as well. And I feel like that freedom wouldn't necessarily be given to the same extent in a less capitalistic society.

All three participants draw upon the two intertwined themes that are the hallmarks of neoliberal discourse: first, freedom from the government and second, only a 'true' capitalism enables our freedom by making us responsible for our individual choices. This true capitalism is characterized as "a

completely free society" unconstrained from any government interference, as P11 argues. He uses the example of Hong Kong to illustrate his idea of this capitalist utopia in which "all decisions and trade is fair" and the government is not involved in our lives other than protecting us and our property. However, the recent Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong during the autumn of 2014, which I witnessed firsthand, actually highlighted the tensions and contradictions around this neoliberal narrative of a free capitalist society without government interference. The activists in the movement, which included not only students but also many workers that were facing financial pressures from exorbitant rents and soaring property prices, actually demanded greater local government involvement to provide a significant counterbalance to the international corporate interests in the region. Among other things, a primary call was for the people's right to democratically elect the governing Chief Executive to serve the interests of the populace rather than the cabal of private and corporate interests aligned with the Beijing government.

The Occupy Central movement in Hong Kong showed that if anything, it was not primarily the State determining how one lives her or his life, as P13 is so fearful of, but rather the very socioeconomic system and its relations that have had a material impact on many Hong Kongers in terms of future employment opportunities, affordable places to live, and the rising costs of education. In equating capitalism with freedom, these participants seem to be favoring a society in which people are able to do what they want: "everyone is responsible for their own choices" (P11), where there is only "true competition" (P12). However, this freedom already exists in the US where P11 and P12 were interviewed. For example, pharmaceutical corporations are now largely free from government regulation, and they are subsequently able to set whatever prices they see fit for their products. In one famous incident in 2015, Martin Shkreli, the owner of Turing Pharmaceuticals, bought the drug Daraprim, which is used to treat malaria and infections. He raised the drug's price overnight from $13.50 USD to $750 USD for each tablet. Although reviled by both the press and the public, he refused to lower the price. Yet, he was merely doing what the system allowed him to do – deciding freely, in the spirit of "true capitalism", to raise the price of a medication that malaria patients needed to survive. He had the power of choice, while the patients who needed to buy the drug did not.

This was actually an example of both the opposite and enactment of what has been called "crony capitalism", a phrase that both P11 and P12 use in describing what they see as the deviation from a supposedly true capitalism. There is the element of Gramscian good sense in their seemingly populist perception that their government is in bed with corporate America. The drug price hike happened because there was no government oversight or regulation of price increases, and thus can be seen as a tacit compliance with corporate interests. But it can also be viewed in their discursive frame of "true capitalism" in which a price of a commodity can be whatever it is in the 'free market' as long as there are buyers. And in this case, as Shkreli knew full well, there would be buyers since they had no choice but to purchase the drug in order to

live; hence his price hike of over 5,555%. Thus, there is no real "crony" or "true" capitalism in these participants' desired imagined utopia. Capitalism does whatever it has to in order to make and increase revenues and profits, with or without government aid or bailouts. If government is 'meddling', applying regulations, then capitalism finds ways to circumvent these or seeks to overturn them. If capitalism needs the government in times of its periodic and systemic crisis, then it demands a bailout – as the participants rightly observe – whenever it suits, and in the name of 'too big to fail'. Capitalism has it both ways.

"Nothing is perfect"

This last section of hegemonic common-sense discourses of capitalism serves as a bookend to the first section featured in the chapter in which the participants acknowledged the various flaws of capitalism but insisted these could be fixed. The last three participants presented here also draw in various ways upon the idea that although capitalism is far from ideal, it is unrealistic to expect anything in this world to be perfect and that other systems are far worse. As such, they discursively echo the famous maxim by Margaret Thatcher that "there is no alternative" inasmuch as the other alternative – state-run Communism – has collapsed and been consigned to the dustbin of history (e.g., the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries), or has become irrelevant (e.g., Cuba, North Korea), or has been transformed into capitalism (e.g., China).

This participant situates the capitalism of today as a progressive force with the consumer as an active agent in improving capitalism:

P14: Well, the idea that I guess capitalism, if you define it as the driving motive for profit, for money, and I don't think that really works. I think what does work is the version of capitalism that's about, like, progressing humans or just the world and everything. 'Cause there are companies that are actively making the decisions, not just to make money like McDonald's. It's terrible food for you. But there are companies that are trying to make a difference in a positive way. The problem is I find that even in the job I work right now, it attracts a lot of the other side, which is just all about money, and those are the people that are my bosses, unfortunately. But I think there's a better way to do things that fits in the mould of capitalism and, you know, buying and selling. I guess the focus is no longer money though. It's, it's something else. It's like helping everybody around you and just progressing everybody, not just yourself. And I think we're moving that way. And I think the big part of it is being an informed consumer, like buying things, that you know, not just buying because it's convenient or there, because it's a bigger ad that you saw. But actually doing the research and figuring out what is the best product that works for your lifestyle and deciding to do it like that.

I: So you think capitalism promotes things and ways of thinking that really aren't for the greater good?

P14: I think capitalism is mainly thought of for profit, at least historically, but I think that's changing. And it's changing because the consumers, the people who are buying, are realizing what's actually right or wrong. That's why I think it's going to all evolve into – 'cause everything's always evolving. They need consumers. They need people to buy their products. So if people stop buying McDonald's because it's terrible for you, they're going to evolve and actually be like, well, OK, let's make a good product, like organic or whatever, some healthy food for you, and try to sell it for the same price or have that similar model and it's going to evolve then – even against Monsanto, if people make informed decisions, like I'm not going to eat this, they need us! You know? But you have to make that decision on a daily basis otherwise it's just furthering the other side.

I: So you don't think capitalism is working right now but you think it has potential to work?

P14: Yeah, it's evolving. It's going to work. It's moving in the direction – I think the idea of it works, I just think the way it is right now isn't ideal for today's world.

The discourse of a progressively minded capitalism, in terms of its products designed to improve our lives for the better, is not new. As Thomas Frank (1997), Jim McGuigan (2009), and Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2006) have all argued, this consumer culture in which products are viewed as anti-corporate and not from sweatshops (e.g., Nike), or are healthier and more organic, originated from the so-called 'counterculture' of the 1960s. The cultural rebellion that took place in the US and the UK in the 1960s has driven consumer capitalism to new heights (and profits) with its advocacy of fair trade and healthier products (with higher price tags out of reach for many of the working poor). However, developing and selling these products having the cachet of being 'alternative' or 'progressive' "are hardly revolutionary ideas, and they certainly represent no threat to the capitalist system" (Heath & Potter, 2006, p. 4). In fact, as Heath and Potter noted, "if consumers are willing to pay more for shoes made by happy workers – or for eggs laid by happy chickens – then there is money to be made in bringing these goods to the market" (p. 4).

In rejecting the mass or mainstream products produced by corporations, such as McDonald's, the more progressive consumers (i.e., those having more disposable income to spend) in choosing what has been presented as 'non-mainstream' commodity goods may feel better about themselves. In doing so, they enact an agentive performative identity in thinking they are part of making "a difference in a positive way" by supporting these type of companies, and helping capitalism to evolve in "progressing everybody", as P14 claimed. In his argument frame, he presents a binary position in which a capitalism that is regressive in its pursuit of profits from harmful commodities (e.g., junk food) should be opposed by a progressive capitalism that perhaps profits only slightly less from more beneficial commodities that knowledgeable consumers want. Yet, this is still within what Guy Debord (1983) described as the "diffuse spectacle" – the display of "the

abundance of commodities, with the undisturbed development of modern capitalism" (p. 19). Thus, the consumer feels empowered in enacting an agentive identity in having the appearance of choice, for "each commodity considered in isolation is justified by an appeal to the grandeur of commodity production in general – a production for which the spectacle is an apologetic catalog" (p. 19). However, whether it is organic healthier food products or the junk food for the poor, they are both only "a succession of fragments … each of which naturally lacks any of the quality ascribed to the whole" (p. 19).

This forms part of the powerful narrative of a dynamic capitalism in which it not only works for the betterment of society, but actually also works in practice (unlike other alternatives that failed), and motivates people to get things done. As P15 argues:

P15: I voted true. I was really reluctant, but I voted true.
I: Why were you reluctant?
P15: Well, there are certain aspects of capitalism that I've always found probably aren't the best in the world. But it's kind of like that whole saying with like, democracy: democracy is the worst form of government except for all the other ones. And capitalism, in my opinion, is one of those ideas that works in practice. There are certain aspects of it that probably aren't as good. But as a whole, I think capitalism does inspire people to do what needs to be done.
I: So in particular, how – I mean as an individual – how does it work for you?
P15: Well, obviously I brought my camera. I looked at the camera. It's made in China. So capitalism has empowered someone to create a business, to actually create a low-end or cheaper electronics, assembles it in China, ships it over here and is able to sell it for a very, very low price, which at the end of the day as a consumer myself that's great. For the industry that used to be making cameras here in the States, it probably isn't as great? So there's pros and cons to every aspect of capitalism. On my end it's great. I'm able to afford luxuries, afford objects. But if I were a small business owner and I'm making the cameras or doing other objects or making other products, of course that's going to be very difficult for them to compete when you have, you know, other locations that can undercut them.

P15 uses his camera as an example of one of the main contradictions of capitalism: the product that brings him personal pleasure as a consumer by being an affordable luxury good also brings misery to others in terms of loss of domestic manufacturing jobs and small businesses. He draws attention to our agentive complicity as consumers: on the one hand, those who can afford such products, be they 'hip' and 'alternative' or seen as 'healthy' and thus 'progressive', can position themselves as those in the know, disdaining others who are conformists in their choices (never mind that these conformists may not have a choice in having to buy much cheaper, mass-produced food). However, on the other hand, as P15 points out, to what extent do we as consumers

purchasing these types of goods enable the very exodus of jobs, and the ensuing decline in employment, as companies keeps shifting labor costs to cheaper sources? This of course inevitably impacts us as consumers if our own wages stagnate, decline, or disappear. In this example of his camera, the participant, whether intentionally or not, in fact draws upon Marx's (1976) critique of commodity fetishism in which the economic and social relationships involved in the production of goods are obscured or masked when these are distributed and consumed. After this insight, however, he goes on to repeat a discourse that came into prominence during the Cold War:

I: Anything else you'd like to add?

P15: I mean I think capitalism has its place. Unfortunately, from my understanding of history, other types of formats probably haven't worked as well. You know, my common – just a little bit of background, sorry, I'm actually from Berkeley, California. So I have a lot of thoughts and ideas in my mind, you know. So that's why I'm very reluctant to say capitalism works. I wish there was a better system of government. I wish socialism could work but unfortunately in practice that's never been the case as far as I understand, and you know, it's one of those things, if you're living in a household and you have dishes in the sink, no one wants to really clean them because no one's really incentivized to really clean them until you have capitalism that comes around where you have individual ownership and responsibility, then that incentivizes everyone to actually take care of the responsibilities and they will clean the dishes because they own those dishes. So unfortunately that's why I say it's a necessary evil.

Pointing to history to prove his argument that alternatives to capitalism have failed, P15 draws upon the well-known ideological truism that socialism sounds great in theory but has never worked in practice. Using the example of a household in which dirty dishes in the sink need washing, but no one is willing to do the washing unless they (individually?) own them, he engages in what I call an 'analogical common sense'. In analogical common-sense making, people use analogies from everyday practices or situations to illustrate how they think a society works. In this case however, his analogical common sense is based on two false assumptions. The first assumption, which has been a common one for some time now, is that in a socialist household (society), no one wants to do any work since they'll be taken care of even if they do nothing. One only needs to look at the example of the Soviet Union and its massive state projects, in which people worked long hours, to see that this idea does not hold up to historical scrutiny. But more importantly, the discourse of laziness has morphed into the by-now familiar neoliberal one made popular by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in which supposed "welfare queens" somehow gamed the system to reap the social welfare state's benefits, thereby collecting state benefits undeservedly. In such a society, there are no incentives to work, a point which P15 highlights in his analogy with dirty dishes in the sink. This portrayal was

then justified to eliminate benefits so that people would supposedly be motivated to work. What was ignored of course was the fact they were on benefits because there were no jobs in the first place.

The second assumption underlying P15's common-sense analogy is that if the people in that household actually own the dirty dishes, only then will they wash them. In his version of capitalism, owning the dishes prompts the household members to take responsibility. However, to use the same analogy, in any capitalist mode of production, the workers do not own the 'dishes', but they still have to wash them if they want to get paid. The household members who do own the dishes (along with the actual house!) may help in washing them, but if there are other members who do not own any dishes, their very presence in the house means that they are there selling their labor power. So yes, P15 is correct in arguing that those who own the dishes have an incentive to keep them clean in order to realize their investment. But if everyone in the household owns and washes the dishes together, that is not capitalism; it is socialism.

That capitalism is "a necessary evil", as P15 maintains, is the flip side of the coin that nothing is perfect. The last participant in this chapter uses this argument to describe capitalism:

P16: I voted for capitalism working for me because it's not perfect – nothing is perfect – but at least I have the freedom to say it's not perfect. Whereas in communism for instance, you can't speak out against communism because people are told it's perfect and you can't say otherwise. So in that respect I think the freedom of being able to say how you feel is a good point as well. When things aren't going right with capitalism, one can speak out against it saying maybe we should do some changes, make it for the better. In communism – I use this as my main example because these are the two main comparisons between capitalism and communism. And in communism, it might not be working but people can't say it's not working because they're brainwashed into thinking it is working. Whereas with capitalism, there is some sort of brainwashing to some extent, but we have the freedom to speak out against it. If things aren't going right we say we don't agree with this. We had the poll tax, people spoke strongly against this and we had the freedom to ban it. We got rid of it. In communism, so much is going on that you can't change. And even now they're trying to tell people you have freedom. You can do this; you can do that. But they still can't do as much as what we can do here in the West with capitalism. So to me, it's a word meaning where you live as well. In societies like in Europe, it's a word which means freedom. In some countries, it's a word which means you don't have your freedom. And that's why it's a good word, capitalism. And it's up to you. It's up to the individual. If you want to work hard and you strive hard, you can be successful. At least we have opportunities here to do that. And I think they're realizing that now in communism as well because they held people back for so long – the wealth was not created in the country. People like in Russia for instance, or China now, they're

> having the freedom to be more entrepreneurial, now the country's becoming much wealthier, so they're realizing again that capitalism is the way forward. But and again, we have freedom. Lots of these countries don't have the freedom. And that I think is the most important thing rather than capitalism or it's the freedom of the country to be able to succeed and do what you want.

In employing a Cold War frame, with references to former and still nominally communist countries (e.g., China and North Korea), P16 conflates capitalism with freedom of speech. The ways in which capitalism and modern-day democracies in the West have been interconnected is beyond the scope of this chapter and book, but there are several points to be made here. One is that there are various systems of economic arrangements of production, appropriation, and distribution in democratic societies such as the US and UK. Capitalism is of course the dominant economic system but in fact it is not the only system in either country. Across the US for example, there are numerous worker cooperatives in which the workers themselves make the decisions on what to do with the surplus they have collectively produced. Contrary to those who insist it can never work, this is actually communism in practice. So it is not that capitalism has allowed our freedom of speech, since it exists along with other economic arrangements (albeit on much smaller scale). It is the democratic traditions and laws that have guaranteed our freedom to criticize capitalism. P16 has a point when he argues that freedom of speech is limited in communist states in that one cannot openly criticize the system and the party. However, this confuses an economic system known as 'communism' with the political-run state known as 'Communism'. Numerous authors have indeed argued that capitalism is incompatible with democracy (e.g., Wilson, 2009; Wolff, 2012; Wood, 1995), and that proponents of capitalism have worked throughout its history to actively subvert democracy when it was threatened. An example is the case of corporate lobbyists in the US helping to overturn regulations of which the majority of the population has voted in favor.

Yet P16 seems to admit this idea in a roundabout way when he says that capitalism is "a word meaning where you live as well – in some countries, it's a word which means you don't have your freedom." Using Russia and China as examples of newfound freedoms associated with capitalism – that is, the freedom to "be more entrepreneurial" (and to exploit as well) – he contrasts these countries with countries having democratic freedoms when he stresses again that "we" have freedom unlike theirs. His good sense perhaps emerges when he concludes that a societal freedom to be able to do what one wants is more important than capitalism. One of the discourses of capitalism has been that we can succeed and the sky is the limit if we work hard enough, yet its own history has proven otherwise.

In this chapter we have seen several interconnected discourses in dialogical circulation among the participants. One dominant one that is repeated throughout is the notion that capitalism as it exists now, is not in its pure,

unadulterated form. Thus it is flawed but one remedy is to simply let it be as it is meant to be – an unfettered capitalism that is uncompromised by needless government interference. This has been framed by several participants as a 'true' or 'good' capitalism versus a 'crony' or 'corporate' one. There is also another discursive variant of capitalism in its better form – that of a progressive one that serves and cares about the many. However, throughout these hegemonic discourses of capitalism embodied in the common-sense beliefs of the participants, we have seen traces of good-sense observations and acknowledgments by several participants about capitalism's excesses and inequalities. We will see this good sense more on display in the next chapter in which the participants that have benefited from capitalism and those who have not both express their opposition to it. Their meaning-making pathways in contesting the dominant discourses of capitalism offer possible ways to further develop these counter-hegemonic discourses so that one day they can become a new common sense.

6 Counter-hegemonic discourses
"Who gets all the money?"

> We could … say that the essential dominance of a particular class in society is maintained not only, although if necessary, by power, and not only, although always, by property. It is maintained also and inevitably by a lived culture: that saturation of habit, of experience, of outlook, from a very early age and continually renewed at so many stages of life, under definite pressures and within definite limits, so that what people come to think and feel is in large measure a reproduction of the deeply based social order which they may even in some respects think they oppose and indeed actually oppose.
>
> (Raymond Williams, 1989, p. 74)

Capitalism has worked for me but not for others

The participants featured in this chapter illustrate in various ways the insights of both Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams on how hegemonic discourses bring forth counter-discourses. Hegemony is never absolute nor does it last forever. Hegemonic discourses attempt to present themselves as not being ideological at all; rather these discourses insist they are merely presenting social realities as the natural state of order – *that's the way things are and have always been*. Numerous historical examples abound; one such example is that slavery in the US was entrenched for two centuries before a widespread abolitionist movement took hold among the population across the country. Hegemonic discourses supporting the institutional practices and profit-making of slavery were instrumental in constructing the notion of 'race' by creating invested ideologies and 'science' that attempted to prove the natural inferiority of certain 'races', all of which were used to justify the enslavement, torture, and death of African Americans. Eventually though, this hegemony of legitimizing slavery collapsed in the US, helped in part by the rise of counter-hegemonic discourses that underpinned the American Civil War.

As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the hegemonic discourses that are mediated, taken up, and co-constructed by the various participants all contain the seeds of good sense. No hegemonic discourse is ever monolithic. The participants featured in this first section here draw in various ways upon more pointed critiques and even condemnations of capitalism while also

acknowledging how some of them have benefited from the system while others have not. The first participant (P1) seems at first to embrace capitalism as she has accrued some of its benefits:

P1: I voted true.
I (INTERVIEWER): And why does capitalism work for you?
P1: Well, I'm a member of the middle class. I still have a disposable income so that I can do some investments on Wall Street … after they tanked after the meltdown, they came back up and they're doing pretty well for me. I'm a homeowner so I get a wonderful tax deduction against you know, my income so my taxable income is lower because of the way the law is structured. So it works for me. I can travel. I have a nice house. I live in a nice neighborhood, so it works. That's the focus here. It's not what I think about capitalism, not if I think that it's a great system or that it's not in trouble right now in our country. Just if it's working for me, and honestly, it is working for me.
I: Thanks very much.
P1: You don't want me to say more?
I: Do you have more to say?
P1: Yes, yes! If I was asked if it's the best system, I would say false. If I were being asked can we do better than this? I would say true. Too many, there's too much of a wealth disparity. The wealthy, what is it, the 1% of the 1% have most of the wealth, most of the power. Our democratic system is in peril in terms of who gets elected and why. And just right now we're putting a lot of money into a wall across the Mexican-United States border to keep people out who want to work here. There aren't enough jobs for people somehow to build the infrastructure in our country. Bridges are falling apart. Roads need rebuilding. What about the school situation? There's something that's out of rational sense here. There's a political party that is demanding that food stamps be cut to balance the budget. This is all wrong. I don't know how much of this is capitalism and how much of this is a failing democratic system.

Despite P1's self-identification as a member of an upper middle-class income bracket and its accompanying lifestyle, her observation about capitalism illustrates what Stuart Hall (1996a) argued regarding whether one's ideologies necessarily correspond to class – that one cannot assume someone's socioeconomic and class-based structural position(s) can predict their ideologies. If the interview had ended before P1 prompted the interviewer, one might have concluded that P1's ideology was indeed aligned with her class position in society. However, her ensuing response indicates her critical good-sense stances, reflecting a circumferential perspective beyond her own immediate status in society.

There are several dialogical discourses intertwined throughout both her common-sense and good-sense views of her society. In P1's belief that capitalism is working for her, this can be seen as reflecting both common sense and good

sense. Within the immediate context of her previous statements outlining her comfortable lifestyle afforded by her income and investments, one can argue that, capitalism is working, for her at least, is not reflective of a common-sense belief, but rather an obvious conclusion based on empirical evidence. In this contextual frame, clearly, capitalism has been working for her through a personal success narrative lens. Yet, an alternative argument is that this does indeed constitute a common-sense belief inasmuch as although the system has benefited her to some extent in terms of her resulting station in life (and others like her might agree), has she benefited as much as her surplus value she produced warranted? In other words, has her financial compensation been commensurate with the surplus she and her co-workers produced for her employer(s)?

However, what at first appears to be a coherent common-sense acceptance and acknowledgment of capitalism's benefits for those in her upper middle-class position, is rent asunder by the emergence of her good sense in her follow-up comments. Like several of the previous participants in Chapters 4 and 5, she takes up the discourse of the government as being part of the problem. Her view though is not the neoliberal one in which the government is interfering with capitalism and the free market; rather her framing argument of "who gets elected and why" has the implication that democracy is being sold to the highest bidder. Her final comment asking whether it is capitalism or democracy (or both) that is failing the general public is an excellent prompt for further discussion and debate on how these two systems have interrelated, interacted, facilitated and/or inhibited each other. In her good-sense appraisal of capitalism and the government, therein exist the possibilities of critical mobilization of others like her.

The next participant is also doing relatively well:

I: So how did you vote? Does capitalism work for you?
P2: I voted false.
I: Why?
P2: So capitalism, materially, I guess works for me because I am able to be in Times Square. I'm wearing clothes. I'm not hungry. I have shelter. All those things are like, in the checkboxes of life, I have all those things, sure. But I think one thing that's sometimes overlooked is how capitalism affects someone psychologically and just being in this environment you can see capitalism kind of basically attacking you at all times, with lights, with advertisements. And in that sense you don't really have control of your own mind sometimes because of how capitalism kind of infiltrates and makes you want things – not necessarily things. It also wants power, all that sort of – it makes it seems like you're an individual who's got to make it and, to do so, it's a zero-sum game and you got to put others down on your way up. And in that sense capitalism does not work for me as a system. Ethically I do not agree with it. Materially, yeah, I've benefited from it a lot. I probably inadvertently hurt other people on the way up, you know? And that's another thing capitalism does really well: it doesn't let

you know where did these clothes come from? How much did they get paid when they made these clothes? How does the system of exploitation kind of hide itself and make people vote true? Right I mean, it is true. It does work for them, people who say that. But I think in a lot of ways you become blind to certain things. You can't let all the lights get to you all the time. You can only let certain ones that you like, I guess. That's how capitalism works in some ways.

In his critique, P2 frames capitalism as an almost inescapable agentive force both psychologically and ideologically, and in this manner, dialogically echoing Guy Debord's (1983) *Society of the Spectacle*, a critique of capitalism as an all-encompassing, uncreative, and repetitive system. Referring to where the interview was taking place – Times Square, New York – as capitalism attacking us "with lights, with advertisements", P2's comment brings to mind Debord's observation that our societies present themselves now as "an immense accumulation of spectacles" (p. 5) reflecting capitalism's "uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue" (p. 24). In portraying capitalism in this hypnotic fashion, P2 also dialogically draws upon the discourse of ideological false consciousness featured in the films *The Matrix* and *They Live* (see Chapter 2). This raises again the issue regarding the extent to which our own agencies are informed, shaped, mediated, reinforced, and/or challenged by the structural demands of an economic system. What are the ways in which a capitalist society helps to create our desires for not only material things such as consumer products, but also power in its own material instantiations and enactments? Or do we have ways of resisting the adoption of a consumer cultural identity, that some like Participant 14 in the previous chapter were advocating as a progressive force for changing capitalist culture?

Likewise, in the hypercompetitive culture of capitalism, or as P2 calls it, "a zero-sum game," in which we have to compete against each other in order to sell the one commodity we possess – our labor power – do we have a choice not to step on others as we attempt to survive and prosper? Some may not have these choices due to the circumstances of their background, educational levels, and social networks. Importantly, P2 draws the connections between the material comforts some enjoy at the expense of others. His questions also raise another issue regarding product labels. In addressing why a consumer good sold in the US and marked as being 'Made in China' sometimes incites a nationalist-driven discourse backlash, we need to also consider why a product that is 'Made in America' instead invokes pride and perhaps reassuring comfort in its purchase by some American consumers. Perhaps this is what P2 was implicitly referring to in his comment that we can only let the lights we like get to us.

This participant draws on several aforementioned discourses in his critique:

P3: I voted true today after a bunch of floundering. And I voted that way because currently capitalism is working for me, inasmuch as I have a roof over my head and I can pursue my dreams or pursue happiness. But it was

> difficult because I understand that it doesn't work like that for everybody and that ideologically it's troubling because those who have all of, you know, hmm, how do I phrase this? I guess there are losers and winners in this system, and I think that's inherent in what capitalism stands for. And it has also become a certain kind of capitalism. It's corporate capitalism. It's capitalism in which the people who are making the most money are actually the people who handle money. And that's troubling to me. But inasmuch as the system is working for me, right now I feel fulfilled and happy with what I have. And I know that's not true for everybody, like I said. But in that case it is working for me. And I suppose you could divide it along the lines of, are you labor or are you using others' labor? And although I am labor currently, I feel that that works for me or that's fine for me and I have the potential to move up that hierarchy because of certain privileges that I had. But it's not true for everybody … I think that there is something about the incentive of moving up through the capitalist system that makes it at least keeps the wheels spinning. I don't know. I feel somehow that if everything was taken care of for me completely, I wouldn't be able to motivate myself to do great things, and maybe that's a glaring hole in humanity or something. But I don't know, it's hard to think outside of it, which I think is also the trouble because it's so engrained in our culture and our notion of individualism and our notion of freedom.

P3 references both the winners and losers discourse and the adjectival discourse of 'corporate' capitalism. Does the adjective "corporate" help to illuminate or obscure what present-day capitalism is in practice? Does this term serve in any way to distinguish that there are perhaps other, more desirable forms of capitalism? Or, is the term 'corporate' helpful in attempting to shed some light on how capitalism operates? This was essentially the argument Graham and Luke (2011) are making in their calling for the use of the term "corporatism" to more accurately describe capitalism in the 21st century. Interestingly, the participant here defines corporate capitalism as "the people who are making the most money are actually the people who handle money." Although the interviewer did not ask the participant to clarify P3's characterization, I am inferring here that he meant that those at the top of corporations with the highest salaries, be they the CEOs and/or Board of Directors, are the ones who make the decisions on what to do with the surplus value (profit) their employees have produced. However, in light of my definition of capitalism drawn on the work of several economists (Marx, 1976, Wolff, 2015, Wolff & Resnick, 2012) as discussed in Chapter 1, P3's definition is essentially the same, be it "corporate" capitalism or just 'capitalism' without any adjectival modifiers.

Although there are a multitude of revenue streams including the increasing reliance on financial investments, capitalism as a structure has not morphed into a "certain kind" as P3 argues. His observation that whether or not capitalism is working for everyone can be divided "along the lines of are you labor or are you using others' labor," is actually a compelling rebuttal to his own earlier

argument that capitalism has somehow entered into a new phase. In his clear explanation in everyday language of the division of labor in capitalism, P3 articulates a powerful counter-hegemonic response to the dominant neoliberal discourses of capitalism as the 'free market' or 'free enterprise' in which we are all supposedly free to make our own choices. In fact, he alludes to these discourses when he observes that notions of individualism and freedom are imbricated within cultural discourses enacting capitalist common-sense beliefs. And perhaps it is this notion of individualism and freedom that informs his feeling that despite self-identifying as labor, he still believes due to his background, he has the freedom to move up in the system. However, in acknowledging that this is not the case for everyone, he points out a long-standing powerful ideological appeal of capitalism (at least in the US): the prospect and incentive of moving up the social ladder, which echoes what the previous participant argued.

The next participant questions this discourse of freedom:

P4: I definitely have serious issues with living in a system that pretends people have freedom of choice in terms of taking jobs or moving from one market, you know, to another, when in reality we don't really have that freedom. And the capitalism that exists right now is really built on forcing people to do things that they would not do if they really felt that they had any freedom, whether that's there's just no jobs in your area and you can't afford to get up and move somewhere else. Or whether that means you have no say in how your job is run. You have no say in looking to negotiate your wage because there's a million other people that are looking for a job, ready to take your place. Yeah, it just seems the system that we have right now is built on a lot of myths and the older I get, the more I experience, the more I realize this system doesn't really work that well, um, yeah.

Here P4 contests a dominant discourse of capitalism in which our freedom is defined as the agentive ability for us to select from a seeming range of choices. In pointing out how workers have no option but to sell their labor power wherever it is needed, P4 draws upon not only historical critiques of political economy (e.g., Marx, 1976), but also recent trends in the US. For example, US cities that depended on numerous manufacturing jobs – Detroit being the most notable example – helped many workers to finally attain a decent standard of living during the postwar period of the late 1940s to early 1970s. Once those jobs disappeared, then what? Would these workers have been able to move overseas to find a similar job at a much lower salary, even if they had wanted to? P4 also uses the discursive frame of freedom in his astute observations regarding the workplace where democratic practices are largely non-existent, if at all, and of the systemic downward pressure on wages as capital seeks to maintain and increase its profits elsewhere. In doing so, he highlights the contradictions of the freedoms that capitalistic discourses promise and insist are inherent in its system.

He then goes on to relate his own lived experiences in society:

I: In your personal life does that carry over? Does capitalism not work for you on those levels? How does it affect you personally?

P4: Me personally, I mean I grew up being told if you work hard, you study hard, you follow the rules, you are a good person, that um, then opportunities will be open to you and whatever you end up doing you'll be doing OK at least. And since I've entered the workforce, I've found that's not really true at all. And the people I know for whom it is true are people who came from really privileged backgrounds. I mean I grew up working class. My parents, you know, didn't really get too much of an education. And I'm doing OK, but I could be doing a hell of a lot better … Most people I know who are even able to make ends meet aren't doing nearly as well as they think they should be doing and most of them have some major advantage. So my major advantage is I got to go to a really good school. Most people I know who didn't get to do that are even in worse situations than I'm in. Yeah, I don't really know if I'll ever fully be able to relax 'cause I've been feeling ever since I've entered the workforce that I'm always one disaster or one misfortune away from being in poverty. You know, I might be a little paranoid but I grew up poor. I'd rather not be like that again. I worked my ass off to get to the meager level of comfort I have right now. I really don't want to just end up, you know, back in that place later on in life.

Class has long been a taboo topic in US society. With the advent and celebration of identity politics in both mainstream culture and academia, the self-identifications of gender, race, sexuality, and ethnicity have all gained prominence in various discussions, debates, and scholarly explorations. It has been only recently with the 2011 Occupy Movement with its discourse of the 1% versus 99% that class identity has become more openly discussed in the US. Much has also been debated about the intersections among class, race, and gender, in which some have argued that by giving class a prominent role, it obscures the exploitation and oppressions based on gender and race. Related to this, Resnick and Wolff (2003) argued that "of course, class aspects interact with non-class aspects; power, property and consciousness interact with class. But that is no warrant for collapsing these differences into identities" (p. 20). As they pointed out, "indeed, analysis warrants precisely keeping them distinct so as to investigate their different interactions in different social settings" (p. 20).

Using Marx's class analysis in *Capital*, Resnick and Wolff (1987, 2002, 2003) use a singular definition of class: their "focus on the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus" (2003, p. 20) is aligned with the previous participant's division of either being labor or using someone's labor. So despite P4's educational background and his having worked hard at his jobs, he feels he is one misstep away from poverty. This speaks to the fact that like many others, he is not in a position to decide on how the surplus value he produces and creates for

his employer is appropriated and distributed to him and his fellow workers. Even with an Ivy League university degree and a so-called white-collar job, in this class analytic framework, he is still a member of the working class. P4's discursive self-indexing of his lived relations to capitalism refutes the discourse of abundant opportunities for those who work hard, and the promise of an upwardly striving middle class in the US.

The next participant was a high school student in Boston at the time she was interviewed:

P5: I haven't voted yet 'cause I'm still thinking. I mean I don't think capitalism – capitalism *can't* work for everybody because capitalism is dependent on social stratification, but, and also the idea that everyone has the potential – well, that everyone's motivated by the potential to move up but that can't, that can't be the reality for everybody because if everyone moves up, you no longer have that social structure. So you have to buy into the idea that it still exists even though it kind of like historically doesn't really like – moving up sort of exists and sort of doesn't. In terms of, like I guess like America, at least from like 20th century literature, we have a lot of people like, criticizing the so-called American Dream, which is that you have the opportunity to move up. And I have to say I agree with that. I think that you are largely limited by where you start out and that it's the exceptional few who do get to go somewhere else. I mean if you're OK with being where you are, then I guess it could work for everyone. But I know very few people who would be OK with still saying it was OK or somewhere worse or like, there's probably also people who wouldn't want to necessarily be at the top because in order to be at the top you couldn't possibly work proportionately for like, the amount of money you earn. It's hard to say whether capitalism works in my life because at this point I'm in high school. I don't, I don't support myself fully. I'm dependent on my parents. Whether I can say capitalism works for my parents, that's hard to say as well. My mom's a teacher, my dad's an electrical engineer. My dad worked at a company for thirteen years and then got laid off because he became overqualified and became too expensive. And I think, you know, things work out a lot better when you're younger because you have less experience; they can pay you less, you can keep a job for longer. And if you get to a certain point, sometimes you can stay there, sometimes you can't.

In extremely clear language, this high school student critically analyzes the systemic logic of capitalism. In her use of the term "social stratification", she points out the material practices that contradict the discourse of the American Dream potential available to anyone through hard work and effort. Her analysis references the class aspect of the system and its inherent built-in obstacles that give lie to the ideological promise of this 'upward mobility' that has been disseminated for so long in US society. She can perhaps be viewed as an example of the millennial generation who overwhelmingly supported the candidacy of

Senator Bernie Sanders during his 2016 Democratic primary run for the US Presidential nomination. Much was written in the media why so many young voters between the ages of 18 to 24 years old enthusiastically embraced Sanders' candidacy. He effectively ran on a platform calling for a democratic socialism modeled on other countries' taxing the wealthier at much higher rates such as Sweden and the Netherlands. This resonated not only with young people like P5, but also older voters.

But it is notable that P5, raised, as she notes, in an affluent suburban community, possesses the ample critical good sense questioning capitalism's promise of upward success. Part of this may be due to her witnessing her father's employment struggles. However, other people have witnessed or gone through similar struggles, yet take up alternative discourses; for example, blaming immigrants for taking jobs away or the government's interference with the 'free market'. Where did her good sense come from? Can her views be situated within the larger circumferential scale indicating a growing shared critical dissatisfaction with capitalism, as evidenced by the emergence of recent protest movements worldwide? If it is indeed the latter, then these insights she shares with her peers need to be explored further for how a critical public pedagogy can help mobilize the growing good sense among young people regarding how they see their future in a capitalist world, and what they might be able to do to change this world.

The following participant, interviewed in London, seems to hedge his bets when voting whether or not capitalism works for people. He draws upon a discourse of freedom:

I: Tell us, how did you vote?

P6: Uh, I'm afraid I cheated. I insisted on having two votes because I didn't want to vote nothing and I think capitalism works for us a bit in some ways and doesn't work for us in other ways. So I think some bits of it are great. I think some of the aspects of freedom are great but I think it needs to be a more – it needs the distribution of wealth, needs to be fairer spread. I think we'd have a better country and more people would be very happy if the wealth of the country was better spread.

I: What do you think capitalism doesn't fulfill?

P6: It doesn't share itself well enough. Uh, capitalism generates wealth through the freedom of the market because uh, that stays with the way that it's generated, which is so much about ownership of capital in the first place. So if you have capital, you can make capital. If there, if capital was spread out more evenly across with people, other people could make money and would have the chance to do the things that people with money do have to do. There's a huge amount of young people with energy and ideas out in the country that don't get a chance to see their ideas come to realization 'cause they can't get access to funds.

There has been a long historical discourse of capitalism being synonymous with freedom and democracy. It gained greater traction in Western countries,

particularly the US during the Cold War era, in the ideological war for global hegemony. Communism was framed as totalitarianism, and capitalism as the only system allowing us to live freely. Dialogical echoes can be found in P6's argument that some of the aspects of freedom associated capitalism are "great," although he does not elaborate beyond mentioning only "freedom of the market," in his taking up this hegemonic neoliberal discourse. In drawing upon this dominant discourse, as we have seen with other participants, P6 displays the complex and contradictory tensions between his common and good sense. Why has capitalism continued to be ideologically imbued with the discursive veneer of 'freedom'? Now that a country such as the People's Republic of China has changed to a more openly capitalist system, but without freedom of speech and the press, is its capitalism more totalitarian in nature while capitalism in the nominally democratic countries is somehow more free?

There are limits to the liberal and Keynesian critiques of capitalism, which P6 also employs here. His good sense in realizing a fairer distribution of wealth is needed is soon overlaid with the authoritative discourse approximating the liberal and Keynesian approaches to 'fixing' capitalism. At the government level, 'spreading the wealth around' would mean typical policy enactments such as increasing taxes on corporations and the wealthy so that a larger share of their annual incomes can go to supporting public social institutions such as schools, healthcare, infrastructure, and social security programs. However, as I argued before, there are two major problems with this approach. First, it is only a matter of time before these higher taxes and their resultant wealth 'redistributions' are rolled back, as we have seen on numerous occasions, most notably with the Reagan and Thatcher governments in the 1980s. The second issue is the way that Keynesian wealth redistribution has been restricted to only at a government policy level. Why has it not been practiced in the workplace itself, where the problem actually originates?

This issue of how wealth might be better distributed leads us to P6's next argument, which is about the "ownership of capital", He makes two claims in that "if you have capital, you can make capital" and "if capital was spread out more evenly across with people, other people could make money." His first claim appears to be ideologically justifying how capitalism operates, i.e., one only needs to have some capital in order to make it grow. This discourse again positions the capitalist as the one who takes the risks by investing capital in the first place, and thus has the right to reap any benefits (profit) thereafter. It ignores the role of workers in producing the capital in the first place but having no say in how those profits can be distributed back to them. However, his second claim seems to be more of a good-sense appreciation: if capital is more evenly spread (that is, if it is spread among workers who produced it themselves), then people could make money, and those making money would be the workers. P6's good sense observation is evident in that there are many young people with great ideas who usually do not have a chance to realize them due to lack of capital. Therein lies one of the main problems to address – who controls the access to capital in determining how this capital gets allocated back to the

populace? Is it the CEO or the Board of Directors? A party apparatchik far removed from the worksite? Or those democratically elected by the people who labored to produce the capital?

The last participant featured in this section, was also interviewed in London:

P7: I'm a therapist.
I: Fantastic. So you were wandering past today?
P7: Yes, wandering past by and … the word 'capitalism' in red caught my eye. Uh, and the question – Does it work for me? – uh, it's a big question. Um, but I can't answer it because I have been a product of capitalism, yet I think it's a one-trick pony, it's all exploitation. And in my humble opinion, it is down to the lottery of birth, uh, the concept of lottery of birth, where you were born, dictates your view of the very real definition of capitalism … yet my conundrum, personal conundrum if you'd like, is I cannot decide uh, whether capitalism works or it does not work. Perhaps it's down to uh, my not knowing more about capitalism how it works. But on the surface of it I just think it's down to exploitation – one group, uh, ruling over another. And uh, it's down to power and who owns the key, uh, to the universe, to planet Earth.

One important issue for critical and public pedagogy is the ways in which people may feel conflicted or confused about capitalism. The therapist's comment here is illustrative of this in his stated indecision if capitalism works or not. On one hand, he claims that he does not know enough in detail about the workings of capitalism; yet, he names an essential characteristic of it – the exploitation of one group by another. P7's admission highlights that sometimes people perceive themselves to be unqualified to criticize capitalism due to an apparent lack of economic knowledge, or perhaps because they have been immersed in it their entire lives so that a capitalist society feels 'normal'. In his book review of Frédéric Lordon's *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, Jason Read (2014) addresses this normalized immersion:

> The naturalization of the economy, its existence as self-evident natural laws, makes it difficult for us to hate it, to become indignant. To this assertion we could add that the more complicated and distant the causes of our desire are, the more likely we are to see ourselves as free, as autonomous. We remember the encounter, the love, that made a given song desirable or the case of food poisoning that made us hate a particular dish; these desires and joys are not opaque to us. In contrast to this, we do not think about the history of wage labor, the destruction of the commons and other alternatives that are the prehistory of our day-to-day struggle to find a job. Nor do we perceive the fluctuations and transformations of capital as anything other than facts of life. We fail to grasp the history and politics of the shaping of our desire. Money appears to us as the natural object of desire, because the historical conditions of its emergence exceed our memory.

> Wage labor appears to be the only way to realize our striving, because the structural conditions of its determination exceed our grasp. The affective economy of capitalism is one in which it is easier to become angry and grateful at the deviations, the cruel bosses and the benevolent philanthropists, while the structure itself, the fundamental relations of exploitation, are deemed too necessary, too natural, to merit indignation.
>
> (Read, 2014, December 9)

It is in this fashion that people would sometimes fail to see beyond their immediate circumference of everydayness, and/or be somewhat unsure when actually prompted to talk about capitalism. Yet although initially unsure, the more P7 discusses capitalism in response to a follow-up question by the interviewer, he generates further critical good-sense insights:

I: What do you think capitalism doesn't deliver to us as human beings maybe on an emotional level, on a spiritual level, can you tell me a little bit about that?

P7: Uh, it's a very vague question … your question it would be about, it would be down to capitalism, you see, the concept of individuality is actually from the West … in summary, through this process of this concept of, of individuality, capitalism became much more powerful because people were separated. Nobody knew their neighbors. There was no community. So because of this need to be individual, right? You look at this beautiful market. This is the epitome of what individuality stands for, yes? So what capitalism doesn't deliver is these individuals separated who are waking up and going to sleep extremely lonely, *desperate*, secretly yearning to get answers for these three questions and that is fundamentally – I will, I will sit here and I will pontificate this for 500 years to come, I will say this, every individual is desperate to know: Do you see me? Do you hear me? Does what I say matter to you? And it's not being met. Capitalism is ensuring that these three answers are never given, never met, so that capitalism can still thrive. What is capitalism is pushing in agendas: sale, sale, sale. How can you sell a person – you can't sell a group of people a uniform these days. You sell an individual a woolly idealism about being an individual. Yet if you take all these woolly idealisms of being individual, style, etc., put it all together, there's only so many genres you can come up with. So why do people get drunk? What do people do on this island? They get drunk. So does it work? I don't know because I'm still benefiting from capitalism. Because look! I'm walking around. I don't have to work today so I'm walking around having a look at vintage bags. You see? You see the conundrum? You see? 'Cause I'm living the capitalist life. I have tons of choices every day, but yet I have this yearning to meet other human beings on a, on a level that I can connect with, but I live in a city like London where I'll be lucky if I get one smile a week … the world has gone individual, individualistic in the sense that people have become terribly lonely … the very concept of saying hello to another human being, it no longer exists.

Again, despite the therapist's claim that he does not know much about how capitalism works, here he powerfully illustrates one of Marx's central theses about why capitalism is harmful to us not only in material terms (e.g., ever-increasing downward pressure on wages), but also just as importantly, in psychological and emotional ways. In his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx (1975) presented his theory of alienation, or more accurately, estrangement as translated from the German word '*entfremdung*'. He explained how we are alienated or estranged from our workplace. Ultimately, we become estranged from others and ourselves because the work we produce from our labor is taken away from us. Often, our attempts to suggest alternative ways of doing things at work are denied because we are usually told what to do. For the majority of workers toiling every day, they take little pleasure in the commodities they produce. But capitalist culture developed a workaround for this denial of our agentive actions and its implications for how we see ourselves and relate to others. Instead of us being the faceless mass of workers embroiled in thankless and meaningless jobs every day, our agency, as it has been fostered and encouraged by the dominant culture, has crystallized and enacted around the idea and practice of the consumer. Although we may not have much freedom or choice at the workplace in terms of important decisions affecting us and our fellow workers – be they wage salary increases, working conditions, and secure employment – our newfound agentive roles in having the 'freedom to choose' and buy a plethora and range of goods has now come to define us.

The therapist cites several factors aligned with this notion of alienation or estrangement in arguing that capitalism has created a culture in which our attempts to address the meaning in our lives are denied or relegated to the margins in favor of the consumption of luxury goods, such as a vintage bag or alcohol. In this respect, he is astute in his good-sense analysis of how the capitalist cult of the individual has been centered on consumption. We now define ourselves by the globally-known brands we buy, the clothes and apparel we display, the music we listen to, and the cars we drive (if we can afford it) that index our sense of performative selves (Chun, 2016). This is referenced in his observation that he is "living the capitalist life" and has "tons of choices" due to his fortunate station in life: he has a professional career and disposable income to buy whatever he wants. Yet, as he also observes, despite his living "the capitalist life", he echoes Marx's theory of alienation of how we become estranged from each other by noticing how few people actually connect with passersby in everyday life. The not-so-new normal under capitalism.

It's not working for me

In this penultimate section of the chapter, the participants express openly anti-capitalist views and sentiments. Using a number of discursive frames, each draws upon her or his own varied lived experiences and observations on the ways in which capitalism has failed or never worked for them. This participant, interviewed in Times Square, brilliantly articulates in blunt everyday language

the critical (i.e., Gramscian good sense) common sense of working people who are all too aware of how capitalism works:

P8: Capitalism does not work for me.
I: Why is it not working for you?
P8: For instance, my mother works in a company. She works all day. Sometimes she goes in on the weekends. Who gets all the money? We don't have any money. She's making all that money for somebody else who doesn't have to go in on the weekends.
I: So you think capitalism, it doesn't, I mean it's workers, like that money or profit is going to someone else?
P8: Yeah, anybody who work anywhere, they bust their ass making tons of money for who? Themselves? I don't know any rich people.

P8's description of what his mother has to go through in her life in order to provide for the means of their existence is simply one of the best characterizations in everyday language I have seen of capitalism. His powerful and succinct assessment of it – people "bust their ass" to make the money for someone else – is evidence that people can articulate their own effective counter-hegemonic replies to dominant discourses. P8's reply appears to rebut Kate Crehan's (2011) argument claiming that in Gramsci's view, "those who live the harsh realities of subordination, however capable they may be of everyday resistance, cannot … themselves come up with the coherent, effective counter-narratives necessary if the existing hegemony is to be overcome" (p. 275). This is clearly not someone who is in the throes of 'false consciousness', blinded by the ideologies of capitalism, but an "organic intellectual" (Gramsci, 1971) articulating a searing account of how capitalism fundamentally works in plain and uncompromising language. This example should give us potential directions for critical pedagogues to use in mobilizing the good-sense beliefs shared by many others. However, intellectuals who view themselves as critical pedagogues may not always be able to express these views as powerfully as this participant did in both intellectual and personally appealing ways. As Crehan (2011) noted, it is "their interaction with the subordinated and what Gramsci termed their 'feeling-passion' – in other words the raw experience of oppression – that educates the intellectuals" (p. 275). Indeed, this participant is not unique, of course, as many others have also expressed similar powerfully succinct critiques of capitalism, as seen in multiple video interviews posted and archived on social media sites. Such critiques form the new spaces of a critical public pedagogy.

Similar to Participant 8, this security guard interviewed in London also offers a concise appraisal of capitalism:

P9: I've been working here for the last 20 years. We look after the building security and whatever we need to do. I vote capitalism does not work for me because it have never benefit me and I haven't had any benefit from it. Because it's supposed to be working for everyone, but it only favors the

few but not the many. The only people I would say that got a benefit of it are people in financial institutions like bankers.

Gramsci (1971) observed that everyone is an intellectual but not all have the function of being an intellectual in society. There are of course socially and traditionally recognized categories of intellectuals; for example, scholars, teachers, writers, and pundits. However, "although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist" (p. 9). Furthermore,

> each man [*sic*] … outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a "philosopher" … he participates in a particular conception of the world … and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it.
>
> (p. 9)

As is evidenced by the case of these two participants, speaking in 'plain' everyday language as they distill capitalism into its essential features, these Gramscian organic intellectuals powerfully refute the prevailing hegemonic common-sense beliefs promulgated widely by many mainstream economists, academics, think tanks, journalists, public opinion-makers and others designated as 'intellectuals'.

Participants 8 and 9 articulate an effective good-sense rebuttal to those who claim capitalism can and does work for the majority; indeed, these two participants are not buying the dominant narrative that has been in place for quite some time. As stressed throughout this book, hegemonic discourses do not stay dominant forever, and just as importantly, are never complete in their dominance. Seeing and assessing the realities around them, people can adjust what they see so it fits in with hegemonic discourses in social circulation, thus validating them. Or they may come to realize their own understandings of their lived social realities refute dominant narratives. As Gramsci (1971) argued,

> critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political "hegemonies" and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality.
>
> (p. 333)

These two participants have demonstratively worked out their own counter-hegemonic conceptions of reality.

The next participant first addresses the issue of time in our lives and how it is shaped by capitalism:

P10: Capitalism doesn't work for me … There are a few issues about capitalism. The main thing is in a capitalist system, you basically spend a lot of time on things you do not actually want to do. So for the things that really are

> the things that you want to do, you have very little time. Me, I have a job, a regular job, like eight hours a day, sometimes more. But I have some real interests, like things that I really want to make in my life like some scientific interests, some music interests, and all this stuff. And being in a capitalistic system, I can't spend on them as much time as I want 'cause I need to pay my bills, I need to pay my rent, I just need to pay everywhere. Maybe if the system was different I could explore in these fields and make more good things for the humanity, but still I can't. Now, I can't, in the modern capitalistic system. The issue is that capitalism bases everything on money and that makes a lot of things, um, like, fake, you know? Capitalism makes them just symbols that do not symbolize anything. It just makes people to think in the way they want to look, they want to sell, but not the way they want actually to be. And this is the main problem. I don't think capitalism is an extremely bad system, but I think it is the phase. And this phase has to come to an end. It's just the time to come to an end because like we're in a postmodernist dead end and I don't see any way going out of there with capitalism because we're repeating the symbols over and over again. And every new generation just repeats the symbol they see from the older generations. And this doesn't make it any more sincere, you know? Life, earlier, when there was no capitalism, it was harder, but it was more sincere for a person. And this is one more thing that I think is bad for capitalism.

In his 2013 book, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, Jonathan Crary describes the military research on how the white-crowned sparrow bird has the unique ability to stay awake for long periods of time, up to as long as seven days during their migrations along the western coast of North America. This research aim is for more than just mere scientific curiosity; it is done with the intention of developing the ideal sleepless soldier, capable of fighting for days on end. The development of military techniques for sleeplessness, including new advanced pharmaceuticals for soldiers, would not stop there. For "as history has shown, war-related innovations are inevitably assimilated into a broader social sphere, and the sleepless soldier would be the forerunner of the sleepless worker or consumer" (Crary, 2013, p. 3). The potential for profit making from non-sleep products is extraordinary for pharmaceutical companies (indeed these drugs already exist, such as amphetamines) inasmuch as these "would become first a lifestyle option, and eventually, for many, a necessity" (p. 3). As Crary argues, there has been in place for quite some time now, "24/7 markets and a global infrastructure for continuous work and consumption … but now a human subject is in the making to coincide with these more intensively" (pp. 3–4).

Leisure is no longer disconnected from labor as in having a sense of one's 'own time' or 'down time', apart from the working hours for which one is actually paid. In addition, for many people now working longer hours in one or more jobs, there is also work outside what might be considered a 'normal' timetable. As a result, there is less time for leisure away from work. Thus, for those who use email as part of their jobs, there is the expectation that they will

reply even during non-work hours, in a 'timely fashion'. In addition, as Crary (2013) and others have observed, for those who have the time and can afford it, 'leisure time' is now increasingly devoted to shopping, and with the 24/7 ethos, of course online to better facilitate 'efficiency' and 'smart shopping' in the name of 'choice'. It is in this context that P10 observes how he spends his own daily life and that in fact, he does not have much choice in this. It is also noteworthy that he refers to a "postmodernist dead end" in that capitalism is "repeating the same symbols over and over". The participant's observation is almost Baudrillard-like in the sense that we live in a world in which we are immersed in simulacra increasingly detached from a material reality (Baudrillard, 1983). However, I say "almost" because although the participant references a postmodernist frame of repeating symbols in the context of meaningless commodities (as he says, "makes a lot of things, like, fake"), his presentation of his very grounded everyday reality of having to spend most of his time on things he would rather not do is a stark reminder that despite capitalism's attempt at simulacra, for those who labor every day with little time for themselves, it is very real indeed.

The next participant is a teacher struggling to make ends meet:

I: Does capitalism work for you?

P11: No, absolutely not. It does not work for me … I'm a teacher and I teach currently at two different schools, plus I do tutoring on the side because none of those jobs pays enough for me to live and so I have to work a bunch of different jobs in order to just pay the bills and try to have healthcare and that kind of stuff.

I: So if capitalism worked for you, then you would have all those things?

P11: Well, if capitalism worked for me I think I could make enough money teaching to pay the bills. And so I'm in that position now where I'm actually on the verge of deciding whether to get out of teaching and try to pursue another profession because I just can't afford to teach anymore. And I'm a pretty good teacher. It's not like I'm, I'm a slacker or I'm a bad teacher. I work – I was telling the guy out there – 60–80 hours a week sometimes. But it's just very hard to make a living these days in the education field.

I: What do you teach?

P11: I teach English at two different community colleges down in New Jersey.

I: Great, thank you. Anything else you'd like to add?

P11: Yes. Can I just add, well, one of the big things for me, it comes from me as an educator not just in terms of what's happened in education, where especially on the college level they're getting rid of full-time teachers and putting in part-time teachers everywhere. That's at the state colleges, the community colleges. But also the students are training now for jobs that don't exist. Because what used to be the case 40, 50 years ago was that we realized it was important to invest in people. And the reason capitalism worked for years in this country is because we knew that people were our most valuable asset; an educated populace is what created wealth. But now we've gotten to the point where we think people are expendable. Our

> young people are not being taught. We're not paying teachers. And the result is going to be disastrous in my view because buildings and bombs and factories and stuff like that do not make a nation; nations are made out of people. An educated populace, from the day this country founded, was one of the strengths of this country.

Unfortunately, P11's story of juggling three jobs to make ends meet is not at all unusual now for many workers in the US and elsewhere. A story about an American woman named Maria Fernandes, who was holding down three jobs, was featured in the *New York Times* in September 2014. It was reported that she died of carbon monoxide poisoning while having to take a nap in her automobile because she did not have enough time to go back home before reporting for another work shift (Swarns, 2014). This parallels other situations around the world, including the ones at the Foxconn factory in China, where numerous workers have committed suicide from the stress of working non-stop making iPhones for the Apple Corporation. There has traditionally been the capitalist discourse that if you worked hard enough, you would eventually 'get ahead' and succeed in life. P11's testimony along with many others plainly contradict this discourse and show it for what it is – that working harder and longer hours is no recipe or route to success if someone else is appropriating all the surplus you are producing.

Teachers, especially in the US, are not immune from increasingly precarious work situations. There have been various drives across the US to abolish tenure for primary and secondary public school teachers, with the accompanying discourse that teachers having tenure become 'lazy' or 'have it too good' to be effective in the classroom. These critics point to the relatively lower standardized test scores of students, especially those in the urban areas, as proof that teachers are not doing their jobs. The charter school movement is rooted in this notion, but its real purpose is to replace public school education with privatized schooling with outsider governance, providing another revenue source for financial investors. This is also happening in the tertiary sector with state and community colleges eliminating full-time teachers by replacing them with part-timers, as P11 notes. It has been estimated that the level of contingent faculty, defined as part-time and full-time non-tenure track faculty, has now reached 76% of all college and university teaching staff (American Association of University Professors, n.d.). It is particularly heartbreaking to read P11's grim statement that he "just can't afford to teach anymore" despite being very good at what he does.

He reminds the interviewer and the public that this was not always so in American society. When he argues that "capitalism worked for years in this country … because we knew that people were our most valuable asset," he no doubt refers to the decades during which wages for American workers steadily rose, creating the middle class in America. Although there were numerous issues including systemic racial and gender discrimination, which prevented many Americans benefiting from these annually rising wage salaries, for the

majority of White American men at the workplace, this was as good as it ever was going to get for them. For people like P11 (judging from the video, his approximate age is at least over 40 years old), it is not difficult to imagine him growing up enjoying a stable middle-class lifestyle. However since then, he undoubtedly has witnessed, and indeed experienced – as he relates it here – the vanishing of this lifestyle. He is partly correct when he attributes this halcyon era to capitalism as a viable system, although this occurred only because of organized labor's demands and the compromise struck during the Roosevelt Administration, which included taxing the wealthy at a 90% plus rate.

The next participant, interviewed in London, is gainfully employed but has this to say:

P12: I'm a mobile engineer … I work for a company. They send me jobs and I go do them. I was walking past *Capitalism – does it work for me? True or false*. And I couldn't wait to get here and say false. It doesn't work because it was never designed to work for me or you or any of us that don't already have capital … the way the system seems to work is that those who have wealth can increase it but those without wealth are sort of left to fight each other for it. When there's lots of wealth, the capitalists, you know, the bankers and stuff are hoarding the wealth that's needed to sort of keep the economy running and keep the wheels of the economy turning. And so we're just wage slaves, you know, to just to run around, try and survive. And we're forced to live under this dangerous extremist ideology of capitalism. We have no choice … we're given the impression of permanence just so we don't question it. Capitalism, the economy is made to sound so complicated that people don't want to know what it's all about. They think it's over their heads, where, and if, it doesn't get taught to you in school. Nobody teaches you where money comes from in school but it's so important because it runs our entire lives. And yet if it was, they want you to think that it's too complicated to understand for us but it's not. And if it was explained to you in the way that you would explain it to a child, even a child would turn around and say why? Why is it done like this? … Capitalism thrives on inefficiency and inequality … It can only work if there are the haves and the have-nots … Gotta get back to work. A wage slave.

P12 indexes his subject position as a wage slave, and in doing so, draws upon a long historical discourse. The notion of being a "wage slave" has gone back to at least ancient Rome when Cicero discussed this societal role. Since then others have examined the differential roles between slaves and workers in the capitalist era. The outward signs of physical bondage and threats of death that slaves had to endure are obvious enough. Thus, is the term "wage slave" diminishing the historical hardships of slaves? Some, including Marx (1976), have observed that although workers in a capitalist system are supposedly free to sell their labor power to the highest bidder, there are several issues to consider. One is that people have to sell their labor power in order to survive. Another is

that since everyone else is also selling theirs, capitalists can pick and choose and keep wages as low as possible. This is the constant threat to workers since they may have no choice but to accept the lower wages. The alternative would be losing their jobs to even cheaper labor elsewhere around the world. Of course, unlike slaves, workers have the choice to quit their jobs; however, most have to continue working somewhere to survive.

P12 also resemiotizes the phrase "extremist ideology" in collocating it with capitalism. A quick Google search of "extremist ideology" displays the term 'Islamic radicalism' as the top search result; nowhere is the word 'capitalism' to be found in combination with "extremist ideology". As I have noted elsewhere in this book, the appearance of, and belief in the permanence of a system (be it political, social, and/or economic) has the ideological function that there can be no other possible alternative. It forecloses the imagination and represses the desire for something else. As P12 notes, it becomes so permanent that we cannot even imagine questioning it. Related to this, he also observes the lack of economic education; or rather, the exclusive focus on the ways in which an economy can work. Economics is rarely taught in US high schools, and is not a required subject in universities. When it is taught at the tertiary level, only two approaches are mainly taught: the neoclassical and Keynesian ones. Any other approaches, especially those critical of the capitalist system, are marginalized at best, and more often, simply absent (Mirowski, 2010). For those academics in the economic field, and the departments that feature only a narrow range of options in their course offerings, what are they afraid of by excluding and ignoring heterodox economic ideas and research? P12's thought-provoking example of a hypothetical child asking about capitalism – "why is it done like this?" – can serve as a prompt for many mainstream economists to ask themselves how they would respond if their students asked this seemingly heretical question as well.

As we have seen previously, a familiar argument for capitalism is the mention of communism's collapse in the Soviet Union and its former Eastern bloc countries as evidence all other alternatives have failed. The people who lived in those countries are often presented in the US media as happy to have escaped the bondages of communist totalitarianism and grateful to be living freely now in a capitalist society. This participant from the former German Democratic Republic (aka East Germany) offers a different narrative though:

P13: We did vote that capitalism doesn't work for us.
I: Why?
P13: Because we are from the former GDR so we know the systems and now we're living 25 years in capitalism. Before we lived in a socialist country and we would compare. We miss the – my family – we miss kind of sociality, community, and that's – we used to know from the former system. So everybody was helping each other. We had a job and we didn't get much money but we had a safe job. And we concentrate on other things than saving money or something like that. Now we are feeling like we have to

fight. Fight against each other to get a better job or fight for money or for kind of status. We didn't know that in former times – it was more social. And the human being was more important than now.

I: What do you think caused the change, like the switch, from people valuing human lives?

P13: Because the most important thing today is money. That's why everybody has to fight for money 'cause you can't survive if you haven't enough. We have to pay for example for insurance, health insurance. We didn't have to do that. It was paid by the state. We know, now people can't – who doesn't pay this insurance and get the risk to get ill and maybe get no help. We didn't know such things.

In contrast to the dystopia of formerly communist states often portrayed in Western cultural representations such as Hollywood movies and television dramas, P13 does not describe a nightmare when talking about her and her family's life in former East Germany. Instead, she employs the discursive frame of a community in solidarity versus alienated individuals battling one another. Though the country was run by a one-party, surveillance state, "the human being was more important than now" because of the absence of competition among workers having to sell their labor power against each other, which encouraged the social. In her discursive representation reversing societal portraits, it is capitalism that is actually the dystopia for P13 and her family now, in which money is valued above all else to survive in society.

This is one woman's account of her life in a former Communist society and perhaps some people might observe that in times of difficulty, we tend to romanticize the past in remembering only the good while forgetting the bad. Back in 1986, I spent 12 hours in East Berlin. I was a tourist visiting Germany for the first time, and I obtained a one-day visa at Checkpoint Charlie to visit the city. I had to convert my money into East Germany currency, a total of 30 marks but I could not convert it back once I returned. Thus, I had to either spend all of it or keep whatever I had left as a souvenir. Once I entered East Berlin, it was almost like stepping back into the 1950s as represented in those Cold War films produced by Hollywood. There were no advertisement billboards on the streets, the buildings still had the structural scars from World War Two, and there were few things in the stores. For someone who had lived in the United States his whole life up to that point, the feeling went beyond culture shock. I experienced an intense consumer sensory deprivation with the absence of advertisements staring me in the face, the scarcity of commodity goods, and the seemingly grey appearance of a society that was the opposite of bustling cosmopolitan displays of capitalist-run cities. At the end of that day, I managed to spend only a fraction of the allotted 30 marks but it was not for the lack of trying. The food and the beer were cheap for a tourist from the West, and there was really nothing else for me to buy. I did not have the usual tourist-consumer experience. Instead, there was something else – a sense, as P13 recalls, that commodities beyond the necessary were not important, and that indeed, the

focus for people was on each other. A different socialization to be sure, and one that can provide a basis for alternative models in the future, minus the oppressive police state apparatus.

"I don't know if capitalism changed so much as maybe I changed"

The final participant narrates his lived work experiences and political beliefs in a society that has changed drastically in the last 50 years:

P14: I voted true for capitalism. And the reason why is basically I've had to feed the family and pay the rent and that was the way of doing that, and so when I got to the point where those were issues and I was out on my own, um, I looked for a job and I found a job in the insurance industry … And you know, I guess I could bitch about capitalism. There's lots of negative things about it. It's not the kindest thing to society in general. Um, I was pretty much a Republican all my life but I don't think the Republican Party in the States likes me anymore because I'm for gun control and I'm pro-choice and things like that, which evidently have become major issues for the Republican Party and stuff, which I sort of associate with heavy capitalism, so uh, I don't know exactly what I am. I guess you'd call me an independent …

I: So there have been a lot of people – we've got about half right now – that say it doesn't work. Why do you think there are so many people that say it doesn't work for them?

P14: 'Cause I think there's a lot of unfairness in the capitalistic system. And um, you know, I was very fortunate because my parents, although they didn't have a lot of money, they believed very much like in education and things like that. They really tried to create a stable environment. And you know, so I kind of had a launch pad that helped me get my foot in the door. I think capitalism doesn't leave a lot of room for people getting your foot in the door unless you have somebody helping you. And you know, so I mean I really can't say I got ahead strictly on my own. You know, I think if my parents had been somebody else, maybe I would have had a different experience with capitalism. It still required a lot of work, you know. I mean it wasn't anyone handing me anything. But I can see where other people have uh, no one to really help them. So I think they're at a tremendous disadvantage and I think you know, that's where capitalism falls down and where the coldness comes in, because they don't really open up any opportunities for people that need a chance to get their foot in the door …

I: How has your view of capitalism changed over the years? Has your view of making money, has it changed?

P14: Yeah, I think it has changed. I think when I was younger I was very, very – well, I had a lot more energy for one thing but I think I didn't quite pay attention to the nuances of capitalism. I just paid attention to whether or not I could get a job, how much did it pay, could I get another job, will it pay more, you know, that type of thing. And now when I'm at a point in

life where I'm less focused on making the mortgage payments so to speak, you know, I think I'm more sensitive to some of the cold barriers that capitalism – I don't know if they were quite as strong back when I was young but I certainly see them now, which is why I find myself drifting more and more away from the Republican side of the party. But you know, but I don't want to go all the way over to the left side of the political spectrum where everything is just, you know, like we had an exchange student from Finland. And when she explained everything it's like wow, you know, I'll just write my pay check over to the government and they'll take care of everything. I mean, but she liked it that way and I've visited Finland a couple times and they certainly have a nice lifestyle there so maybe they've got something going so, whatever.

I: Maybe you landed right in the middle.

P14: I don't know if capitalism changed so much as maybe I changed. But you know, I mean I don't know.

In the context of American society in the past 70 years, millions of lives have been impacted by the rise and subsequent fall of what has been called the 'middle class'. Many have seen their jobs outsourced overseas, and as a result have suffered downsizing and permanent unemployment, or the loss of home ownership, or have incurred staggering debt. This decline and fall in their living standards is all the more notable because of the relatively prosperous years from 1945 to the early 1970s. During this roughly 30-year period, those who were middle-class (self-identified as such) in the US never enjoyed such prosperity in the abundance of good-paying jobs (often unionized if in manufacturing) and the accompanying benefits. Is it any surprise that the overwhelming majority of these workers would embrace capitalism as working for them, or at least tacitly accept it as long as their wages increased every year and they had savings in the bank with no debt? Everyday people, especially those who came of age during the Great Depression, were happy to make ends meet with some extras.

P14's narrative of his life's trajectory is emblematic of this historical era of US capitalism. As he explains, for people of his generation that enjoyed that halcyon period of middle-class good times, they just focused on getting a decent job and then trying to 'keep up with the Joneses' or even get ahead in society. And then, beginning in the 1970s, it all went wrong for them, with inflation, stagnating wages, rising gasoline prices, and the increase of lending rates. Ronald Reagan promised he would help these middle-class voters but instead ushered in the present-day neoliberal era of enriching the elite at the expense of the many. P14's concluding self-observation that he doesn't know "if capitalism changed so much as maybe I changed" can be viewed in this context. His admission is an important one and has several implications.

The first implication is that if he has begun questioning capitalism, are there a significant number of others from his generation who also question it now? A second implication is why has he changed? He left the Republican Party, which he associates "with heavy capitalism" and has become an independent voter.

However, he does not mention being in any financial distress. So, why the dissatisfaction now? These two implications lead us to the third one. If P14's common-sense beliefs shifted over the years, eventually leading him to see that capitalism has "lots of negative things about it" and that "there's a lot of unfairness" in the system, how can others' common-sense beliefs be transformed to view capitalism in a similar light? For those of us who are in opposition to capitalism, we might be tempted to believe this may be a harbinger of things to come. However, more than mere hope, this participant and others like him in this book offer us a template from which the hard work of critically, dialogically, and (importantly) respectfully engaging with people's common-sense beliefs can begin. Gramsci spent his last years reflecting deeply on how and why the Italian Communist Party failed to stop the rise of Mussolini and fascism in Italy. With the rise of UKIP in the UK, the Tea Party movement in the US, the fascistic right in Europe, and the appeal of right-wing demagogues everywhere, we on the Left would do well not to repeat the same mistake.

7 Public pedagogy engaging with the discourses of capitalism

As we have seen throughout this book, capitalism means many different things to different people. This should not surprise anyone since any important keyword, as Raymond Williams (1985) argued, is always contested with its meanings and usage employed differently throughout its history. A keyword such as 'freedom' or 'democracy' has long been contextually and ideologically mediated, and 'capitalism' is no exception. The efforts to define freedom and democracy were not and have not been merely linguistic or lexical debates. These struggles over freedom and democracy were of course very real material enactments leading to bloodshed, the loss of lives, and hard-earned victories in turn defended against inevitable counter-attacks and attempted reversals. Likewise, the struggles over capitalism and its material meanings have been no different from the past two centuries inasmuch as the overwhelming majority of us still continue to sell our labor power on a daily, weekly, and annual basis without being able to decide how to distribute the very surplus value we produce.

As we have seen in the previous three chapters, the participants took up a myriad of discursive subject positions in relation to capitalism. Drawing upon their lived experiences and identifications, dominant discourses and hegemonic common-sense beliefs, counter-hegemonic views, and their good sense, they explained what capitalism means to them, as well as whether or not it has worked for them and others in society. Their responses illustrate both the challenges and opportunities in critical engagements with the discourses of capitalism. Should those of us who are committed to exploring and seeking alternative ways to organize our economy care if there are multiple and conflicting discursive meanings of capitalism? What are the implications for social and economic justice aims and movements if everyday people understand capitalism differently? How do we address the ways in which any given meaning of capitalism is separated from people's lived experiences as they narrate these? Fontana (2002) argued that "an understanding of the feelings, passion, and practices of the people is fundamental" (p. 32) to any critical project. And Terry Eagleton (2011) claimed, "you can tell that the capitalist system is in trouble when people start talking about capitalism" (p. xi). But beyond merely talking about capitalism, how do we address, challenge, and transform the myriad "everyday cultural practices that 'produce consent' to the commodity logic"

(Foley, 2010, p. 191) of capitalism? Eagleton (2011) argued that "what really alters our view of the world is not so much ideas, as ideas which are embedded in routine social practice," and so "if we change that practice, which may be formidably difficult to do, we are likely in the end to alter our way of seeing" (p. 94). Although Eagleton did not specify what comprises these routine social and cultural practices, we may include at the very minimum practices related to and embedded in our workplaces, our home lives, our schools, and the ways in which we interact with people in our communities, both face-to-face and virtually. Another question therefore arises: How do we go about changing our routine everyday practices so that we can change our ways of seeing the world, and in particular, viewing capitalism in our world(s)?

One participant who was not included in the previous chapters had this to say when asked on how to make things better in society:

> What I can say is I think the economy is so entrenched in people's lives from every aspect of it, that it's hard to fathom change. So I think that's something the academics of the country really need to put into just the general conversation, such as this art installation. It's asking a very basic question and it gets people talking about it. It got me here sitting in this chair talking about it, you know? So, I think just getting the conversation started and getting it to people who are really willing to sit down and think about it is the first step.

Stuart Hall (1988) observed that "the 'good sense' of the people exists, but it is just the beginning, not the end, of politics. It doesn't guarantee anything" (p. 169). As the participant above astutely noted, both the traditional intellectuals ("the academics of the country") and organic intellectuals, such as the participants featured in this book, need to engage with each together in discussing and questioning if capitalism is so hegemonic that there really exist no serious alternatives in our ideas, imaginations, fantasies, and actual economic social practices.

The primary aim of this book has been to contribute to this discussion in finding and facilitating ways to develop a critical and critically engaged consciousness of our conditions today (e.g., Gramsci, 1971, Green, 2015). I have situated the notion and practices of critically engaged public pedagogies in the work of Antonio Gramsci, whose framework of hegemonic common-sense meaning making and accompanying emergent counter-hegemonic good sense beliefs inform this book. Fontana (2015) notes that Gramsci distinguished between everyday people (who Gramsci called "the people-nation") and intellectuals in their enactment of those who feel versus those who merely know. As Gramsci (1971) argued in his *Prison Notebooks*:

> The popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel. The two extremes are therefore pedantry and

> philistinism on the one hand and blind passion and sectarianism on the other. Not that the pedant cannot be impassioned; far from it. Impassioned pedantry is every bit as ridiculous and dangerous as the wildest sectarianism and demagogy. The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned (not only for knowledge in itself but also for the object of knowledge): in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual (and not a pure pedant) if distinct and separate from the people-nation, that is, without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world, scientifically and coherently elaborated – i.e. knowledge. One cannot make politics-history without this passion, without this sentimental connection between intellectuals and people-nation. In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people-nation are, or are reduced to, relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood.
>
> (Gramsci, 1971, p. 418)

Fontana (2015) observes that "how to bring a people to think critically and coherently is the fundamental problem posed by Gramsci, and it is a problem that combines political, epistemological and educational spheres of activity" (p. 59). One educational sphere of activity is public pedagogy, and the practices that can enable these necessary connections between the socially recognized and situated everyday people, and those who are named as 'intellectuals'. With the increasing intolerance of public displays of dissent and political demonstrations in Western countries, as evidenced by the coordinated crackdowns and closings of the Occupy protests in urban spaces across the US in 2011, perhaps online forums have acquired more importance, despite its inevitable surveillance and information gathering that takes place. In both these spaces of public pedagogy, there exists the radical possibility of "active participation that enables subaltern groups not only to use the language, institutions and to consume or absorb culture but allows subaltern groups to use them creatively, to add to them, and alter them in relation to their experiences" (Green & Ives, 2009, p. 22).

Those in power now have created the very conditions, whether it is war, poverty, and/or climate change, which have forced people to flee those conditions. Those in power then blame those fleeing, attempting to victimize them yet again. We try to teach and remind our children, our students, our neighbors, our fellow citizens to take responsibility for their actions, yet those in power almost never take responsibility for their actions in the dire conditions they have created. Instead, they point the finger at others for the condition in which they find themselves: the poor for being poor; the unemployed for being unemployed; the persecuted for being persecuted; the innocently and unjustly jailed for being jailed; and the unfairly accused for being accused. Those of us fighting for social and economic justice for all everywhere not only need to hold those

responsible accountable for their actions, but also to keep working to help create the conditions in which freedom, real democracy, and justice can be truly realized. However, to achieve these goals, we must continue to critically and dialogically engage on the terrain of everyday people's common sense and see the openings and fissures as avenues through which their latent good sense can emerge in more active, productive, and material ways. This will not happen if those of us in the academy do not engage in the praxis of everyday life, involving everyday people in their communities. With this aim in mind, I leave the last word to the late Marshall Berman, who wisely cautioned:

> I think it's an occupational hazard for intellectuals, regardless of their politics, to lose touch with the stuff and flow of everyday life. But this is a special problem for intellectuals on the Left, because we, among all political movements, take special pride in noticing people, respecting them, listening to their voices, caring about their needs, bringing them together, fighting for their freedom and happiness. (This is how we differ – or try to differ – from the world's assorted ruling classes and their ideologues, who treat the people they rule as animals or machines or numbers or pieces on a chessboard, or who ignore their existence completely, or who dominate them all by playing them against each other, teaching them that they can be free and happy only at each other's expense.) Intellectuals can make a special contribution to this ongoing project. If our years of study have taught us anything, we should be able to reach out further, to look and listen more closely, to see and feel beneath surfaces, to make comparisons over a wider range of space and time, to grasp hidden patterns and forces and connections, in order to show people who look and speak and think and feel differently from each other – who are oblivious to each other, or fearful of each other – that they have more in common than they think. We can contribute visions and ideas that will give people a shock of recognition, recognition of themselves and each other, that will bring their lives together. That is what we can do for solidarity and class-consciousness. But we can't do it, we can't generate ideas that will bind people's lives together, if we lose contact with what those lives are like. Unless we know how to recognize people, as they look and feel and experience the world, we'll never be able to help them recognize themselves or change the world. Reading *Capital* won't help us if we don't also know how to read the signs in the street.
>
> (Berman, 1984, p. 123)

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