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Book Review: J. K. Gibson-Graham's *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996.

Carolyn Gallaher
University of Kentucky

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Left Women questioning government policies in funding cuts to mass transit. Lexington, Kentucky. [photo: Chris Huestis]

book review: J.K. Gibson-Graham's
**The End of Capitalism
(As We Knew It): A Feminist
Critique of Political Economy**

Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996

by Carolyn Gallaher

ny thorough engagement with social justice must necessarily tackle issues of the economy. For Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson, however, the notion that there is a single 'economy'—a totalizing entity of oppression—is itself detrimental to social justice. Graham and Gibson, who together make up the writing unit known as J.K. Gibson-Graham, claim as the central argument of their book that left-leaning academics influenced by Marxism have created the very "beast" against which we presumably fight. Such a claim comes out of the theoretical recognition of the performativity of representation:

In those exciting early days I had yet to take seriously the "performativity" of social representations—in other words, the ways in which they are implicated in the worlds they ostensibly represent. I was still trying to capture "what was happening out there," . . . I wasn't thinking about the social representation I was creating as constitutive of the world in which I have to live (p. ix).

The theoretical value of such an argument, moreover, is that by deconstructing the monolith and showing it for what it is, there will be room for both seeing and creating anti-capitalist forms of economy.

To deconstruct 'the economy' and 'capitalism,' however, is no easy project—a fact Gibson-Graham know well. Much of their book is devoted to laying out the theoretical framework which sets the stage for anti-essentialist readings of society, economy, and polity, and which allows them to make the argument that 'capitalism' and 'capitalist hegemony' are artifacts of

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Committee on Social
Theory, University of
Kentucky, Lexington,
Kentucky.

Carolyn Gallaher is a
member of the
disClosure editorial
collective in the
Department of
Geography, University
of Kentucky.

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discourse. Each chapter is, in some way, based on unpacking essentialism in the social sciences through a variety of literatures. They develop Althusser's concept of overdetermination, and move from there to a variety of topical literatures, including identity theory, queer studies, globalization, post-Fordism, industrial policy discourse, and class politics. Their work is clearly influenced by poststructuralism, which pervades each chapter's topical literature, and which is then translated by Gibson-Graham to their subject matter, capitalism.

The impetus behind Gibson-Graham's engagement with poststructuralism, and its translation to critical-, neo-, post-, and feminist- Marxisms is, in fact, the book's overwhelming strong point. Gibson-Graham illustrate how capitalism's discursive scripting as a totalizing unity has undermined attempts by Marxists to effectively confront capitalist exploitation. Such a scripting, they argue, has also rendered Marxism blind to non-capitalist economic relations, both existing and potential. And although their book is neither empirically-based, nor aimed at prediction, they do provide current examples to illustrate the fiction that they argue is capitalism's totality. They point to women in Australia, for example, who work exclusively in the household and whose relationships with their families constitute a feudal rather than capitalistic social relationship. They also point to successful battles by workers against multinational corporations. Such battles are important, they argue, because multinational corporations have long been viewed as the ultimate indicator of capitalism's global reach in political economy literatures.

Gibson-Graham's book is clearly intended to shake up social science's engagement with, and study of, the economy. The reactions will, however, no doubt be influenced by one theoretical position. Those familiar with poststructuralism and cultural studies will find their argument well-versed in relation to pertinent literature, and they will more than likely ask themselves why someone has not developed this line of argument earlier. Those unfamiliar or unsympathetic with anti-essentialist analysis will be forced to confront the authors' thorough deconstruction of key, contemporary political economic literatures, including globalization (chapter 6), regulation theory/post-Fordism (chapter 7), and industrial policy discourse (chapter 5 and 9).

While the book is an excellent and important contribution to poststructuralist thought, as well as political economy, it is not without its problems. The most important problem concerns the book's underlying premise. Gibson-Graham are clear in their intentions. The deconstruction of the discursive artifact known as capitalism is im-

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portant for any left-centered politics. Marxian theorizations of capitalism have created an unwieldy and unbeatable opponent. As Gibson-Graham argue, it is important that we deconstruct the discursive artifact of capitalism in order that non-capitalist forms of economy may be recognized and created. The goal of such a deconstruction is clearly political, and is based in a long tradition of viewing theory as inherently political. Their political goals, however, rest uneasily with their equally insistent claim that their project is *not* about rebuilding something in place of the artifact they have willingly destroyed. The politics of the book, therefore, rest on a theoretical perspective which gives no guarantees that the deconstruction of capitalism as a unifying concept will necessarily lead to the progressive forms of economy for which they hope and call. While their deconstruction of capitalism is believable and thought-provoking, visions of Marx still haunt their work, leaving the reader to wonder what can and will spring from the ruins.

In the end, the book will likely be frustrating for those looking for guarantees, answers, or even road maps for how to enact progressive politics, yet appealing for those concerned with dismantling the very way social science constitutes its subject matter. This reviewer hopes the authors will produce another book, based in the same theory, but with empirical analysis and examples of progressive, non-capitalist forms of economy. The reviewer also hopes that through such an extended work the problematic divide between the 'dismantlers' and the '(re)builders' may itself be complicated, and re-theorized.