Women and Work

Feminism, Labour, and Social Reproduction

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The Social Reproduction Strike: Life-Making Beyond Capitalism

Anna Wheeler and William Thompson laid the foundation of the social reproduction feminism trajectory by insisting that "women's work" be counted as part of the overall production of social wealth. In so doing, they pushed feminist discussions about labour beyond the rational-humanist parameters of earlier feminism, into the realm of political economy. This groundwork makes it possible to shift the analytic focus from the gender division of labour to the relation between "women's work" (social reproductive labour) and waged, capitalistically "productive" (value-producing) work.

Most socialist feminists since then have not fully appreciated the power of Wheeler's and Thompson's insight. While they have pointed out how capitalism presupposes the separation of production from reproduction, they have tended to attribute women's oppression to the gender division of labour that attends that separation. Citing women's dependency on men, their isolation in the private sphere, and the drudgery of the work itself, socialist feminists have generally theorized women's labour in the same rational-humanist terms that characterize equality feminism. Linking this critique to a political-economic critique of capitalism (itself understood essentially as a system of "productive" labour), critical equality feminism has produced tendencies toward dualism and class reductionism within socialist feminism.

Others, however, have periodically and partially challenged that theoretical trajectory. In different ways and to different degrees, they have grappled with the political-economic significance of "women's work" to sustaining capitalism. While such efforts were brusquely dismissed in the 1940s by Communist Party leaders, they could not be repressed in the 1970s when social reproduction feminism became, for the first time, a major pole of attraction and debate within socialist feminist circles. Having moved beyond an overly narrow concern with unpaid housework toward more complex and nuanced understandings of the

coercive underbelly of capitalist value creation, social reproduction feminists today share a broad theoretical conviction that social oppressions are systemic, grounded in capitalism's necessary-but-contradictory relation of productive to social reproductive work.

Despite identifying a common nexus of problems that this perspective reveals, however, socialist feminists have still not resolved earlier debates about how best to untangle the relation between social reproductive and capitalistically "productive" labour. This chapter addresses that persistent point of disagreement, and the distinct analytic inflections and political conclusions it generates. I take this up here not simply because it is an abiding theoretical question, but because its resolution matters. It matters if we want to convince others of the need for and possibility of forging a truly inclusive class politics that can transcend capitalist relations once and for all. The chapter thus concludes with a discussion of the corresponding political perspectives, making a case for the theoretical political orientation that emphasizes the possibilities of life-making and resistance to capital within multiple forms of working class struggles—the theory and politics advanced, for instance, by the Feminism for the 99% initiative.

SOCIAL REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR AND THE QUESTION OF VALUE

The social reproduction feminist trajectory branched into two related but distinct theoretical orientations. These can be distinguished by the responses of each to the question: Does the work that goes into producing labour power create the actual value that capitalists then appropriate when they sell the products of waged labour? Mary Inman, various contributors to the Domestic Labour Debate, and those involved in the international Wages for Housework (WfH) campaign all propose that it does. Domestic work, they claim, ultimately produces the exchange value of the product of waged labour (the commodity). It does so, many suggest, because it produces the commodity labour power that, when sold to capitalists, produces value. But the relation of the social reproductive worker to capital is obscured by the wage (which appears to be paid only for work done directly for capital) as well as by the family (which provides emotional and ideological cover for what is an essentially oppressive material condition). Because unpaid household labour is capitalistically "productive," they insist, capitalists don't only *depend*

upon those whose labour reproduces this and the next generation of workers; they directly *exploit* them.[1]

This perspective developed within autonomist Marxism, a tradition that emerged among radical intellectuals connected to 1960s struggles of Turin auto workers. Responding to the failures of Communist Party leadership, and influenced by the wave of student and feminist struggles, the autonomists moved from an overriding focus on the workplace to seeing capitalism as a totalizing system that organizes *all* members of society (housewives, students, and the unemployed along with waged workers) in the production of wealth that it then appropriates.[2] Mario Tronti introduced the term "social factory" in his 1962 book, *Factory and Society*, to capture the idea that capital *subsumes* all society to the logic of accumulation.[3] Maria Dalla Costa, Silvia Federici, and others pushed the autonomist analysis in a feminist direction by emphasizing that the capitalist subsumption of unwaged labour (for example, housework) requires, sustains, and shapes women's unfreedom.

The WfH campaign also embraced and further developed the autonomist political strategy, which calls on workers to refuse work. Capital thrives on value creation. Accordingly, if workers stop engaging in "productive" labour (that is, if they stop creating value), they deprive capital of its lifeblood. And because all work is "productive"—because, as Federici states, "every moment of our lives functions for the accumulation of capital"—refusing housework and social reproductive labour more broadly conceived also obstructs the creation of value.[4] The WfH campaign therefore called on women to do just that, to walk away from housework. It linked this strategy to the wage demand as a means of emphasizing housework's value, and the impossibility of its full recompense under a capitalist system. The refusal of housework was also intended as a refusal of its commodification (through the hiring of nannies, for instance) and of its organization by the state (through social services).[5] The WfH campaign goal was to "break the whole structure of domestic work" by highlighting all that the wage obscured: capitalists' exploitation of women's unpaid and unfree labour.[6]

Other socialist feminists who conceive of unpaid social reproductive work as capitalistically "*un*productive" also call on women to "refuse" work. However, this group (which I will call the Marxian social reproduction school, or Marxian school for short) defines that refusal differently.[7] I explore that political difference after more closely comparing the ideas informing it.

The Problem of Value

Unconvinced by autonomism, the Marxian school embraces and develops a classically Marxist conception of capitalism. Capitalistically "productive" labour, according to Marx, is that which directly creates value. Value is determined in the process of producing goods and services for exchange (or commodities). In other words, *it is created when the product of labour is destined for sale on the market*. But this is not the case when people take on (unpaid and much paid) social reproductive labour.[8] Such labour certainly contributes to creating a commodity, labour power. But it does so by producing things to be consumed—things that support life (not capital) in the first instance. Its products are meals, clean clothes, community gardens, safe streets, hurricane relief shelters, and mended bones. They are also more ephemeral "things," such as love, attention, discipline, and knowledge that comprise the emotional and social grounding of life. They are *useful* things—things produced not for sale, but to sustain life.

Autonomist Marxist feminists do not generally dispute this reading. Leopoldina Fortunati (who wrote the widely read and cited *The Arcane of Reproduction*) agrees that reproductive labour, which she stresses includes both housework and sex work, produces use value, not exchange value: capital "uses housework as use-value for value."[9] But the meals, clean clothes, sexual pleasure, and so on that it produces, she claims, *transform* into exchange values because they are first consumed by a worker whose labour power later produces value for the capitalist. Thus, social reproductive work, she proposes, *indirectly* creates value.

Insofar as Fortunati means that social reproductive labour is essential to reproducing the conditions that make it possible to create capitalist value, there is no argument with the Marxian school. However, she does not only say that. Fortunati explains that the consumption of use values is a phase in capital's overall process of value creation *because the ultimate product, labour power, is a commodity*. This, she insists, renders it capitalistically "productive" labour. As "productive" workers, housewives and sex workers create not just use value, but value and surplus value. They may do so indirectly, but that indirectness has no apparent bearing on the social form of their work.

Yet, exactly how concrete social reproductive labour transforms from "unproductive" to "productive" is unclear. Fortunati's discussion of the process of its abstraction begins with an assertion:

> If reproduction work … is productive, *then it goes without saying* that it too must take on the dual character [for example, abstract and concrete] assumed by all other work that produces value. Reproduction is not only concrete work, individually necessary and complex, it is also abstract human labor, socially necessary and simple.[10]

She then makes two points: (i) social reproductive work shares in a general character—individual housewives and sex workers labour in "undifferentiated" ways; and (ii) the labour of one housewife or sex worker is equal to that of another.

As for the first explanation, this is a conceptual abstraction to be sure, like any generalization. If I say all trees have trunks, I abstract from individual trees. But that abstraction proves nothing about the *value* of the tree, or trunk. Commodity abstraction is something different. It is a relation of a particular to the general that requires some process of measuring commensurability. As Marx puts it in the first chapter of *Capital*, Volume 1, the very exchange, 20 yards of linen = one coat, requires that qualitatively distinct items (linen and coats) can be rendered commensurate. The value abstraction of capitalism uses market relations to transform concrete goods into interchangeable quantities of value (measured in prices). And this is the problem with Fortunati's second point. She asserts the commensurability of social reproductive labour without ever explaining by what measure equality among the different labours of housewives or sex workers is established. What is the socially determined standard of commensurability? How is that standard determined? For capitalist commodities, the equation of one labour process and its commodities is performed by the market. What mechanism does the same for cooking, sex acts, or cleaning in the home? None of this is discussed.

Mezzadri's contribution to *Radical Philosophy* provides a recent example of these unresolved theoretical problems within autonomist Marxist feminism. She argues that because the rate of exploitation expands when the costs of social reproduction are reduced, social reproductive labour must be capitalistically "productive" labour. She does not, however, explain how or why reducing the costs of labour power to the capitalist (something that can happen for any number of reasons, from government subsidies to small businesses, to strike-breaking and back-to-work legislation) in fact *produces* value. How does it, in other words, make social reproductive labour commensurable and transform

into labour whose value can be abstracted? More significantly, how does it create new value (rather than just redistribute existing value flows)?

While Fortunati and autonomist Marxist feminists more generally grasp that there is a distinction between life and labour power, the significance of that distinction disappears in their analysis of value production. This reflects the autonomist conception of capitalism as a system of *total* domination. All production is value production since the latter is the modus operandi of capitalism. And so, in this reckoning, once one accepts that social reproductive labour is essential to (and therefore "inside") capitalism, it necessarily becomes capitalistically "productive" labour—and is, they reason, fully dominated by or subsumed to capital's imperatives. Any production or life-making *against* or in resistance to capital, it follows, can only take place *outside* the capitalist system (a point I return to in the next section).

According to the Marxian school, because value is determined in producing goods for exchange, and insofar as the products of social reproductive labour have in fact been consumed in the creation and sustenance of life (not capital), that labour cannot be ascribed a capitalistic value. It is "unproductive" in capitalist terms.[11] Granted one is not obliged to follow Marx, and Fortunati and others critique Marx, pointing out that value exists where he believes it does not.[12] But, in this instance, Fortunati clearly thinks she *is* following Marx in determining what constitutes abstract labour (as do Dalla Costa and James who explain, "What we meant precisely is that housework as work is productive in the Marxian sense, that is, as producing surplus value").[13] If autonomist Marxist feminists are to convince us that Marx is wrong about how capitalist value is determined, they need to develop a more coherent critique, one that accurately represents his theory and shows where precisely he errs. Instead, Fortunati substitutes Marx's value theory for an alternative theory of *value transfer* (through consumption), drawing imprecisely and somewhat randomly on Marx's categories.

In the absence of a more convincing theory of value, autonomist Marxist feminism relies on a sort of all-or-nothing logic: because social reproductive labour contributes to capitalist processes of accumulation insofar as it produces the labour power upon which capitalists depend, it *must be* value-producing. Or, put another way: capitalist value is created by "productive" labour, ergo all labour that contributes to the realization of capitalist value is "productive." Labour that is not "productive" does not have a role in the creation of capitalist value because, by definition, it

cannot. This is, quite simply, a tautology—one that is rooted in vaguely defined meanings of "productive" labour and "value."[14]

Subsumption and the Social Forms of Labour

The Marxian school of social reproduction feminism observes that Marx did not extend his political-economic critique of capitalism to unpaid social reproductive labour but accepts his value theory as authoritative. Here, value creation is understood to require both forms of labour, those that are capitalistically "productive" *and those that are not*. The latter comprises socially necessary unpaid social reproductive work *and* different forms of paid labour—public sector social reproductive labour as well as other work that is, according to Marx, essential but not directly "productive" (such as banking or certain transportation jobs).[15] Capital's domination of these "unproductive" work processes cannot be denied. But it never totally dominates any work process (even "productive" work).

Labour resists total subsumption by capital precisely because there can be no labour without life—without a living human being, whose life needs can and will assert themselves against capital time and again. For both historical and systemic reasons, however, "unproductive" social reproductive labour *tends to be* less fully subsumed to capital than "productive" labour. To begin, as Vogel, Federici, and others have stressed, capitalist production presumes, but does not directly oversee a great deal of social reproductive labour. Much life-making takes place in times and spaces beyond the immediate imperatives of capitalist value production, and thus beyond the supervision of bosses and their production quotas and disciplining practices. This best describes the *unpaid* work of reproducing this and the next generation of workers. Yet because such labour is *necessary* to the realization of surplus value and because it is performed overwhelmingly by those who are already dispossessed by capital, it is never *simply* outside capitalist processes and discipline. It is inflected with the rhythms and paces of value production, even as it is not directly value-producing: resources for living are constrained by wages (and credit limits); time for eating, sleeping, helping a child with homework, playing, and more is generally prescribed by the waged workday; the pressure to perform well at work often determines whether someone parties all night or goes to the gym and then home to bed.

Nonetheless, the unpaid work of social reproduction is sufficiently "outside" capital to be highly flexible. While performing such labour, many people can, to a significant degree, ignore or resist market disciplining of their lives.[16] They can decide how much time to spend making dinner, or whether to attend a community meeting for a safe-injection site instead of preparing lunches for the next school day. Or they can stay up late and do it all. Such control over the content, pace, and timing of work is considerably less available for paid social reproductive workers who are subject to the disciplinary logic of capitalist accumulation in other ways. Paid domestic workers are generally hired not only to ensure that a household runs according to the socially determined standards that facilitate the reproduction of labour power for capital, but also to facilitate the reproduction of the ruling class. They have less autonomy than stay-at-home parents because they are accountable to an employer who expects the work done in a certain amount of time. The work of public sector school custodians, teachers, personal support workers, nurses, and so on, on the other hand, typically has rigidly regulated standards and schedules, as well as on-site managers and structures of accountability to the capitalist state that employs them.

Yet capitalist domination of these jobs is often less direct than it is in private sector work and therefore *can be* less intense. Consider, for example, public sector teaching in North America. Established in the nineteenth century, in many cases in response to working class demand and eventually supported by the state, schools for young children emerged on the sidelines of capital's involvement. Although accountable to the parish, municipal, or other authorities paying their wages, teachers were not generally subject to capitalist management standards and techniques of increasing productivity. As the need for a literate workforce increased, the state made school attendance mandatory and worked to meet the labour demands of the economy by reshaping curriculum, grading, teacher training, and disciplinary practices. Such measures tended to diminish teacher autonomy. There was (and still is) a limit, however, to the degree to which teachers could be made to improve their "output" (whatever that may mean in a given context).[17] Because public education exists "outside" the spaces and times of capitalist value production, capital's domination of teaching jobs is always mediated by other social authorities and—as I say more about in a moment—by pressures from below as well.

More generally, public sector workers who teach, feed, care for, or otherwise assist in the reproduction of human life are subject—to greater and lesser degrees—to workplace supervision, pressures to work more efficiently, performance reviews, and other disciplining measures familiar to those who work in factories or fast-food restaurants. They often report to governing boards populated by members of the ruling class or are managed through bureaucratic chains of command inflected with the priorities and resources provided by the capitalist state. And increasingly, digital technologies are introduced into these work processes to both speed up and monitor workers' "productivity."[18] All these elements of paid public sector social reproductive work subsume a worker to the logic of capital accumulation and regularly override the logic of life-making or meeting human need.

The degree of subsumption, however, varies so widely *precisely because such work is capitalistically "unproductive."* Most significantly, because the product is another human life, social reproductive work tends to be socially interactive in nature. Its "product" can and does talk back, behave in ways that may or may not further the goals of the worker (or the worker's boss). A student who hasn't eaten or had enough sleep cannot learn as well as one who has—regardless of the pressures a teacher is under to submit higher test scores. A patient develops an infection during a routine surgery and ends up spending a week rather than a day in the hospital, requiring more care by more attendants and more administrative and custodial resources than it takes to produce the average healthy human being.

Such scenarios drive home the point that the production of life regularly requires resisting the subsumption of life to capital. And when the workers involved are "unproductive" workers (not hired by private, for-profit companies), they are more able, and sometimes have no choice but to, override capitalist imperatives. Depending upon the degree of autonomy they enjoy, they can even make a point of prioritizing life needs over capital. For example, teachers will often play with and care for their students, not to improve test scores but to address a child's need for attention, fun, and love. A personal support worker paid to dress an elderly client might take extra time to fix the client's makeup or help with setting their room straight for the same reasons. Of course, such workers might choose to ignore or be ill-equipped to deal with those needs as well. But the point is that while there are certainly pressures from above to speed up and shortchange the processes of life-making, public sector

social reproduction workers experience pressures from below to do the opposite: they confront and negotiate the needs of the people they are helping to reproduce as part and parcel of their daily work. And in the process, they can establish connections with others that cut against the alienating tendencies of capitalism, emotionally and intellectually investing in their work and the "product" of their labour—despite being immersed in capitalist relations and against the disciplining pressures of management and/or technology.[19]

Relatedly, because such workers produce life not value (albeit under a disciplinary regime of wage labour), it is impossible to capitalistically measure their output. Unlike Google or Amazon, which depend upon market sales to determine the productivity of their workforce (and therefore the standards of productivity to impose), school board trustees have no reliably objective measure to determine how much knowledge a child absorbs. They can, and do, aspire to these—by comparing standardized test scores and school dropout rates among other things. And they use these market "proxies" to discipline teachers. Similarly, hospital management might use time studies to regulate orderlies bathing a patient, or cafeteria workers distributing meals. Such practices facilitate the subsumption of the worker to capitalist imperatives—but not with the degree of rigidity and exactness that they do in the "productive" sector because there is no capitalist value attached to the product life.[20]

This admittedly schematic taxonomy of labour forms is not intended to be the last word on subsumption and the social forms of labour. Indeed, research on this question from a social reproduction feminism perspective is sparse. My goal here is simply to illustrate why the Marxian school insists that capitalist subsumption is *not* a totalizing process, and how that perspective can be understood in relation to the differentiation between "unproductive" social reproductive labour and "productive" labour within capitalist relations. There may be a totalizing tendency at work, but concrete labour can never be fully identical with its abstract form, and the discrepancy between the two will generally be greater where the direct imposition of value imperatives is not available.[21] For it is only by highlighting the co-existence of—and contradictions between—"productive" and "unproductive" labour within the process of value creation that we can grasp how *all* workers (be they reproducing labour power or making capitalist commodities) can and do resist capitalism's relentless degradation of life *despite* their everyday existence as capitalist subjects.

And that is why resolving this question of theory matters politically. The theoretical disagreements just outlined lead autonomist Marxist feminism to conceptualize the possibilities for resistance as existing beyond or outside capitalist relations, in the creation of alternative spaces to capitalism; the Marxian school looks instead toward struggles to break the system from within. This requires, among other things, drawing on and continuing to develop the anti-oppression politics of a renewed social reproduction feminism perspective in order to forge and strengthen ties of solidarity across community and workplace movements. Along with tracing the ties between theoretical and political differences, the next section proposes that the autonomist Marxist feminist strategic focus on building alternatives to capitalism forfeits fertile political ground. It fails to highlight the potentialities of mass movement building *across* productive and reproductive sectors for forging new ways of life-making while also confronting capital on its own terrain.

FROM THEORY TO POLITICS: SOCIAL REPRODUCTION FEMINIST STRATEGIES

Both approaches discussed here hold that because the reproduction of labour power is at one and the same time the reproduction of life, it is always possible and often necessary for the forces of life to assert themselves against the forces of capital. As Federici writes:

> Highlighting the reproduction of "labor power" reveals the dual character and the contradiction inherent in reproductive labor and, therefore, the unstable, potentially disruptive character of this work. To the extent that labor power can only exist in the living individual, its reproduction must be simultaneously a production and valorization of desired human qualities and capacities, and an accommodation to the externally imposed standards of the labor market.[22]

Those "desired human qualities and capacities" constitute an immense well of "practical human activity" from which new societies can be forged—societies that put human need ahead of profit. Autonomist Marxist feminism and the Marxian school further agree that the social reproduction strike plays a key role in resisting capital and forging new societies. Where they differ is in their *conception* of the social reproduc-

tion strike—what it precisely takes to mobilize the forces of life to disrupt capital's power to impose the "standards of the labor market."

Federici has been at the forefront of advancing a renewed political vision that draws on the theory and politics of refusal that informed the WfH campaign. In a 2008 article, she calls for a "reopening of a collective struggle over reproduction" through which workers assert control over "the material conditions of our reproduction and creat[e] new forms of cooperation around this work *outside of the logic* of capital and the market."[23] She advocates carving out collective spaces beyond capital's reach wherein people socially reproduce themselves and their communities. For once outside capitalism, she argues, it is possible to forge new, collective, ways of living and producing.

Federici has in mind communal kitchens, farms, and land occupations (citing recent Latin American initiatives as examples), as well as market-alternative trading systems for healthcare, childcare, and other social services. These are "cooperative forms of reproduction [that enable people] to survive despite their very limited access to monetary income."[24] Careful not to endorse just any cooperative venture, she elaborates upon and qualifies the concept of a *revolutionary* commons in a 2014 article written with George Caffentzis. A revolutionary notion of the commons not only refuses the logic of capitalism but also works "to transform our social relations and create an alternative to capitalism." To that end, the authors outline six political and logistical principles informing a "commons against and beyond capitalism," which establish an embryonic post-capitalist set of relations.[25]

Kathi Weeks advances a similar vision of moving beyond capital, although she proposes somewhat different means. Weeks follows Jean Baudrillard's critique of Marx's insistence that humans are fundamentally producers. She suggests that as "the practical and ideological position of abstract labor … [this claim is] a mythology internal to and … ultimately supportive of the work society," or capitalism. Insofar as Marxist and socialist feminist politics begin from this same premise, they exhibit similar "productivist tendencies." In revaluing unwaged work and care, socialist feminists end up "replicat[ing] the very ideas about the moral virtues of work" that capitalism relies upon. Resistance to capital, counsels Weeks, requires instead that movements refuse work—that they collectively reject work's domination of life and instead develop the possibilities of the "creative powers of social labor."[26]

Weeks highlights the campaign for a Universal Basic Income (UBI) as an example of such a politics. A decent, unconditional guaranteed income, she suggests, allows people to opt out of waged work and force employers to increase wages and "pursue opportunities for pleasure and creativity that are *outside* the economic realm of production," including opportunities to "recreate and reinvent relations of sociality, care and intimacy."[27] Such prefigurative relations are not ends in themselves but a means of revealing how capitalist society is dominated by work, and how work is organized through a gender division of labour and the naturalization of the family. That is, the call for UBI is, like the WfH campaign before it, intended as a "perspective and provocation" as much if not more than as a demand in its own right.[28]

The above summary leaves much out of two important analyses. I hope it provides sufficient context, however, to trace the connection between their political proposals and the theory that informs them. Both Weeks and Federici support building alternatives to capitalism as a path to revolution, seeing these as crucial spaces in which people can develop prefigurative relations that put the needs of human life ahead of those of capital. They see in such spaces an immanent counter-power to capital. By consciously developing value-alternative communities and initiatives, people grasp their own agency as makers of the world and develop dis-alienated ways of relating to each other and the things they produce. Such alternatives must be established outside or against capital because capitalism is a totalizing system that flattens any differentiation between capitalistically "productive" and "unproductive" labour. For the production of use values to dominate—for production to serve life not capital—workers must escape capitalist relations and organize their labour according to revolutionary principles of cooperation.

This is the essence of the strike, or the refusal to work, as defined by autonomist Marxist feminists. It is a *withdrawal* from the capitalist system and the development of a new, classless, economic system. It paints a scenario in which capital is resisted in a piecemeal and cumulative fashion, as more and more people develop capital-resistant modes of living or getting things done. The counter-power to capitalism emerges because members of the revolutionary commons gain greater control over the conditions of their social reproduction and embrace alternative ways of being that resist the "work society." It is here, within communities and initiatives "outside" capitalism, where members discover and nurture the "creative powers of social labor."

For the Marxian school, the social reproductive strike is also incredibly important. In a "manifesto" written to explain and advance the political perspective informing many of the recent International Women's Day strikes, Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser offer a rationale that echoes the autonomist Marxist feminism position: "By withholding housework, sex, smiles, and other forms of gendered, invisible work, [striking women] are disclosing the indispensable role of social reproductive activities in capitalist society." The strike broadens our understanding of who works to sustain capitalism—and therefore of who comprises the "working class"—while also "disclosing the unity of 'workplace' and 'social life.'" And, as Weeks and Federici also stress, Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser insist that the social reproductive strike represents a space of creativity, a space where "the impossible" can and must be demanded.[29]

For both political perspectives, then, the social reproductive strike is a powerful weapon in the struggle against capital. The Marxian school departs from autonomist Marxist feminism, however, in its definition of what constitutes a strike, and more significantly, in its conception of how the strike poses a threat to capital. According to the authors of *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*, the strike is not only or even primarily a withdrawal from capitalist relations. Certainly, many anti-capitalist camps, occupations, and communal kitchens Federici refers to are examples of social reproductive strikes which, according to this perspective, should be supported. But for the Marxian school, so too are those anti-capitalist social movements that make demands on the state without also creating worker production or trading cooperatives. As are walkouts and militant protests of paid social reproductive workers in the public sector. The *Manifesto* celebrates, for example, workplace- and community-based protests for better schools, healthcare, housing, transportation, and environmental protections. And it stresses the importance of building solidarity across such struggles.

Many of these strikes do not refuse work in the sense discussed by Federici and Weeks. But they nonetheless make claims for democratic and collective control of the conditions of (re)production. They are examples of people who collectively insist on putting need over profit by demanding that the resources for social reproduction be expanded—who attempt, that is, to take life back from capital. For the Marxian school, then, the strike is a moment of collective *struggle against* capital. It is not so much the forging of an *alternative to or a way beyond* capital, even

though it can and often does engender the creativity and social bonds that revolutionary cooperatives can engender (a point I return to below). Rather, these strikes are fundamentally about building a mass movement capable of confronting capital on its own terrain.

That terrain is organized by capital and the capitalist state. Although both forms of labour are necessary to sustaining capitalism, according to this perspective, "productive" labour does not hold the same relation to capital as "unproductive" labour. On the one hand, that means that conventional workplace-based strikes in capitalistically "productive" industries are critical to any anti-capitalist movement. One cannot adequately threaten the ruling class by organizing resistance *solely* around social reproductive labour strikes. On the other hand, because social reproductive labour is not capitalistically "productive" labour and is managed to a large degree by the state, the fight against capital must also engage the state—through attempts to assert the priorities of life over capital whether in paid or unpaid sites of social reproductive labour.[30]

Not only does the Marxian school identify the need to develop anti-capitalist struggles on multiple fronts, it prioritizes building bridges between those fronts. Practically, this means figuring out ways for workplace strikes to incorporate anti-oppression politics, and for anti-oppression strikes to incorporate workplace-based demands. Examples of this cross-fertilization include Black Lives Matter organizing with some Kentucky teachers to oppose that state's racist so-called gang bill (HB 169) as part of their strike actions.[31] Or the New York Teamsters transformation into a "sanctuary union" which protects its members from being detained and deported by immigration authorities.[32] By *engaging* with anti-capitalist struggles both "inside" and "outside" capitalist social relations, strikes not only can expand the "partial protection for some from capital's inherent tendency to cannibalize social reproduction."[33] They can also—and this is a point that the theoretical commitments of autonomist Marxist feminism fails to make evident—create *alternative communities of struggle* wherein bonds of solidarity are forged and strikers develop creative ways of meeting people's needs.

That is, strikes do not have to be exercises in revolutionary commons to model alternative ways of organizing life-making. The potential to unleash creative energies and ideas about how to build a better world and engender social bonds to counter the alienation and isolation of capitalist subjectivity is inherent in the very act of organizing with others to improve control over the conditions of work and life. Perhaps the most

vivid recent example of this come from the 2018 wave of education worker strikes to hit the United States. Eric Blanc's interviews with more than a hundred people involved in the West Virginia, Arizona, and Oklahoma strike movements lead him to conclude that strikers were "profoundly transformed" by their participation.[34] They connected in new ways with co-workers they had barely known and had little in common with culturally and ideologically; they strategized, waved placards, shared meals, chanted, sang, and camped out on the state legislative grounds together; they jointly endured moments of disappointment, debate and defeat, and even bigger moments of celebration. And they connected in new ways with the communities they worked in as passersby honked and waved in support, as strangers identifying them by their distinctive red T-shirts approached them in grocery stores to thank them for their job action, and as students and parents stood on their lines and rallied in support. In the words of Arizona teacher Noah Karvelis, interviewed by Blanc:

> Since the strike, there's a definite sense of solidarity that wasn't there before. When you go into school and see all of your coworkers in red, it's like they're saying, "I'm with you, I got you." It's hard to even sum up that feeling. You used to go in to school, do your thing, and go home. Now if there's a struggle, we go do something about it because we're in it together. It's not just that there are a lot more personal friendships—we saw that we had power.[35]

Such solidarity did not magically appear. It had to be built. The strikers were divided by all the usual social cleavages. Not all teachers were in the union and most were white. They differed in political allegiance, religious affiliation, and income (in West Virginia bus drivers, cafeteria cooks, custodians, and other support staff walked out as well). Moreover, as social reproductive workers in the public sector, the walkout risked creating a wedge between themselves and the community they served. Rather than deny these divisions, organizers and strikers consciously addressed them—figuring out imaginative ways of addressing needs and drawing people in: bilingual signs and chants, GoFundMe sites to help lower-income strikers make ends meet, soliciting food donations, and delivering care packages for families who otherwise rely on school lunches. As Kate Doyle Griffiths observes, strikers temporarily and partially reorganized the relations of social reproductive labour "on the basis of workers control for the benefit of the wider working

class" while also fostering solidarity with community members.[36] And although strikers did not generally politicize around racial issues, Blanc notes, they were self-consciously inclusive and won the support of the majority black and brown student base and their families through their calls for increased school funding and (in Arizona) opposition to cuts to Medicaid and services for those with disabilities.[37] These are not-so-small and incredibly important examples of how strikers organize new ways of life-making, ways that defy the alienating, individualizing experiences of everyday life under capitalism.

These are the lessons Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser take from struggle:

> Struggle is an opportunity and a school. It can transform those who participate in it, challenging our prior self-understandings and reshaping our view of the world. It can deepen our comprehension of our own oppression—what causes it, who benefits, and what must be done to overcome it. The experience of struggle can also prompt us to reinterpret our interests, reframe our hopes, and expand our sense of the possible. It can induce us to revise prior understanding of who are our allies and who are our enemies. It can broaden the circle of solidarity among the oppressed and sharpen their antagonism to the oppressors.[38]

There is nothing within autonomist Marxist feminism that suggests this form of organizing should not be supported—and those associated with the tradition have been supportive of the teachers' strike and similar struggles. Rather, my point is that a theory of capital that conflates all labour with "productive" labour has little to say about the strategic role of such strikes. Because autonomist Marxist feminism understands value to be created everywhere, *all* places play the same role in resisting capital. There is, in other words, *from capital's perspective*, little to differentiate a walkout by Walmart workers from a politicized, cooperative community kitchen. Both stop the creation of value; both refuse capitalist ethics and organization of work. As a result, there is no compelling or clear necessity to promote political strategies to bridge struggles on multiple fronts.

Federici and Weeks are indeed relatively silent about whether one should or how one might confront capital on its own terrain. They don't discuss the potential of such strikes to forge social bonds and ways of provisioning and supporting each other that allow us to imagine building

a better world is in fact possible. Neither do they have much to say about how their strategies relate to anti-oppression social movements that make demands on the state, and even less to say about building solidarity with trade unionists and others at the point of capitalist production. For example, of the six principles of revolutionary commons Federici and Caffentzis propose, five deal with the internal organization of alternative communities. None mentions the significance of workplace-based struggles to the revolutionary commons project. And only one mentions connecting the project with those who fight for improved state services and resources—a connection the authors endorse as "an ideological imperative" because the state manages collective wealth, which must be reappropriated and public sector workers have a certain, useful, knowledge base.[39]

Weeks, on the other hand, advocates making a demand on the state for UBI while making it clear that the goal is not simply or even necessarily achieving the reform. The demand itself, she explains, is both perspective and provocation. In the same sense that the WfH campaign did not really expect the state to pay housewives wages (because of the threat to capitalism this would pose), Weeks understands that capitalism will not abide UBI. As a result, "it is not the content of the demand but the collective practice of demanding that will determine whether what we win 'will be a victory or a defeat.'"[40] She gestures here to the importance of building mass resistance, but doesn't develop this point. Similarly, although Weeks discusses why a guaranteed basic income could strengthen workers' social power (because it would improve their wage bargaining leverage), she doesn't elaborate on building solidarity among the employed and unemployed. The autonomist Marxist feminism theory points her, and Federici, in a different direction.

CONCLUSION

The Marxian school prioritizes struggle against capital, not because it is particularly combative in outlook. Confrontation, it claims, is an essential political strategy because there can be no form of labour today (cooperative or not) that fully escapes capital's domination—that is not already imbued, more-or-less, with the imperatives of capitalist accumulation.[41] Consider, for instance, that occupations exist on land already defined by capitalist processes of dispossession and accumulation (otherwise what precisely is being *occupied*? or from whom is the land being *claimed* or

protected?). And commons of any sort are organized within political jurisdictions defined in relation to and largely beholden to capitalists' interests. To be "outside" capital is, by definition, to be determined to some extent by capital. There can only be spaces and times that are, more-or-less, shaped by the logic of capitalist accumulation. Subsumption is, as I argue above, a matter of degree—not a totalizing experience.[42]

It is simply not possible then to refuse work's domination of life—be it through the freedom granted by UBI or through organizing production within revolutionary commons. Rather, work dominates life as a condition of capitalist existence. At the same time, that domination is always susceptible to forms of internal resistance. As we saw in the first chapter of this book, work dominates life because capital has robbed people of the means with which they make life. To move beyond capital then means that workers need to push back against capital's domination of life *within the system itself*—to claim more resources for life-making and fewer for capital. But until we destroy capitalism, we cannot escape it. We are always, everywhere, in struggle with it.

This is why, the authors of the *Manifesto* place so much emphasis on struggle and solidarity. And why they call the strike movement "Feminism for the 99%"—a movement that in drawing into struggle the exploited, dominated, and oppressed forges connections between and among those who have a common interest in creating a new, socialist or post-capitalist, society:

> Feminists for the 99% do not operate in isolation from other movements of resistance and rebellion. We do not separate ourselves from battles against climate change or exploitation in the workplace. Nor do we stand aloof from struggles against institutional racism and dispossession. Those struggles are our own struggles, part and parcel of the struggle to dismantle capitalism, without which there can be no end to gender and sexual oppression.[43]

Building solidarity, in this reckoning, is the strike's means *and* end. Second Wave feminist theory was mistaken, write Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, "in treating universal sisterhood as the starting point." Solidarity is, in fact, the goal.[44] Avoiding that mistake requires patiently negotiating ways of working together while respecting the integrity of each sector's organizational and political autonomy. In this, socialist feminists embrace the Combahee River Collective vision of resistance

in which one group's "liberation is a necessity not … an adjunct to somebody else's" while also incorporating those particular struggles into a shared movement aimed at destroying capitalism. Only then can the strike be a widely diverse confrontation with capital on multiple fronts—in the realm of social reproduction *and* "production" without collapsing one struggle into the other. That is, only then does revolutionary strategy entail incorporating multiple forms of resistance to capital through building a mass movement linking struggles in communities and on the streets with those taking place within paid workplaces. Such a movement is diverse but united in its intent to create a world that prioritizes need over profit, that dislodges labour for capital with labour for life.

30. This is the same dynamic of dispossession and primitive accumulation involved in the transition from feudalism to capitalism (see Chapter 1).
31. Federici, *Caliban*, 17.
32. See Chapter 5.
33. See, for example, Isabella Bakker and Rachel Silvey, eds., *Beyond States and Markets: The Challenges of Social Reproduction* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Ferguson and McNally, "Precarious Migrants."
34. Capitalism is widely seen as a system of "free" labour, as opposed to slavery or feudalism where workers are bonded to owners or employers. Marx takes issue with that characterization, pointing out the economic coercion capitalism entails (one is not free if one has no choice but to work in order to live; see Chapter 1). Jairus Banaji expands that critique, suggesting that capitalist labour is better characterized by varying degrees of unfreedom; see Jairus Banaji, "The Fictions of Free Labour: Contract, Coercion and So-called Unfree Labour," *Historical Materialism* 11, no. 3 (2003): 69–95; see also Genevieve LeBaron, "Unfree Labor Beyond Binaries: Social Hierarchy, Insecurity, and Labor Market Restructuring," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1 (2015), 1–19; and Todd Gordon, "Capitalism, Neoliberalism and Unfree Labour," *Critical Sociology* (April 20, 2018), doi.org/10.1177/0896920518763936.
35. See "Migration Data Portal: The Bigger Picture," International Organization for Migration (2019), https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-migration-flows.
36. Federici, *Revolution*, 71.
37. Alessandra Mezzadri, *The Sweatshop Regime: Labouring Bodies, Exploitation, and Garments Made in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5, 37.
38. Ibid., 134.
39. Federici, *Revolution*, 104. Yet, she also notes that capital is never completely indifferent to the loss of life since it cannot exist without living labour.

CHAPTER 8: THE SOCIAL REPRODUCTION STRIKE: LIFE-MAKING BEYOND CAPITALISM

1. See Maya Gonzalez, "The Gendered Circuit: Reading The Arcane of Reproduction," *Viewpoint Magazine* (September 28, 2013), www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/28/the-gendered-circuit-reading-the-arcane-of-reproduction/.
2. See Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven: Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 2002).
3. Other early theorists associated with this tradition include Antonio Negri, Félix Guattari, and Adriano Sofri.
4. Federici, *Revolution*, 35.

5. The latter was seen not so much as undesirable but as insufficient. State-provided daycare, for instance, does not necessarily challenge (and may reinforce) the gender division of labour.
6. Dalla Costa and James, *Power of Women*, 20. See Chapter 6 for more on the WfH campaign.
7. The Marxian school is not an explicitly organized group or "school." The designation is entirely my own, based on my understanding of those who share a theoretical and political perspective; I use it here to meet my need for a succinct way of referring to socialist feminists, like myself, who have been influenced by Lise Vogel's work. I call it "Marxian" not to lay exclusive claim to Marx's mantle, but to emphasize our close adherence to Marx's theory of value.
8. The exception is paid social reproductive labour performed in for-profit enterprises, such as private schools, childcare centers, or restaurants. In these cases, the product of social reproductive labour *is* exchanged on the market (even as it also produces labour power).
9. Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, 1981, trans. Hilary Creek and ed. Jim Fleming (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1995), 9. Fortunati was active in Italian workerist and feminist struggles in the 1970s, eventually joining *Lotta Femminista* in which she worked with Dalla Costa and others on the WfH campaign. See also Fortunati, "Learning to Struggle: My Story Between Workerism and Feminism," *Viewpoint Magazine* (September 15, 2013), www.viewpointmag.com/2013/09/15/learning-to-struggle-my-story-between-workerism-and-feminism/. Gonzalez calls *The Arcane* (published in 1981 in Italian and 1995 in English), "one of the most important Marxist contributions to a theory of gendered exploitation, and also one of the most widely misunderstood" ("Gendered Circuit").
10. Fortunati, *Arcane*, 105, emphasis added.
11. This is not to say that *all* social reproductive labour is "unproductive" (see n. 8 above).
12. Indeed, some criticize the Marxian school for being overly beholden to Marxist orthodoxy. See Alessandra Mezzadri, "On the Value of Social Reproduction: Informal Labour, the Majority World, and the Need for Inclusive Theory and Politics," *Radical Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (Spring 2019), https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/on-the-value-of-social-reproduction; and Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 244, n. 12.
13. Dalla Costa and James, *Power of Women*, 16, n. 12.
14. This conceptual confusion is repeated and elaborated upon in social reproduction feminist analyses of digital media. See, for example, Kylie Jarrett, "The Relevance of 'Women's Work': Social Reproduction and Immaterial Labor in Digital Media," *Television & New Media* 15, no. 1 (2014): 14–29.
15. It excludes social reproductive labour in the private sector (such as cooks in restaurants or teachers in private schools), which is in fact "productive" labour because its products while also sustaining life (restaurant meals,

education) are produced to be sold on the capitalist market (see n. 8 above). Marx applies this rationale to the teaching profession: "A schoolmaster who educates others is not a productive worker. But a schoolmaster who is engaged as a wage labourer in an institution along with others, in order through his labour to valorise the money of the entrepreneur of the *knowledge-mongering institution*, is a productive worker"; see Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Economic Works of Karl Marx, 1861–1864*, vol. 34, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994), 484.

16. Those whose spaces of social reproduction and waged work overlap (live-in caregivers or migrant workers housed in employer-owned camps, for instance) have considerably less flexibility in this regard.
17. See D.E. Mulcahy, D.G. Mulcahy and Roger Saul, eds., *Education in North America* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
18. For an example of the positive spin placed on this development, where technology is cited as improving efficiency *and* engagement, see "Technology and the Workforce of the Future: The Future of Work in Healthcare," Deloitte.com, www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/life-sciences-and-health-care/articles/healthcare-workforce-technology.html. For a more critical view, see Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Perrenas, eds., *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies and the Politics of Care* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
19. Ursula Huws makes this point about capitalistically "productive" labour in the creative industries as well; see her *Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014).
20. For an excellent examination of how such proxies have been imposed in the higher education sector, see Eric Newstadt, *The Value of Quality: Capital, Class, and Quality Assessment in the Re-making of Higher Education in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ontario*, PhD Dissertation, York University, Toronto (December 23, 2013).
21. See McNally, "Dual Form."
22. Federici, *Revolution*, 99.
23. Ibid., 111, emphasis added.
24. Matthew Carlin and Silvia Federici, "The Exploitation of Women, Social Reproduction, and the Struggle Against Global Capital," *Theory & Event* (January 2014), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303289331_The_Exploitation_of_Women_Social_Reproduction_and_the_Struggle_against_Global_Capital: 2.
25. George Caffentzis and Silvia Federici, "Commons Against and Beyond Capitalism," *Community Development Journal* 49, no. 51 (January 2014): 92–105, 100.
26. Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 90, 25, 158. The "productivist" conception of human life and society Weeks takes issue with is elaborated in Chapter 1.
27. Ibid., 103, emphasis added, 168. While Weeks advocates demanding a "sufficient, unconditional and continuous" (138) UBI that does not replace existing social services, John Clarke argues that no contemporary government would pass such a policy, and for the left to endorse UBI is

to grant legitimacy to the neoliberal agenda that will use UBI as a means of clawing back social services and offloading state responsibilities onto individuals. See John Clarke, *Basic Income in the Neo-liberal Age* (Toronto: Socialist Project, 2017).

28. Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 149.
29. Arruzza et al., *Feminism*, Thesis 1.
30. Referring to the recent wave of teachers strikes in the United States, Kate Doyle Griffiths proposes that certain sites of paid social reproductive labour constitute "choke points" of resistance to capital in the same way that Kim Moody argues the capitalistically "productive" logistics industry is. See Griffiths, "Queer Workers, Social Reproduction and Left Strategy" (November 19, 2018), www.patreon.com/posts/queer-workers-22819890; and Moody, *On New Terrain: How Capital is Reshaping the Battleground of Class War* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2017).
31. Tithi Bhattacharya, "Why the Teachers' Revolt Must Confront Racism Head On," *Dissent* (May 1, 2018), www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/why-teachers-strikes-must-confront-racism.
32. Ginger Adams Otis, "N.Y. Teamsters for 'Sanctuary Union' to Fight ICE Agents," *Daily News* (February 10, 2018), www.nydailynews.com/new-york/n-y-teamsters-form-sanctuary-union-fight-ice-agents-article-1.3813201.
33. Arruzza et al., *Feminism*, Postface 1.
34. Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strikes and Working-Class Politics* (London: Verso, 2019), 3.
35. Ibid., 41.
36. Kate Doyle Griffiths, "Crossroads and Country Roads: Wildcat West Virginia and the Possibilities of a Working Class Offensive," *Viewpoint Magazine* (March 13, 2018), www.viewpointmag.com/2018/03/13/crossroads-and-country-roads-wildcat-west-virginia-and-the-possibilities-of-a-working-class-offensive/.
37. Blanc, *Red State*, 64–7, 81–2.
38. Arruzza et al., *Feminism*, Thesis 10.
39. Caffentzis and Federici, "Commons," 102.
40. Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 149.
41. To be clear, the Marxian school suggests no labour exists outside of capitalist domination, but *not* all labour within capitalism is fully subsumed to the logic of accumulation. Autonomist Marxist feminism suggests that it is possible to build alternatives to capitalism, but that all labour within capitalism *is* fully subsumed to its logic.
42. For Marx, producer cooperatives could play a progressive role in the transition to capitalism but are also subject to certain limitations. See Bruno Jossa, "Marx, Marxism and the Cooperative Movement," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 29 (2005): 3–18.
43. Arruzza et al., *Feminism*, Thesis 10.
44. Ibid., Thesis 6. Solidarity here should not be equated with universal sisterhood, as the latter denies the determinative influences of capitalist oppressions and exploitation.