

INTRODUCTION    **The Problem with Work**

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Though women do not complain of the power of husbands, each complains of her own husband, or of the husbands of her friends. It is the same in all other cases of servitude, at least in the commencement of the emancipatory movement. The serfs did not at first complain of the power of their lords, but only of their tyranny.

JOHN STUART MILL, *THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN*

One type of work, or one particular job, is contrasted with another type, experienced or imagined, within the present world of work; judgments are rarely made about the world of work as presently organized as against some other way of organizing it.

C. WRIGHT MILLS, *WHITE COLLAR*

Why do we work so long and so hard? The mystery here is not that we are required to work or that we are expected to devote so much time and energy to its pursuit, but rather that there is not more active resistance to this state of affairs. The problems with work today—my focus will be on the United States—have to do with both its quantity and its quality and are not limited to the travails of any one group. Those problems include the low wages in most sectors of the economy; the unemployment, underemployment, and precarious employment suffered by many workers; and the overwork that often characterizes even the most privileged forms of employment—after all, even the best job is a problem when it monopolizes so much of life. To be sure, if we were only resigned to such

conditions, there would be no puzzle. What is perplexing is less the acceptance of the present reality that one must work to live than the willingness to live for work. By the same token, it is easy to appreciate why work is held in such high esteem, but considerably less obvious why it seems to be valued more than other pastimes and practices.

That these questions are rarely posed within the field of political theory is also surprising. The lack of interest in representing the daily grind of work routines in various forms of popular culture is perhaps understandable,<sup>1</sup> as is the tendency among cultural critics to focus on the animation and meaningfulness of commodities rather than the eclipse of laboring activity that Marx identifies as the source of their fetishization (Marx 1976, 164–65). The preference for a level of abstraction that tends not to register either the qualitative dimensions or the hierarchical relations of work can also account for its relative neglect in the field of mainstream economics. But the lack of attention to the lived experience and political textures of work within political theory would seem to be another matter.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, political theorists tend to be more interested in our lives as citizens and noncitizens, legal subjects and bearers of rights, consumers and spectators, religious devotees and family members, than in our daily lives as workers.<sup>3</sup> And yet, to take a simple example, the amount of time alone that the average citizen is expected to devote to work—particularly when we include the time spent training, searching, and preparing for work, not to mention recovering from it—would suggest that the experience warrants more consideration. Work is crucial not only to those whose lives are centered around it, but also, in a society that expects people to work for wages, to those who are expelled or excluded from work and marginalized in relation to it. Perhaps more significantly, places of employment and spaces of work would seem to be supremely relevant to the very bread and butter of political science: as sites of decision making, they are structured by relations of power and authority; as hierarchical organizations, they raise issues of consent and obedience; as spaces of exclusion, they pose questions about membership and obligation. Although impersonal forces may compel us into work, once we enter the workplace we inevitably find ourselves enmeshed in the direct and personal relations of rulers and ruled. Indeed, the work site is where we often experience the most immediate, unambiguous, and tangible relations of power that most of us will encounter on a daily basis. As a

fully political rather than a simply economic phenomenon, work would thus seem to be an especially rich object of inquiry.

There are at least two reasons for the inattention to work within political theory that bear mentioning. The first of these is what I will call the privatization of work. As the pair of epigraphs above suggest, we seem to have a hard time grasping the power relations of both work and family systematically; we often experience and imagine the employment relation—like the marriage relation—not as a social institution but as a unique relationship. Certainly this can be explained in part by the institution of private property that secures the privacy of the employment relation alongside the marriage relation. However, it should also be noted that this mode of privatizing work is not easily maintained: work has long occupied a somewhat vexed position in the private-public economy of liberalism. Thus, even though John Locke could establish the private character of work through both the natural right to property and its integration into the economy of the household, the state's role in defending property rights (and, since Locke's day, increasingly regulating and planning on property's behalf) threatens the status of work as a private relationship, exposing it, by the logic of Locke's scheme, to the purview of properly political power.<sup>4</sup> Work's place within the private-public division becomes even more troubled with the advent of industrialization; as work becomes identified with waged work and separated from the household, it could more easily seem—by comparison to that exemplary private sphere—relatively public. But there are additional mechanisms that secure what I am calling work's privatization. One is its reification: the fact that at present one must work to “earn a living” is taken as part of the natural order rather than as a social convention. Consequently, as C. Wright Mills observes (in one of the epigraphs above), we tend to focus more on the problems with this or that job, or on their absence, than on work as a requirement, work as a system, work as a way of life. Like the serfs who, as John Stuart Mill claims in the other epigraph, “did not at first complain of the power of their lords, but only of their tyranny” (1988, 84), we are better at attending to the problems with this or that boss than to the system that grants them such power. The effective privatization of work is also a function of the way the labor market individualizes work—never more so than today, with the enormous variety of tasks and schedules that characterize the contemporary

employment relation. The workplace, like the household, is typically figured as a private space, the product of a series of individual contracts rather than a social structure, the province of human need and sphere of individual choice rather than a site for the exercise of political power. And because of this tethering of work to the figure of the individual, it is difficult to mount a critique of work that is not received as something wholly different: a criticism of workers. As a result of work's subordination to property rights, its reification, and its individualization, thinking about work as a social system—even with its arguably more tenuous private status—strangely becomes as difficult as it is for many to conceive marriage and the family in structural terms.

The second reason for the marginalization of work within political theory's configuration of the political could be attributed to the decline of work-based activism in the United States. In the absence of a worker's party, and with the fickle and sometimes conflicting class alignments within and between the two major parties, electoral politics has rarely served as an adequate vehicle for work-centered activism. The power of union-based politics has also been curtailed by the sharp decline of union membership in the period since the Second World War. Many activists today seem to assume that, besides party-line voting and institutionalized collective bargaining, our best chance for exerting collective power lies in our purchasing power. Ethical buying and the consumer boycott as ways to effect corporate decision making thus rise to the forefront of the political-economic imaginary. Of course, the logic that informs these models of consumer politics is the same one that enables corporations to make the case that low prices for ever more worthy consumer goods is an adequate trade-off for low wages, outsourcing, union busting, and government make-work programs. To the extent that unionization and consumer organizing continue to represent not only two obviously important means, but often the *only* avenues for imagining a politics of work, we are left with few possibilities for marshaling antiwork activism and inventing postwork alternatives.

What amounts in all these instances to a depoliticization of work is precisely what I want to think through and challenge in this contribution to the political theory of work. The brief chapter summaries at the end of this introduction will outline the book's specific points of focus and lines of argument. But first, I want to concentrate on presenting the project's major theoretical lineages and dominant conceptual frames, not to pre-

view the analyses to come so much as to account for their inspiration and explain the kinds of claims and assumptions they presuppose. In terms of theoretical resources, although Max Weber, Jean Baudrillard, and Friedrich Nietzsche will each have a critical role to play at some point in the analysis, the project draws most heavily, albeit selectively, on the fields of feminist theory and Marxist theory, as this introductory discussion will illustrate. I should note, however, that it is not only political theory's disregard for the politics of work that poses obstacles for this endeavor; as we will see, both feminism's and Marxism's productivist tendencies—their sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit pro-work suppositions and commitments—present problems as well. There are, nonetheless, a number of exceptional cases or even whole subtraditions within each of these fields that have much to offer antiwork critiques and post-work imaginaries. But rather than organize this introductory discussion around a rehearsal of the project's more specific theoretical debts, I want to structure it instead in relation to a selection of its key concepts. The analysis begins with two concepts that orient the undertaking and give it direction: the work society and the work ethic. It then proceeds to a series of conceptual pairings—including work and labor, work and class, and freedom and equality—through which I hope to flesh out the text's central themes and further clarify my concerns and intentions. Let me start by articulating some of the reasons why I find the topic of work so theoretically interesting and politically pressing. The concept of the work society is my point of entry into that discussion.

#### THE WORK SOCIETY

The shift in perspective that I would like to see more political theorists pursue—from state and government to political economy, from cultural products to the sites and relations of their production, from public spaces and marketplaces to workplaces—is reminiscent of something Marx proposed in an oft-cited passage at the end of part two of the first volume of *Capital*. As a way to describe the buying and selling of that very “peculiar” commodity labor power, Marx presents the story of two free, self-interested individuals, each an owner of property and both equal under the law, who enter into an exchange of equivalents: one consents to give the use of his or her labor power for a limited period of time, and in return, the other agrees to pay the first a specific amount of money. But to see what happens after the employment contract is

signed, the analysis must then move to a different location, the site where this special commodity will be “consumed” by putting the seller of it to work. “Let us therefore,” Marx proposes,

in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice “No admittance except on business.” Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. (1976, 279–80)

By altering the focus of the study in this way, Marx promises, “the secret of profit-making” will be exposed (280). By changing the site of the analysis from a market-based exchange to wage-based production, the labor-process itself—that is, the activity of labor and the social relations that shape, direct, and manage it—will be revealed as the locus of capitalist valorization.

So what are the benefits of this vantage point? What do we see when we shift our angle of vision from the market sphere of exchange to the privatized sphere of production? As the language about revealing secrets suggests, part of what Marx seeks to accomplish by descending into this “hidden abode” is to publicize the world of waged work, to expose it as neither natural precursor nor peripheral byproduct of capitalist production, but rather as its central mechanism (the wage) and lifeblood (work). With this shift in perspective, Marxian political economy recognizes waged labor as central to the capitalist mode of production and claims it as the standpoint from which capitalism’s mysteries can be uncovered and its logics laid bare. This recognition of the significance of work remains, I argue, as relevant now as it was when Marx wrote, and it is this observation that my deployment of the category of the work society is intended, in part, to underscore.

Waged work remains today the centerpiece of late capitalist economic systems; it is, of course, the way most people acquire access to the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. It is not only the primary mechanism by which income is distributed, it is also the basic means by which status is allocated, and by which most people gain access to healthcare and retirement. After the family, waged work is often the most important, if not sole, source of sociality for millions. Raising children with attributes that will secure them forms of employment that can match if not surpass

the class standing of their parents is the gold standard of parenting. In addition, “making people capable of working is,” as Nona Glazer notes, “the central goal of schooling, a criterion of successful medical and psychiatric treatment, and an ostensible goal of most welfare policies and unemployment compensation programs” (1993, 33). Helping to make people “work ready” and moving them into jobs are central objectives of social work (Macarov 1980, 12), a common rationale for the prison system, and an important inducement to perform military service. Indeed, enforcing work, as the other side of defending property rights, is a key function of the state (Seidman 1991, 315), and a particular preoccupation of the postwelfare, neoliberal state.

But making public the foundational role of work is only part of what Marx achieves with this change in venue. In descending from the sphere of the market—which he satirized as “a very Eden” of equal rights, individual freedom, and social harmony (1976, 280)—into the privatized spaces of work, Marx seeks not only to publicize but also to politicize the world of work. That is to say, the focus on the consumption of labor seeks to expose the social role of work and, at the same time, to pose it as a political problem. Despite Marx’s insistence that waged work for those without other options is a system of “forced labor” (1964, 111), it remains for the most part an abstract mode of domination. In general, it is not the police or the threat of violence that force us to work, but rather a social system that ensures that working is the only way that most of us can meet our basic needs. In this way, as Moishe Postone notes, the specific mechanism by which goods and services are distributed in a capitalist society appears to be grounded not in social convention and political power but in human need (1996, 161). The social role of waged work has been so naturalized as to seem necessary and inevitable, something that might be tinkered with but never escaped. Thus Marx seeks both to clarify the economic, social, and political functions of work under capitalism and to problematize the specific ways in which such world-building practices are corralled into industrial forms and capitalist relations of work. This effort to make work at once public and political is, then, one way to counter the forces that would naturalize, privatize, individualize, ontologize, and also, thereby, depoliticize it.

Work is, thus, not just an economic practice. Indeed, that every individual is required to work, that most are expected to work for wages or be supported by someone who does, is a social convention and disciplin-

ary apparatus rather than an economic necessity. That every individual must not only do some work but more often a lifetime of work, that individuals must not only work but become workers, is not necessary to the production of social wealth. The fact is that this wealth is collectively not individually produced, despite the persistence of an older economic imaginary that links individual production directly to consumption.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Postone observes, “on a deep, systemic level, production is not for the sake of consumption” (1996, 184). The relationship may appear direct and incontrovertible, but it is in fact highly mediated: the goal of neither party in the work relation is consumption; one seeks surplus value, and the other income. The normative expectation of waged work as an individual responsibility has more to do with the socially mediating role of work than its strictly productive function (150). Work is the primary means by which individuals are integrated not only into the economic system, but also into social, political, and familial modes of cooperation. That individuals should work is fundamental to the basic social contract; indeed, working is part of what is supposed to transform subjects into the independent individuals of the liberal imaginary, and for that reason, is treated as a basic obligation of citizenship. (The fact that the economy’s health is dependent on a permanent margin of unemployment is only one of the more notorious problems with this convention.) Dreams of individual accomplishment and desires to contribute to the common good become firmly attached to waged work, where they can be hijacked to rather different ends: to produce neither individual riches nor social wealth, but privately appropriated surplus value. The category of the work society is meant to signify not only the centrality of work, but also its broad field of social relevance (see, for example, Beck 2000).

#### GENDER AT WORK

Another way to get at the extra-economic role of work that the concept of the work society is intended to evoke is through a further consideration of work’s subjectification function, alluded to above. Work produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects. In other words, the wage relation generates not just income and capital, but disciplined individuals, governable subjects, worthy citizens, and responsible family members. Indeed, given its centrality both to individuals’ lives and to the social imaginary, work constitutes a par-



ticularly important site of interpellation into a range of subjectivities. It is, for example, a key site of becoming classed; the workplace is where, as Marx describes it, the seller of labor power who we are invited to follow into the hidden abode of production “becomes in actuality what previously he only was potentially, namely labour-power in action, a worker” (1976, 283). Class identities and relations are made and remade as some people are excluded from and others conscripted into work, by means of educational tracks and workplace training regimens, through the organization of labor processes and the interactions they structure, via the setting of wage levels, and in relation to judgments about occupational status. This process of subjectification is perhaps best understood in terms of a model not of passive construction but of active recruitment, often less a matter of command and obedience than one of inducement and attraction (West and Zimmerman 1991, 27–29). Along these lines, one can observe that some of the attractions of different forms of work are about joining a relatively advantaged class: becoming a member of the working class rather than the underclass, a middle-class rather than a working-class person, a salaried versus an hourly worker, a professional with a career as opposed to a working stiff and job holder. As a way to build on these logics a little further, let us turn to another dimension of this process of subject making and doing and consider work as a site of gendering.

To say that work is organized by gender is to observe that it is a site where, at a minimum, we can find gender enforced, performed, and re-created. Workplaces are often structured in relation to gendered norms and expectations. Waged work and unwaged work alike continue to be structured by the productivity of gender-differentiated labor, including the gender division of both household roles and waged occupations. But the gendering of work is not just a matter of these institutionalized tendencies to distinguish various forms of men’s work and women’s work, but a consequence of the ways that workers are often expected to do gender at work. Gender is put to work when, for example, workers draw upon gendered codes and scripts as a way to negotiate relationships with bosses and co-workers, to personalize impersonal interactions, or to communicate courtesy, care, professionalism, or authority to clients, students, patients, or customers. And this is, of course, not limited to waged forms of work. As Sarah Fenstermaker Berk argues, unwaged domestic work too should be recognized for producing not just goods and

services, but gender as well (1985, 201). As a result of these activities, work plays a significant role in both the production and reproduction of gendered identities and hierarchies: gender is re-created along with value.

As in the example of class identities noted earlier, gender identities are coordinated with work identities in ways that can sometimes alienate workers from their job and other times bind them more tightly to it. Whether it is the women informatics workers whose pink-collar status and dress code is, Carla Freeman argues, at once a disciplinary mechanism and a source of individual expression (2000, 2), or the specific model of blue-collar masculinity that made industrial work attractive to the working-class boys of Paul Willis's famous study (1977, 150), this gendering of labor—doing men's work or women's work, doing masculinity or femininity as part of doing the job—can also be a source of pleasure in work and serve to promote workers' identification with and investments in the job. This can extend to unwaged forms of labor too; consider, for example, the ways in which conforming to a gender division of household labor might be for some people welcome confirmations of gender and sexual identities and relations. "What is produced and reproduced," in the case of one such example, is thus "not merely the activity and artifact of domestic life, but the material embodiment of wifely and husbandly roles and, derivatively, of womanly and manly conduct" (West and Zimmerman 1991, 30). Sometimes doing gender might be treated as part of doing the job; at other times doing the job is part of what it means to do gender. As Robin Leidner observes in her study of routinized interactive service work, the "degree to which workers accept the identity implied by a job is therefore determined in part by the degree to which they can interpret the job as expressing their gender in a satisfying way" (1993, 194).

But there is more to this story. For an employee, it is not merely a matter of bringing one's gendered self to work but of becoming gendered in and through work. For an employer, it is not just a matter of hiring masculine and feminine workers and putting them to work, but of actively managing workers' gendered identities and relationships. Exploitable subjects are not just found; they are, as Michael Burawoy famously argues, made at the point of production (1979). Even at the level of specific workplaces, individual managers can to some degree fashion the exploitable subjects, including the specific kind of feminized or masculinized subjects they imagine that they have already hired (Salzinger

2003, 20–21). Of course, it is difficult to predict whether various jobs will be segregated by gender in this way, whether they will be considered suitable men's work or women's work, and which particular models of gender such workers will be expected to conform to. In the fast-food franchise that Leidner studied, cooking was understood by managers and workers alike as men's work when it could have just as easily been coded as a feminized activity. Though it is not always easy to foresee if jobs will become gendered—or, if so, which jobs will be treated as more or less appropriate for which specific ideal of gendered comportment—the occupational segregation that is part and parcel of the gender division of labor stands nonetheless as supposed empirical proof of the necessity of gender difference and hierarchy. Thus, as Leidner notes, “the considerable flexibility of notions of proper gender enactment does not undermine the appearance of inevitability and naturalness that continues to support the division of labor by gender” (1993, 196). In her study of gendered labor in the *maquiladoras*, Leslie Salzinger argues that it is precisely the combination of rigid gender categories with the malleability and variability of their enactments and meaning that explains the resilience of gender as a principle of human differentiation (2003, 25). In this sense, ironically, the tremendous plasticity of gender reinforces rather than undermines its naturalization.

#### WORK VALUES

The category of the work society refers not just to the socially mediating and subjectively constitutive roles of work but to the dominance of its values. Challenging the present organization of work requires not only that we confront its reification and depoliticization but also its normativity and moralization. Work is not just defended on grounds of economic necessity and social duty; it is widely understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation. Traditional work values—those that preach the moral value and dignity of waged work and privilege such work as an essential source of individual growth, self-fulfillment, social recognition, and status—continue to be effective in encouraging and rationalizing the long hours US workers are supposed to dedicate to waged work and the identities they are expected to invest there. This normalizing and moralizing ethic of work should be very familiar to most of us; it is, after all, routinely espoused in managerial discourse, defended in the popular media, and enshrined in public poli-

cies. The ethic's productivist values are promoted on both the political Right and Left, from employers seeking the most able and tractable workers, and politicians intent on moving women from welfare to waged work, to parents and educators eager to prepare their children or students to embrace the values that might best ensure their future economic security and social achievement.

Let me be clear: to call these traditional work values into question is not to claim that work is without value. It is not to deny the necessity of productive activity or to dismiss the likelihood that, as William Morris describes it, there might be for all living things "a pleasure in the exercise of their energies" (1999, 129). It is, rather, to insist that there are other ways to organize and distribute that activity and to remind us that it is also possible to be creative outside the boundaries of work. It is to suggest that there might be a variety of ways to experience the pleasure that we may now find in work, as well as other pleasures that we may wish to discover, cultivate, and enjoy. And it is to remind us that the willingness to live for and through work renders subjects supremely functional for capitalist purposes. But before the work society can be publicized and raised as a political problem, we need to understand the forces—including the work ethic—that promote our acceptance of and powerful identification with work and help to make it such a potent object of desire and privileged field of aspiration.

Feminism has its own tendencies toward the mystification and moralization of work and has reproduced its own version of this famed ethic. Consider two of the dominant feminist remedies for the gender divisions and hierarchies of waged and unwaged work. One strategy, popular with at least some feminists of both the first and second waves, is to more or less accept the lesser value accorded to unwaged domestic labor and seek to secure women's equal access to waged work. Waged work would be women's ticket out of culturally mandated domesticity. While recognizing the importance of the ongoing struggle to secure equal employment opportunities for women, I want to argue that subjecting feminism's own idealization of waged work to critical scrutiny remains an important task as well. Confronting the present organization of waged labor and its values is especially urgent in the wake of the 1996 welfare reform debate and resulting legislation. Certainly the attack on poor women that was perpetrated in the name of the work ethic should inspire the

reconsideration and reinvention of feminist perspectives on waged work—its ever-shifting realities and its long-standing values.

A second feminist strategy concentrates on efforts to revalue unwaged forms of household-based labor, from housework to caring work. Certainly making this socially necessary labor visible, valued, and equitably distributed remains a vital feminist project as well. The problem with both of these strategies—one focused on gaining women's entry into all forms of waged work and the other committed to gaining social recognition of, and men's equal responsibility for, unwaged domestic work—is their failure to challenge the dominant legitimating discourse of work. On the contrary, each approach tends to draw upon the language and sentiments of the traditional work ethic to win support for its claims about the essential dignity and special value of women's waged or unwaged labor.<sup>6</sup> How might feminism contest the marginalization and underestimation of unwaged forms of reproductive labor, without trading on the work ethic's mythologies of work? Feminists, I suggest, should focus on the demands not simply or exclusively for more work and better work, but also for less work; we should focus not only on revaluing feminized forms of unwaged labor but also challenge the sanctification of such work that can accompany or be enabled by these efforts.

The question is, then, how to struggle against both labor's misrecognition and devaluation on the one hand, and its metaphysics and moralism on the other hand. The refusal of work, a concept drawn from the autonomous Marxist tradition, will help to focus the analysis on the question of work's meaning and value. In contrast to some other types of Marxism that confine their critique of capitalism to the exploitation and alienation of work without attending to its overvaluation, this tradition offers a more expansive model of critique that seeks to interrogate at once capitalist production and capitalist (as well as socialist) productivity. From the perspective of the refusal of work, the problem with work cannot be reduced to the extraction of surplus value or the degradation of skill, but extends to the ways that work dominates our lives. The struggle against work is a matter of securing not only better work, but also the time and money necessary to have a life outside work. Although there are a number of important analyses of the most exploited forms of waged and unwaged work performed by workers both in the United States and beyond its borders, the larger systems of labor and especially

the values that help sustain them are often insufficiently theorized, leaving one to conclude that all of our work-related goals would be met and the dominant work values justified if only such work were to resemble more closely the employment conditions at the middle and upper reaches of the labor hierarchy. The theory and practice of the refusal of work insists that the problem is not just that work cannot live up to the ethic's idealized image, that it neither exhibits the virtues nor delivers the meaning that the ethic promises us in exchange for a lifetime of work, but perhaps also the ideal itself.

## WORK AND LABOR

Earlier I noted the difference between thinking systematically about work and thinking about this or that job. As a way to further clarify my concerns and intentions, I turn here to another distinction—the first of three additional conceptual pairs that I want to explore—that between work and labor. Although the division that I want to register between these categories is not a terminological one, I want to begin the discussion with a brief clarification about my use of the first term. In this book, the label “work” will refer to productive cooperation organized around, but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of waged labor. What counts as work, which forms of productive activity will be included and how each will be valued, are a matter of historical dispute. Certainly the questions of whether or not various forms of productive activity—including some unwaged forms—will be recognized as work and at what rate they will be compensated have long been at the forefront of class, race, and gender struggles in and beyond the United States.

Which brings me to the relationship between work and labor: for the purposes of this project, I will use the terms interchangeably, thereby running roughshod over a distinction that is frequently, though inconsistently and variably, posed. For Hannah Arendt, to cite one notable theorist, the distinction between labor as the activity that reproduces biological life and work as the creation of an object world serves, among other things, to establish by way of comparison the singularity of a third category, action, as the definitively political activity of being in common (1958). Within the Marxist tradition, by contrast, it is perhaps more often labor—or, specifically, living labor—that figures as the more expansive category and valued practice. Conceived as a collective and creative human capacity harnessed by capital to the production of surplus

value, living labor can yield both a critical standpoint from which the alienating and exploitative conditions of modern work can be critically interrogated and a utopian potential that can inform speculations about the revolutionary transformation of those conditions. By this account, the human capacity for labor may be hobbled by the organization of waged work, but as a collective creative potential, can also exceed them.

As far as the classic Arendtian approach to the categories is concerned, the distance it places between both labor and work on the one hand, and the legitimate business of the political on the other hand, renders it less useful for my purposes. As for the example from the Marxist tradition, while I recognize the power of the distinction it poses, I find it ill-suited to a critique that takes aim at both the structures of work and its dominant values. The trouble with the category of living labor deployed in this way as an alternative to work is, as I see it, that it is haunted by the very same essentialized conception of work and inflated notion of its meaning that should be called into question. To the extent that it is imbued in this way with the productivist values I want to problematize, it can neither provide the critical leverage necessary to interrogate the dominant ethic of work nor generate an alternative mode of valuation—a vision of the work society not perfected but overcome.<sup>7</sup> Consistent in this respect with Postone's antiproduktivist Marxism, the ensuing analysis intends not to advance a "critique of capitalism *from the standpoint of labor*," but to pursue a "critique *of labor in capitalism*" (1996, 5). My refusal to distinguish between work and labor is thus a wager of sorts: by blocking access to a vision of unalienated and unexploited work in the guise of living labor, one that could live up to the work ethic's ideals about labor's necessity and virtues and would be worthy of the extravagant praise the ethic bestows, I hope to concentrate and amplify the critique of work as well as to inspire what I hope will be a more radical imagination of postwork futures.

In place of the opposition between labor and work, I will employ a number of other distinctions over the course of the argument to secure some critical insight into particular dimensions of work and to imagine other possibilities. These will include the distinction between work time and non-work time, between work and life, between time for what we are obligated to do and time for "what we will," or—to mark differences at yet another level of abstraction—between the category of antiwork used to signal the deconstructive moment of this cri-

tique of the work society, and the concept of postwork offered as a place holder for something yet to come.

#### WORK AND CLASS

Whereas the distinction between work and labor will be suspended for the purposes of this analysis, the relationship between work and class is a link I want to maintain, if only obliquely. Class is, of course, a central category of Marxist political economy, as Marx makes clear in what follows the passage from *Capital* cited above. Consider the first thing we see when we accompany the two owners of property—in one case, money; in the other, labor power—as they descend from the Eden of market exchange where they meet to trade equivalents into the hidden abode of production where one party is set to work. “When we leave this sphere of simple circulation or the exchange of commodities,” Marx writes, “a certain change takes place, or so it appears, in the physiology of our *dramatis personae*. He who was previously the money-owner now strides out in front as a capitalist; the possessor of labour-power follows as his worker” (1976, 280). Where we had observed two equal individuals, each in possession of a commodity, who agree to make an exchange for the benefit of each, now we witness the inequality that separates the one who steps in front from the one who follows behind; with this shift of the locus of perception from the marketplace to the workplace, the existence of a social hierarchy based on class comes into sharp focus.

Despite the centrality of class in traditional Marxist analysis, work remains my privileged object of study and preferred terrain of political struggle. So let me say something about the relationship between work and class and what might be at stake in different formulations of its terms. There are at least two ways to approach the relationship between the categories: one draws a rather sharp distinction between them, whereas the other finds overlapping concerns. I will start with the first. The difference between the concepts is perhaps most starkly posed when work understood as a process is compared to class conceived in terms of an outcome—that is, as a category (whether explained by reference to ownership, wealth, income, occupation, or forms of belonging) designed to map patterns of economic inequality. To the extent that class is defined and measured in this way, as an outcome rather than an activity, then its utility for my purposes will be limited.



I am, of course, not the first to raise such concerns about this approach to the category of class. For example, the potential shortcomings of the concept have long been debated within Marxist feminism. The original “woman question” was, after all, generated by the disjuncture between the categories of gender and class, and the question this posed for the relationship between feminism and class struggle. But the trouble with class for second-wave feminists was not just that it might be inadequate to broader, extra-economic fields of analysis; the problem was that to the extent that class was conceived—as it typically was—as a gender- and race-blind category, its ability to register the contours of even narrowly economic hierarchies was limited as well. For some of the same reasons that I want to foreground the category of work over that of class, Iris Young once argued in favor of substituting the Marxist category of division of labor for class as a primary analytic of Marxist feminism. In this classic contribution to second-wave Marxist feminism, Young describes at least two advantages of this methodological shift. First, the division of labor has at once a broader reach than class and allows a more differentiated application. Not only can it be used to register multiple divisions of labor by class as well as by gender, race, and nation, but it can, as Young explains, also expose “specific cleavages and contradictions *within a class*” (1981, 51; emphasis added)—not just along the lines of gender, race, and nation, but also, potentially, of occupation and income. Thus the category of the gender division of labor, for example, enables a focus on gendered patterns of work “without assuming that all women in general or all women in a particular society have a common and unified situation” (55). Like the division of labor, the category of work seems to me at once more capacious and more finely tuned than the category of class. After all, work, including its absence, is both important to and differently experienced within and across lines of class, gender, race, and nation. In this sense, the politics of and against work has the potential to expand the terrain of class struggle to include actors well beyond that classic figure of traditional class politics, the industrial proletariat.

Consider too the second advantage noted by Young: “The category of division of labor can not only refer to a set of phenomena broader than that of class, but also more concrete.” Unlike class, by her account, the division of labor “refers specifically to the *activity* of labor itself, and the specific social and institutional relations of that activity,” proceeding

thus “at the more concrete level of particular relations of interaction and interdependence in a society” (51). By this measure, whereas class addresses the outcome of laboring activity, the division of labor points toward the activity itself. Here too there are similarities between Young’s interest in the category of division of labor and my focus on work: after all, work, including the dearth of it, is the way that capitalist valorization bears most directly and most intensively on more and more people’s lives. This politics of work could be conceived as a way to link the everyday and sometimes every-night experiences of work—its spaces, relations and temporalities; its physical, affective, and cognitive practices; its pains and pleasures—to the political problematic of their present modes and codes of organization and relations of rule.<sup>8</sup> Although the category of class remains analytically powerful, I would argue that its political utility is more negligible. The problem is that while the oppositional class category of the industrial period—the “working class”—may accurately describe most people’s relation to waged labor even in a post-industrial economy, it is increasingly less likely to match their self-descriptions. The category of the middle class has absorbed so many of our subjective investments that it is difficult to see how the working class can serve as a viable rallying point in the United States today. A politics of work, on the other hand, takes aim at an activity rather than an identity, and a central component of daily life rather than an outcome. Once again, the struggle over work in this respect has the potential to open a more expansive terrain than that of traditional class politics, insofar as the problem of work carries the potential to resonate, albeit in very different ways, across a number of income, occupational, and identity groups.

The advantages of work over class extend beyond its breadth and tangibility. Crucial for Marx in his own privileging of labor as the point of entry into the materialist analysis of capitalist society—rather than beginning, for example, with political inequality or poverty—is the relationship between labor and agency that he assumes to be fundamental to anticapitalist politics. Thus in the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels distinguish their materialist methodology not only from the idealism of the Young Hegelians but also from Feuerbach’s “ahistorical” brand of materialism that may have recognized, to borrow another of Marx and Engels’s formulations, “that circumstances make men” but not necessarily that “men make circumstances” (1970, 59). Materialism, as Marx

and Engels understand it, is a matter not merely of the social construction of subjects but a matter of creative activity, of doing and making, the ontological trajectories of which are equally synchronic and diachronic. By focusing on laboring practices, or “living sensuous *activity*” (64), materialism as Marx and Engels conceive it is a matter not merely of the social construction of subjects but of creative activity, the capacity not only to make commodities but to remake a world. In this way, the focus on laboring practices, on the labor process and the relations of labor, can register the workers’ power to act, in contrast, it seems to me, to their relative disempowerment that is registered in the economic outcomes the categories of class are often used to map and measure.<sup>9</sup>

So by at least one way of reckoning, class and work belong to different fields of analysis, and my project pursues the critical study of work instead of class analysis and antiwork politics as a substitute for class struggle. But there is another way to approach class that does not produce such a sharp contrast with the category of work and that yields a different and, I think, more compelling approach to this territory. The distinction between the two fields of analysis becomes rather less clear when class too is conceived in terms of a process rather than an outcome. Process notions of class disrupt the functionalism of static mappings of class formations by attending to the practices by and relations within which they are secured, re-created, and challenged.<sup>10</sup> If class is figured as a process of becoming classed, it may be that work—including struggles over what counts as work—could be conceived as a useful lens through which to approach class; in this way, the struggle against work could be a terrain of class politics.

But let me add one caveat: rather than conceiving class groupings and relations as the ground of antiwork politics, as that which provides its fuel and organizational form, it might be better to think of them as what might emerge from these efforts. By this reading, class formation, or what the autonomist tradition calls class composition, is best conceived as an outcome of struggles rather than their cause. The particular composition of the working class that might emerge from this politics of work—that is, the collectivities that might coalesce around its issues and the divisions that might develop in the interstices of antiwork struggles and in relation to postwork imaginaries—remains an open question. To the extent that the concerns it raises carry the potential to cut across traditional class divisions, a politics against work might serve to de-

constitute the field of working-class politics and reconstitute it in a different, perhaps more expansive, way.

So in the end, I am not saying that we should stop thinking about class, but rather that focusing on work is one politically promising way of approaching class—because it is so expansive, because it is such a significant part of everyday life, because it is something we do rather than a category to which we are assigned, and because for all these reasons it can be raised as a political issue. By this account, work is a point of entry into the field of class analysis through which we might be better able to make class processes more visible, legible, and broadly relevant and, in the process, perhaps provoke class formations yet to come.

#### FREEDOM AND EQUALITY

Whereas my analysis ignores the difference between work and labor and, in the end, defers the question of the precise relationship between work and class, it presumes the significance of another distinction, the one between freedom and equality. To get a sense of how this pair of concepts is conceived for the purposes of this project, let us return yet again to Marx's description of what we see when we descend with the owners of money and labor power from the realm of market exchange to the realm of production. To recall our earlier discussion of the passage, accompanying the change of venue is a visible change in the physiognomy of the *dramatis personae*: we see the money owner stride out in front as capitalist, while the possessor of labor power follows behind as worker. "The one," Marx continues, "smirks self-importantly and is intent on business; the other is timid and holds back, like someone who has brought his own hide to market and now has nothing else to expect but—a hiding" (1976, 280; translation modified). Whereas we had, as noted above, witnessed the formal equivalence of contractors in the labor market, in the realm of work we discover hierarchy. As the conclusion of the passage suggests, however, it is not only inequality that is revealed, with the capitalist striding in front and the worker following behind, but subordination, with the former smirking and self-important and the latter timid and holding back. In other words, the critical analysis of work reveals not only exploitation but—as the reference to the violence of a hiding serves to amplify—domination.<sup>11</sup>

The domination and subordination experienced at work is not merely incidental to processes of exploitation. Carole Pateman's analysis of the

employment contract is illuminating on this point. By her account, the problem with the labor contract is not just a function of the coerced entry that is ensured by the absence of viable alternatives to waged labor, nor is it only a matter of the inequality that is produced as the result of the contract's terms. To translate this into a Marxist vocabulary, the problem can be reduced neither to forced labor nor to exploitation. Rather, we need to pay more attention to the relationship of dominance and submission that is authorized by the waged labor contract and that shapes labor's exercise. Exploitation is possible, Pateman notes, because "the employment contract creates the capitalist as master; he has the political right to determine how the labour of the worker will be used" (1988, 149). This relation of command and obedience, the right of the employer to direct his or her employees that is granted by the contract, is not so much a byproduct of exploitation as its very precondition.

Marx too would seem to be quite clear that the problem with work cannot be reduced to the terms of its recompense, but rather extends into the very heart of the wage relation and the labor process it commands. That is why he insists on describing the program of raising wages as only "*better payment for the slave*" (1964, 118). To focus narrowly on outcomes rather than processes, and on inequality and not also on unfreedom, is to impoverish the critique of capitalism. Marx muses about a comparably inadequate approach in "Critique of the Gotha Program": "It is as if, among slaves who have at last got behind the secret of slavery and broken out in rebellion, a slave still in thrall to obsolete notions were to inscribe on the programme of the rebellion: Slavery must be abolished because the feeding of slaves in the system of slavery cannot exceed a certain low maximum!" (1978, 535).

I am thus interested in adding to the critique of the exploitative and alienating dimensions of work a focus on its political relations of power and authority, as relations of rulers and ruled. My inspiration for this, it should be noted, is not only these readings of Marx, but certain strands of 1970s feminism. A commitment to freedom in conjunction with or beyond equality was what distinguished the more radical sectors of the early second wave of US feminism from liberal feminists of the time. Refusing to honor the "do not enter" sign on the door leading to the so-called private terrains of the family, marriage, and sexuality—a sign meant to ban political judgment of relations that were thought to be governed only by the exigencies of nature or prerogatives of individual

choice—the radical elements of the movement sought not women’s assimilation into the status quo but a sweeping transformation of everyday life.<sup>12</sup> The goal was not, to use the vocabulary of the day, women’s mere equality with men, but women’s liberation. What precisely they were to be liberated from and to were, of course, matters of lively debate, but the language of liberation and the project of conceiving a state of freedom beyond equality did serve to open a broader horizon of feminist imagination and indicate new agendas for action.

In addition to 1970s women’s liberation, about which I will have more to say below, another resource for this project comes from recent work in political theory that affirms freedom as an important feminist goal. The work of Wendy Brown and Linda Zerilli is particularly valuable for its efforts to take up “the project of feminism in a freedom-centered frame” (Zerilli 2005, 95). Freedom is understood in these accounts beyond the liberal model of an individual possession, something that emanates from the sovereign will and guards its independence such that, to quote a familiar formulation, “over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign” (Mill 1986, 16). Instead, freedom is seen as a practice, not a possession, a process rather than a goal. Whether it is drawn from the simultaneously creative and destructive qualities of the will to power in Brown’s Nietzschean analysis, or from the inaugural and disordering capacities of human action in Zerilli’s Arendtian account, freedom emerges in these texts as a double-sided phenomenon. It is depicted, on the one hand, as an antidisiplinary practice—that is, to use Brown’s formulation, as “a permanent struggle against what will otherwise be done to and for us” (1995, 25). But there is more to it: freedom is also a creative practice, what Zerilli describes as a collective practice of world building and Brown characterizes in terms of a desire “to participate in shaping the conditions and terms of life,” a longing “to generate futures together rather than navigate or survive them” (1995, 4). Freedom thus depends on collective action rather than individual will, and this is what makes it political. Though freedom is, by this account, a relational practice, it is not a zero-sum game in which the more one has, the less another can enjoy. Freedom considered as a matter of individual self-determination or self-sovereignty is reduced to a solipsistic phenomenon. Rather, as a world-building practice, freedom is a social—and hence necessarily political—endeavor. It is, as Marx might put it, a species-being rather than an individual capacity; or, as Zerilli contends, drawing

on an Arendtian formulation, freedom requires plurality (2005, 20). Thus Arendt provocatively declares: “If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce” (1961, 165). Freedom in this sense demands not the absence of power but its democratization.

Although political theorists like Brown and Zerilli are helpful in elaborating a notion of freedom that can serve as a central analytic and principle of political aspiration, political theory in general, as noted above, has not attended sufficiently to work. Work has been relatively neglected not only as a practice productive of hierarchies—a scene of gendering, racialization, and becoming classed—but as an arena in which to develop and pursue a freedom-centered politics. Yet at the same time, as Michael Denning reminds us, “the workplace remains the fundamental *unfree* association of civil society” (2004, 224). It is the site of many of the most palpable and persistent relations of domination and subordination that people confront, even if these are not conventionally perceived as potentially alterable enough to be regarded as properly political matters. If, as I maintain, a political theory of work should address the problem of freedom, a political theory of freedom should also focus on work. My interest, then, is in developing a feminist political theory of work that could pose work itself—its structures and its ethics, its practices and relations—not only as a machine for the generation of inequalities, but as a political problem of freedom.<sup>13</sup> Linking the previous distinction between class and work to this conceptual pair might help to clarify my concerns in this respect. Rather than a politics of class focused primarily on issues of economic redistribution and economic justice—particularly a politics that seeks to alter wage levels to redraw the map of class categories—the politics of work I am interested in pursuing also investigates questions about the command and control over the spaces and times of life, and seeks the freedom to participate in shaping the terms of what collectively we can do and what together we might become. If what I am calling a “politics of class outcomes” lodges its central complaint against the inequalities of capitalist society, the politics of work that I would like to see elaborated would also levy a critique at its unfreedoms.<sup>14</sup>

#### MARXIST FEMINISM REDUX

Although I draw on a variety of sources, the version of 1970s feminism that has been of particular importance to this effort to theorize work in these terms is Anglo-American Marxist feminism.<sup>15</sup> As an attempt to

map capitalist political economies and gender regimes from a simultaneously anticapitalist and feminist perspective, the tradition in its heyday was committed to investigating how various gendered laboring practices are both put to use by, and potentially disruptive of, capitalist and patriarchal social formations.<sup>16</sup> Three focuses of this literature are especially relevant to my interests here: publicizing work, politicizing it, and radically transforming it. However, the efforts in all three of these areas require some prodding and pushing if they are to be of use to this project in this moment. The category of the refusal of work introduced above will be used to do some of this prodding and pushing, serving as a tool with which to reconfigure each of these focuses by providing certain correctives and additions.

The Marxist—or, as some prefer to call it, socialist feminist—tradition is an inspiration for this project first and foremost because of its focus on labor, both as a point of entry into the critical analysis of capitalist patriarchy and as a key site of political action. “Socialist feminism,” as one analyst summarizes it, “means paying consistent attention to women *in our capacity as workers*, and in all our variety” (Froines 1992, 128). Perhaps its most significant contribution to the critical theory of work in the 1970s was the expansion of the category. Feminists insisted that the largely unwaged “reproductive” work that made waged “productive” work possible on a daily and generational basis was socially necessary labor, and that its relations were thus part and parcel of the capitalist mode of production. What had been coded as leisure was in fact work, and those supposedly spontaneous expressions of women’s nature were indeed skillful practices. In their efforts to adapt Marxist concepts and methods to new concerns, these feminists usefully troubled the tradition’s definition of work. Nancy Hartsock describes this by way of an addendum to Marx’s story about the owner of money and the owner of labor power. To return to that passage one final time, if after descending with the capitalist and worker into the realm of waged work we were then to follow the worker home, into yet another hidden abode of production, we might observe another change in the *dramatis personae*:

He who before followed behind as the worker, timid and holding back, with nothing to expect but a hiding, now strides in front, while a third person, not specifically present in Marx’s account of the



transactions between capitalist and worker (both of whom are male) follows timidly behind, carrying groceries, baby, and diapers. (Hartsock 1983, 234)

By following the worker not only from marketplace to workplace, but also from the place of employment to the domestic space, we find evidence not only of class hierarchy, but of specifically gendered forms of exploitation and patterns of inequality. By descending into the even more hidden, even more fiercely privatized space of the household, we see men and women who may be formally equal under the law transformed through the gender division of labor into relatively privileged and penalized subjects. Thus, Marxist feminists in the 1970s explored the means by which gender hierarchies deliver unwaged women workers to the domestic mode of reproduction while also ensuring a cheaper and more flexible secondary or tertiary waged labor force. These feminists debated the exact value to capital of women's unwaged domestic labor and exposed the hyperexploitation of women wage earners around the globe. And they studied the interconnections among the family, the labor market, waged and unwaged labor processes, and the welfare state. As we will see, in fact, many of their insights into the conditions of women's labor under Fordism will prove to be more widely applicable to the forms of work typical of post-Fordist economies. By extending these efforts to publicize, politicize, and transform work into the field of domestic labor, feminists usefully complicated and upped the ante of all three projects. What might have at first appeared to be a simple addition to Marxist analyses has in fact required a vast rethinking of its concepts and models, its critical analyses and utopian visions.

Whereas many of these texts are helpful for their emphasis on work, the tradition's productivist tendencies, which it shares with some other versions of Marxist theory, prove more troublesome. As we have already noted, feminism has managed to reproduce its own version of the work ethic, whether in the process of defending waged work as the alternative to feminine domesticity in both liberal feminism and traditional Marxism, or through efforts to gain recognition for modes of unwaged labor as socially necessary labor. Feminism, including much of 1970s Marxist feminism, has tended to focus more on the critique of work's organization and distribution than on questioning its values. The autonomous Marxist tradition is thus useful in this instance insofar as it

simultaneously centers its analytical apparatus on work and disavows its traditional ethics. Central to that tradition is not only the analytical primacy accorded to the imposition of work as fundamental to the capitalist mode of production, but also the political priority of the refusal of work—a priority recorded in the call not for a liberation *of* work but a liberation *from* work (see Virno and Hardt 1996, 263). The refusal of work is at once a model of resistance, both to the modes of work that are currently imposed on us and to their ethical defense, and a struggle for a different relationship to work born from the collective autonomy that a postwork ethics and more nonwork time could help us to secure. As a simultaneous way to insist on work's significance and to contest its valuation, the Marxist feminist literature on wages for housework—with roots in an Italian feminism that was, as one participant observed, “characterized, with more emphasis than in other countries, by the *leitmotif* of ‘work/rejection of work’” (Dalla Costa 1988, 24)—will be of particular importance to my project in this respect.

Thus work is not only a locus of unfreedom, it is also a site of resistance and contestation.<sup>17</sup> This brings me to the second element of the Marxist feminist literature that I have found instructive: the commitment to work's politicization. Marxist feminists focused not only on exploited workers but, to cite one of these authors, also on subjects that are “potentially revolutionary” (Eisenstein 1979, 8). Within this body of literature, one can find an attention both to structures of domination and to the possibilities for critical consciousness, subversive practices, and feminist standpoints that might be developed in their midst. This investment in constructing collective political subjects on the basis of, or in relation to, work practices, relations, and subjectivities remains for me an aspect of this literature with the most relevance to contemporary feminism. Harking back to the example of a Marxism that conceived the industrial proletariat as a revolutionary class less because it had nothing to lose but its chains than because it had the power to create a new world, many of these authors concentrate on the ways that feminized modes of labor—marginalized by, but nonetheless fundamental to, capitalist valorization processes—could provide points of critical leverage and sites of alternative possibility.

This more capacious understanding of work also entailed a transformation of what might be recognized as a terrain of anticapitalist politics, pushing beyond orthodox Marxism's industrial model of productive

cooperation that centered on the factory, in which the proletariat was once imagined as the singularly revolutionary subject, to a more expansive set of sites and subjects. The focal point of analysis for this expanded political terrain might best be described as the contradiction between capital accumulation and social reproduction.<sup>18</sup> Capital requires, for example, time both to “consume” labor power and to produce (or reproduce) it, and the time devoted to one is sometimes lost to the other. The competing requirements of creating surplus value and sustaining the lives and socialities upon which it depends form a potential fault line through capitalist political economies, one that might serve to generate critical thinking and political action. Under the conditions of Fordism, for example, this meant that capital was dependent on a family-based model of social reproduction, one that was in some respects functional to its purposes but was in other ways a potential hindrance to its hegemony. Thus we find in a body of management literature and practice that spans the Fordist and post-Fordist periods an expressed need to locate and preserve some kind of balance between work and family—a relationship that many feminists, on the contrary, struggled to expose as a product of normative imposition rather than natural proclivity and a site of flagrant contradiction rather than mere imbalance.

But just as Marxist feminism’s critical study of work was limited, at least for the purposes of this project, by its productivist propensities, so too the focus on locating and cultivating revolutionary possibilities in relation to work was sometimes compromised by a susceptibility to functionalist logics. The temptation of functionalism is, of course, not peculiar to feminist theory. Indeed, its presence at some level reflects a methodological and political choice: whether to concentrate on how social systems persist over time, or to highlight the ways that they can and do change. Foucault explains it this way: because of the instability and unpredictability generated by the “agonism” of power relations on the one hand and the “intransitivity of freedom” on the other hand, there is always the option “to decipher the same events and the same transformations either from inside the history of struggle or from the standpoint of the power relationships” (1983, 223, 226)—a pair of options between which his own work could be said to oscillate. This same methodological distinction marks a long-standing division within the Marxist tradition as well. Thus, for example, although they both offer systematic mappings of capitalist logics and social formations, Marx’s *Grundrisse*

approaches the analysis more from the point of view of crisis and conflict, whereas *Capital* tells the story from the perspective of capital's appropriative and recuperative capacities.

To return to the case of 1970s Marxist feminism, the residues of functionalist logics show up in what is, I would argue, a limited understanding of social reproduction. In fact, there are at least two related problems with the analyses from a contemporary perspective. First, whereas these authors arguably succeeded in developing more-complete accounts of the relationship between production and reproduction typical of Fordist political economies than were available elsewhere at the time, these accounts are no longer adequate to the project of mapping post-Fordism. In the classic texts from this period, production and reproduction were associated according to the logic of a dual-systems model with two different spaces: the waged workplace was the site of productive labor, and the household was the site of unwaged, reproductive labor. Reproductive labor in these accounts usually included the forms of unwaged work through which individuals met their daily needs for food, shelter, and care and raised a new generation to take their place.<sup>19</sup> However, under the conditions of postindustrial, post-Fordist, and post-Taylorist production, the always vexing exercise of distinguishing between production and reproduction—whether by sphere, task, or relationship to the wage—becomes even more difficult. The dual-systems model, always problematic, is thereby rendered even more deficient.

The second reason why the older models are no longer tenable brings us to the issue of their functionalism. Here is the problem: when reduced, as it tends to be in these analyses, to a familiar list of domestic labors, the category of social reproduction cannot pose the full measure of its conflict with the logics and processes of capital accumulation. The specific problems that this more limited notion of reproduction serves to highlight—the invisibility, devaluation, and gendered division of specifically domestic labors—could, for example, be responded to (but not, of course, remedied) through an expanded reliance on marketized versions of such services. As the refusal-of-work perspective suggests, the problem with the organization of social reproduction extends beyond the problems of this work's invisibility, devaluation, and gendering. Although I want to register that domestic labor is socially necessary and unequally distributed (insofar as gender, race, class, and nation often determines who will do more and less of it), I am also interested in

moving beyond the claim that if it were to be fully recognized, adequately compensated, and equally divided, then the existing model of household-based reproduction would be rectified. A more expansive conception of social reproduction, coupled with the refusal of work, might be used to frame a more compelling problematic. What happens when social reproduction is understood as the production of the forms of social cooperation on which accumulation depends or, alternatively, as the rest of life beyond work that capital seeks continually to harness to its times, spaces, rhythms, purposes, and values? What I am in search of is a conception of social reproduction—of what it is we might organize around—that can pose the full measure of its antagonism with the exigencies of capital accumulation, a biopolitical model of social reproduction less readily transformed into new forms of work and thus less easily recuperated within the present terms of the work society.

The third aspect of the Marxist feminist tradition that I want to acknowledge here is its commitment to thinking within a horizon of utopian potential, that is, in relation to the possibility of fundamental transformation (Feminist Review Collective 1986, 8). Work is not only a site of exploitation, domination, and antagonism, but also where we might find the power to create alternatives on the basis of subordinated knowledges, resistant subjectivities, and emergent models of organization. At least some of this literature focuses on both antiwork politics and postwork imaginaries. This model of utopian politics that can “make the creation of prefigurative forms an explicit part of our movement against capitalism” and challenge the “politics of deferment” that would postpone such innovations to some distant future after “the revolution” is something that I think feminist theory should embrace (Rowbotham, Segal, and Wainwright 1979, 147, 140). The problem with these visions of radical social change from a contemporary perspective is that they were most often conceived of as variations on a theme named socialism, even if some called for “a new kind of socialism” or a socialist revolution that would be equally feminist and antiracist.<sup>20</sup> Today, however, it seems unlikely that socialism can serve as a persuasive signifier of a postcapitalist alternative. There are at least three kinds of problems with the term. At one level, there is the problem of the name itself: it has been some time since the language of socialism could resonate in the United States as a legible and generative utopian vocabulary (even though it continues to serve occasionally as a viable dystopia for the Right). But it is not just a

matter of the label; it is about the content of the vision, which has traditionally centered on the equal liability to work together with a more equitable distribution of its rewards. As a certainly more just version of a social form that is nonetheless centered on work, it gestures toward a vision of the work society perfected, rather than transformed.

Beyond the obsolescence of the label and the commitment to work it affirms, there is a third problem with the legacy of socialism. Whereas the Marxist feminist—or, more specifically in this instance, the socialist feminist—tradition was willing to affirm the value of utopian speculation about a radically different future, the use of the label “socialism” often nonetheless seemed to assume that this future could be named and its basic contours predetermined. In this respect—here I anticipate an argument that I will develop in chapter 5—socialist feminists would seem “to know too much too soon.” There are advantages, I claim, to more-partial visions of alternatives, fragments or glimpses of something different that do not presume to add up to a blueprint of an already named future with a preconceived content. I will use the label “postwork society” not to anticipate an alternative so much as to point toward a horizon of utopian possibility, as it seems preferable to hold the space of a different future open with the term “post” than to presume to be able to name it as “socialist.”

In summary, my project can thus be said to begin with a historical tradition of Marxist feminism that often focused on the category of class, the ideal of equality, the problem of domestic labor, and the socialist struggle for more and better work, which I would like to redirect by way of the sometimes rather different commitments and imaginaries referenced by the categories of work, freedom, social reproduction, life, the refusal of work, and postwork. I will thus use work as a point of entry into the territory of class politics; freedom to supplement and redirect an anticapitalist political theory also committed to equality; the refusal of work to confront work’s overvaluation; the field of social reproduction as part of a struggle to wrest more of life from the encroachments of work; and postwork utopianism to replace socialism as the horizon of revolutionary possibility and speculation.

## CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

The questions raised and points of focus elaborated above are meant to set the stage for the specific arguments pursued in the remaining chap-

ters. One way to approach the overall structure of the discussion that follows is to separate it into two parts: a first part, encompassing chapters 1 and 2, that concentrates on the diagnostic and deconstructive dimensions of the critical theory of work; and a second part, including chapters 3, 4, and 5, that focuses on the prescriptive and reconstructive aspects of the project. Whereas “refusal” is the animating category of the first part, “demand” anchors the analysis in the second part. The argument thus proceeds from the refusal of the present terms of the work society to demands for remedies and for the imagining of alternative futures.

As noted above, the work ethic is at the center of the political theory of and against work that I want to begin to elaborate. A critique of work that seeks to challenge its dominance over our lives must take on the ethical discourse that gives work its meaning and defends its primacy. The first two chapters seek to develop a critical account of the work ethic and to explore some of the theoretical resources through which it might be interrogated. Chapter 1 concentrates on the nature and function of the work ethic in the United States. In what may be a fitting departure for a text so often indebted to Marxist resources, the analysis in chapter 1 draws on one of that tradition’s most famous critiques, Max Weber’s *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Tracing the continuities and shifts in the work ethic over the course of its different incarnations—first as a Protestant ethic, and later as an industrial and then a postindustrial ethic—the analysis seeks to map the recent history of the work ethic and to raise questions about its future. Today when neoliberal and post-neoliberal regimes demand that almost everyone work for wages (never mind that there is not enough work to go around), when postindustrial production employs workers’ minds and hearts as well as their hands, and when post-Taylorist labor processes increasingly require the self-management of subjectivity so that attitudes and affective orientations to work will themselves produce value, the dominant ethical discourse of work may be more indispensable than it has ever been, and the refusal of its prescriptions even more timely. The analysis thus attempts to account not only for the ethic’s longevity and power, but also its points of instability and vulnerability.

Chapter 2 explores some theoretical tools with which we might exploit some of these openings. Drawing on Jean Baudrillard’s critique of productivism, the chapter explores the limitations of two familiar paradigms of Marxist theory, labeled here “socialist modernization” and

“socialist humanism,” and then concentrates on an explication of autonomist Marxism’s theory and practice of the refusal of work. The critical review of the two earlier models presents an opportunity to confront the pro-work assumptions and values that remain stubbornly embedded within a number of theoretical frameworks, including some Marxist discourses, as well as instructive contrasts to the very different commitments animating the more recent example of autonomist Marxism. As a refusal not of creative or productive activity, but of the present configuration of the work society and its moralized conception of work, the refusal of work serves as a methodological center of gravity and ongoing inspiration for the models of analysis and speculation that occupy the subsequent chapters. The critical practice at the heart of the refusal of work, as I read it here, is at once deconstructive and reconstructive—or, as the autonomists might describe it, a practice of separation and process of self-valorization—an analysis that is committed at once to antiwork critique and postwork invention.

In keeping with this dual focus of the refusal of work, chapter 3 marks a shift in the project from the critical charge I just described to the task of constructing possible alternatives, from the development of an antiwork critique to the incitement of a postwork political imaginary. More specifically, the argument shifts at this point from a focus on the refusal of work and its ethics to the demands for a guaranteed basic income (chapter 3) and for a thirty-hour work week (chapter 4). The category of the utopian demand (a category I explore in more detail in chapter 5) is one of the ways I want to conceive the relationship between antiwork analysis and postwork desire, imagination, and will as they figure in the practice of political claims making. Utopian demands, including demands for basic income and shorter hours, are more than simple policy proposals; they include as well the perspectives and modes of being that inform, emerge from, and inevitably exceed the texts and practices by which they are promoted. Assessments of their value thus need to be attentive to the possibilities and limits of both their structural and discursive effects.

But first: why single out these demands? Certainly there are any number of demands for change worth exploring, proposals that could affect tangible improvements in the present conditions of work.<sup>21</sup> The demand for a living wage is an obvious example; across the United States, campaigns for living-wage reform have mobilized impressive levels of political activity and achieved significant victories. I focus on the demands for



basic income and shorter hours for two reasons. First, like the demand for living wages and others, they represent important remedies for some of the problems with the existing system of wages and hours. A guaranteed and universal basic income would enhance the bargaining position of all workers vis-à-vis employers and enable some people to opt out of waged work without the stigma and precariousness of means-tested welfare programs. A thirty-hour full-time work week without a decrease in pay would help to address some of the problems of both the underemployed and the overworked. The second reason for focusing on these demands—which I think distinguishes them from many other demands for economic reform, including the demand for a living wage—is their capacity not only to improve the conditions of work but to challenge the terms of its dominance. These demands do not affirm our right to work so much as help us to secure some measure of freedom from it.<sup>22</sup> For the purposes of this project, I am interested in demands that would not only advance concrete reforms of work but would also raise broader questions about the place of work in our lives and spark the imagination of a life no longer so subordinate to it—demands that would serve as vectors rather than terminal points.<sup>23</sup>

Chapter 3 begins with a rereading of the 1970s movement for wages for housework, the most promising dimensions of which, I argue, have been poorly understood. This instance of Marxist feminist theory and practice is particularly relevant to this project because of its roots in the autonomist tradition and for its commitment to, and distinctive deployment of, the refusal of work. Building on some of this literature's unique analyses of the gendered political economy of work, its mode of struggle against the organization of domestic work, and its treatment of the feminist political practice of demanding, I go on to propose a rationale for a different demand: the demand for a guaranteed basic income. I argue that this demand can deliver on some of the potential of wages for housework while being more consistent with conditions in a post-Fordist political economy. Drawing on a framework gleaned from the wages for housework literature, the demand for basic income can do more than present a useful reform; it can serve both to open a critical perspective on the wage system and to provoke visions of a life not so dependent on the system's present terms and conditions.

This particular understanding of what a demand is and what it can do guides the analysis in chapter 4 of another demand, this one for shorter

hours. The chapter explores the demand for a six-hour day with no decrease in pay as at once a demand for change and a perspective and provocation, at once a useful reform and a conceptual frame that could generate critical thinking and public debate about the structures and ethics of work. In contrast both to those who defend a reduction of hours at work in order to expand family time, and to those who fail in their articulation of the demand to address the intimate relationship between work and family, the case for shorter hours developed here focuses on expanding our freedom not only from capitalist command but also from imposed norms of sexuality and traditional standards of proper household composition and roles. Taking aim at, rather than appropriating, normative discourses of the family, the demand for shorter hours is conceived here as a demand for, among other benefits, more time to imagine, experiment with, and participate in the relationships of intimacy and sociality that we choose. This account thus understands the movement for shorter hours in terms of securing the time and space to confront and forge alternatives to the present structures and ethics of both work and family.

Whereas the demands for basic income and shorter hours usefully point in the direction of a critical politics against and beyond work, they could be easily dismissed as utopian. Chapter 5 investigates the case against utopia and, drawing on the work of Ernst Bloch and Friedrich Nietzsche, attempts a response. Rather than rehearse the arguments made in other chapters about why these demands are in fact realistic proposals, chapter 5 pursues another tack. Provisionally accepting the judgment that they are utopian, the discussion explores instead what a utopian demand is and what it might be able to do, arguing that only through a more complicated understanding of the utopian dimensions of these demands can we appreciate their efficacy. To establish the general credentials and specific possibilities and limitations of the demand as a utopian form, the analysis explores its relation to other, perhaps more familiar, utopian artifacts, including the traditional literary and philosophical utopia and the manifesto. The conception of the utopian demand that emerges from this account emphasizes not only its capacity to advance significant reforms, but also its potential as a critical perspective and force of provocation that can incite political desires for, imagination of, and mobilization toward different futures.

The brief epilogue attempts to both reflect on the previous arguments

and address some topics that they neglected. I begin with two points of clarification. First, my preference for politics over ethics as the terrain of antiwork struggle and postwork speculation raises a question about the relationship between politics and ethics that the analysis presumes. Also meriting discussion is a second relationship, between the project's radical aspirations to remake a life outside of work and its comparatively moderate demands. This seeming incongruence between ambitious ends and modest means warrants an elaboration of the relationship between reform and revolution that informs the project. In the final section, I take another step back from the material to consider one way to bring the two demands together as part of a broader political effort to defend life against work, the colloquial version of which could be described as "getting a life." The rubric of life against work is, I propose, both capacious and pointed enough to frame a potent antiwork politics and fuel a postwork imagination.

In the epigraph above, C. Wright Mills laments the fact that we measure the satisfaction of jobs only against the standard of other jobs: "One type of work, or one particular job, is contrasted with another type, experienced or imagined, within the present world of work." That is to say, "judgments are rarely made about the world of work as presently organized as against some other way of organizing it" (1951, 229). I want to make a case for the importance of a political theory of work and specifically, a political theory that seeks to pose work as a political problem of freedom. Beyond any particular claim or category—beyond any of the specific arguments about the role of the work ethic in sustaining the structures and cultures of work, the legitimacy of basic income, the need for shorter hours, or the utility of utopian thought—the project is meant to raise some basic questions about the organization and meaning of work. The assumptions at the heart of the work ethic, not only about the virtues of hard work and long hours but also about their inevitability, are too rarely examined, let alone contested. What kinds of conceptual frameworks and political discourses might serve to generate new ways of thinking about the nature, value, and meaning of work relative to other practices and in relation to the rest of life? How might we expose the fundamental structures and dominant values of work—including its temporalities, socialities, hierarchies, and subjectivities—as pressing political phenomena? If why we work, where we work, with whom we work, what we do at work, and how long we work are social arrangements and hence

properly political decisions, how might more of this territory be reclaimed as viable terrains of debate and struggle? The problem with work is not just that it monopolizes so much time and energy, but that it also dominates the social and political imaginaries. What might we name the variety of times and spaces outside waged work, and what might we wish to do with and in them? How might we conceive the content and parameters of our obligations to one another outside the currency of work? The argument that follows, then, is one attempt to assess theoretically and imagine how to confront politically the present organization of work and the discourses that support it.

## **Working Demands**

### **From Wages for Housework to Basic Income**

Political visions are fragile. They appear—and are lost again. Ideas formulated in one generation are frequently forgotten, or repressed, by the next; goals which seemed necessary and realistic to progressive thinkers of one era are shelved as visionary and utopian by their successors. Aspirations which find voice in certain periods of radical endeavor are stifled, or even wholly silenced, in others. The history of all progressive movements is littered with such half-remembered hopes, with dreams that have failed.

BARBARA TAYLOR, *EVE AND THE NEW JERUSALEM*

We have arrived at a crossroads of sorts. At this point, the focus of the analysis shifts from antiwork critique to postwork politics, moving away from the earlier concentration on the refusal of work and its ethics toward an exploration of demands that might point in the direction of alternatives. In this chapter, I present a reading of the 1970s feminist demand for wages for housework and then propose its reconfiguration as a contemporary demand for a guaranteed basic income. As will soon become clear, the wages for housework perspective—as it was articulated in a handful of texts published in Italy, Britain, and the United States between 1972 and 1976—is an important inspiration for many of the arguments in subsequent chapters as well.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the two major demands often repeated by proponents of wages for housework, along with other autonomists—for more money and for less work—guide the choice of demands that are the subject of this chapter and the next: the

demand for basic income and the demand for shorter hours. Perhaps more significantly, the literature's insights into both the nature of demands and the practice of demanding inform my analyses of the rationales and potential effectivity of these two demands. In light of my investments in this perhaps peculiar artifact of 1970s feminism, it may be helpful, before moving into the heart of the argument, to clarify something about my approach to this historical terrain.

#### READING THE FEMINIST PAST

Why return to this bit of feminist history? One would be hard-pressed to find a political vision within feminism that has less credibility today than wages for housework; indeed, it is frequently portrayed in histories of feminism as a misguided movement and, when discussed in feminist anthologies, is typically represented as a rather odd curio from the archive of second-wave feminist theory. One should not discount these assessments; although I find inspiration in several dimensions of the project, I too reject what would seem to be its foundational claim and *raison d'être*: the demand for wages for housework. So what might this—to borrow terms from the epigraph to this chapter—half-remembered hope and failed dream have to do with contemporary feminism? More specifically, two questions warrant consideration: first, why return to this piece of the feminist past; and second, how might the past be brought to bear on feminism's present and its possible futures?

This return to the 1970s is made difficult by feminism's own historiographical practices, including some of its most familiar periodizing models and classificatory schemes. Two in particular pose obstacles for the kind of return I seek. The first conceives the relationship between the feminist past and present in terms of a dialectical logic that codes the passing of time in terms of eras in succession. The second approaches history in terms of a familial model, conceiving it as a relation between one generation and the next. The first raises the question of why one would bother with the past; the second poses limits on how one might enlist it in the effort to craft a different future. It is not exactly that the former is too dismissive of and the latter too deferential toward this history; the problem, as I see it, is that one can block access to a full and rich engagement with the past, and the other can keep us from a creative reappropriation of its insights.

Perhaps the most familiar way of telling the story of feminist his-

tory relies on a dialectical logic to explicate a progressive development of feminist theories over time. For example, in a well-known and oft-repeated taxonomy of the field popularized in the early 1980s, liberal, Marxist, and radical feminisms were posed as competing models of feminist theory that socialist feminism was seen to at once absorb and outshine. In particular, Marxist feminism, a category that includes wages for housework, was positioned as thesis and radical feminism posed as its antithesis, with the shortcomings of each remedied by socialist feminism imagined as their synthesis. Thus, in some of these early histories of second-wave feminist theory, socialist feminism was described as feminism's crowning achievement, succeeding temporally and transcending both methodologically and politically liberal, Marxist, and radical feminisms.<sup>2</sup> Some instances of this same periodizing scheme produced in the 1990s replace socialist feminism with poststructuralist feminism in the privileged position. Clare Hemmings describes one widely disseminated version of this updated story in her critical reading of such models this way: essentialist feminism of the 1970s—a broad category that includes liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist feminisms—was challenged in the 1980s by feminists of color and third-world feminists, whose critiques were incorporated into and surpassed by poststructuralist feminism of the 1990s (2005, 126).

One of the limitations of such an account is, of course, its reductionism—a perhaps inevitable side effect of any such classificatory project. In the case that concerns me here, wages for housework is contained in the broader category of Marxist feminism, which is in turn inserted into a progressive historical narrative as one moment in a dialectical chain.<sup>3</sup> But the more difficult problem is not that this narrative codes wages for housework as a political vision that failed and was defeated; the trouble is that wages for housework is imagined as part of a history that has been superseded. That is why a return to this 1970s tradition might be understood not only as a distraction, but as a regression, as a return either to the mistakes that were made before socialist feminism's subsumption of Marxist feminism, or to a thoroughly repudiated and now overcome essentialist feminism.

In response to such logics, part of the analysis of wages for housework that follows will be concerned with setting the historical record straight. This will involve both revisiting some existing interpretations of the discourse and recovering certain lost dimensions of the project. There

are, for example, a number of misreadings of the literature that a better understanding of its historical connections to the autonomous Marxist tradition can serve to correct. There will also be an effort to recover specific aspects of the project that were not part of socialist feminism's supposedly more perfect union of Marxist and radical feminisms or of poststructuralism's anti-essentialist feminism. These include the concept of the social factory often deployed in the literature, the project's commitment to the refusal of work, and the understanding of political demands and the process of demanding that was central to both the movement and the analysis. Contrary to the model of dialectical history, the story of feminist history is not only a story of progress but also sometimes, as the epigraph reminds us, of forgotten ideas and stifled aspirations.

Despite its value, however, the work of historical recovery is not my primary concern; I am more interested in remaking wages for housework than in preserving its memory. This brings me to a second conception of the relationship among feminist theories through time, another progress narrative that would undermine the kind of return to the 1970s I want to make. This second mode of feminist history relies on a familial logic for its temporal imaginary. Judith Roof aptly describes this as a generational discourse, one popular version of which casts feminist history as a story of mothers bequeathing a feminist legacy to a new generation that then builds on and carries forward its inheritance, a story of a feminist sisterhood that over time evolves into a succession of generations within a larger feminist family (1997, 70). Progress is secured by the steady accumulation of feminist knowledge and an ever-expanding feminist solidarity. One of the problems with this conception is that, as Roof notes, the family model functions to domesticate differences among feminists (73), reducing fundamental and persistent conflicts to the stuff of family quarrels and generational gaps.<sup>4</sup> But perhaps the more important problem with this model is the way it tends to individuate and personalize theoretical discourse and political contestation. In the realm of feminist academic production, the inheritance to be handed down from one feminist to another is a life's work rather than a collection of writings; authors take precedence over texts in this subjectivized framework.<sup>5</sup> The heritage is at once political and personal, a legacy that flows from the consciousness, experience, desire, and commitment of specific individuals rather than theories, strategies, and visions that exceed the



paradigm of individual authorship. Whereas the dialectical model treats the past as either a stage leading to the present or as the dustbin of history, the familial model demands more reverence, treating feminism's history as elders to respect and legacies to preserve.

One problem with both of these periodizing frames and historical imaginaries is their historicism. That is, they cast any given theoretical paradigm as not only *of* its time—developed within a particular political conjuncture and conceptual horizon—but as *only* of its time. Each theory is corralled within a span of time bounded by its genesis and death; even when conceived as a living legacy rather than as a dead relic, the theory remains more of a historical artifact than a project. Each contribution is fixed to a linear time by a logic—whether dialectical or familial—that marks, divides, and seals each moment. Within the dialectical scheme, it is not just that the particular theories are homogenized so as to fit a given classificatory framework, but also that each is seen as a finished product consigned to the boundaries of a particular historical period. Within the familial narrative, each theory is represented by individual authors and their perspectives rather than conceived as collective projects animated by common questions and political desires that are not so easily contained within either an individual or a single span of time.

I am interested here in a different temporality, which might sustain a more fruitful relationship among past, present, and future. To borrow Robyn Wiegman's formulation, I want to "think about feminism's political time as nonlinear, multidirectional, and simultaneous" in a way that can open up "the possibility of thinking about the historical as distinct from and other to the present *and* as a present living force" (2000, 824, n. 14). In contrast to the familial model, my focus is on texts rather than authors. To be sure, I will treat these texts as historical artifacts; I am not interested here in contemporary iterations of wages for housework or the later writings of its original authors. Instead, I will focus on a handful of texts produced in the early to mid-1970s—most of which, it is relevant to note, are manifestoes, and as such, clearly of their time: interventions designed to gather and direct the political energies of a specific moment and location. But my project is not for that reason primarily historical; as a work of political theory rather than intellectual history, its primary focus is on how wages for housework might be employed to confront the present and reimagine its possible futures. The reading I seek is at once

antidialectical, open to the lost possibilities from which we might still learn, and antifamilial, treating these texts not as a legacy to preserve but as tools to use. So although I am interested in reading the 1970s wages for housework literature within its historical context—in relation to other Marxist theories, and in a particular moment of transition from Fordism to post-Fordism—in the end, the point is to go back in order to bring some of the insights from the 1970s forward, to use them in this time and place.

#### THE DOMESTIC LABOR DEBATE

A good place to begin our exploration of wages for housework is with one of the feminist literatures with which it was engaged and of which it is typically remembered as a contributor. The domestic labor debate was one major strand of Anglo-American Marxist and socialist feminist theory in the 1970s that focused on the political economy of women's household labor. Enlisting Marxist categories and frameworks in the service of feminist inquiry held the promise of yielding new insights into the relationship between gendered relations and capitalist logics. Participants in the domestic labor debate argued that gender difference and hierarchy are also constituted and reproduced through laboring practices, and that specific gender divisions of labor are part and parcel of contemporary capitalist social formations. The debate produced a sizable body of literature comprising a lively set of exchanges from the late 1960s up through the end of the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the 1970s, however, the domestic labor debate had exhausted itself (Vogel 2000, 152). This was due, in part, to factors external to the literature itself: by the 1980s, many feminist theorists had moved on to other topics grounded in different frameworks. Most notably, the locus of materialist analysis had shifted from the terrain of economics to that of the body (Malos 1995b, 209), and the preoccupation with the constituting force of laboring practices gave way to increasing interest in language, discourse, and culture as forces that shape the lives of gendered subjects. Interest in the debate also declined as both Marxism and Marxist feminism were often eclipsed—rather than inspired, challenged, and transformed—by the rising popularity and efficacy of poststructuralist approaches. But the more important sources of the debate's demise can be located internally. What began as a promising attempt to combine the theoretical energies and political commitments

of Marxism and feminism became mired in a debate about how to conceive the relationship between domestic labor and Marx's theory of value. The basic division, to simplify a complex range of positions, was between those in the more orthodox camp who tended to describe domestic labor as a form of unproductive labor that, since it does not create surplus value, is not central to capitalism per se, and less orthodox contributors who posed domestic labor as reproductive or even productive labor that, since it creates surplus value either indirectly or directly, must be conceived as an integral part of capitalist production. At least in the early years of this debate, two important issues were clear: the conceptual issue of how to approach the imbrication of the domestic political economy and the capitalist mode of production; and the political question of whether to integrate or separate feminist struggles with respect to working-class organizations and agendas. Over time, however, these theoretical questions and practical concerns gave way to an ever more technical debate over Marx's theory of value.<sup>7</sup> The conceptual and political point of the exercise was increasingly obscured as the debate frequently degenerated into a contest to locate the definitive passage from Marx that would resolve the dispute once and for all. The early commitment to rethink Marxism from a feminist perspective was largely overshadowed by efforts to rethink feminism from a Marxist perspective, with the latter too often posited as a reified textual legacy to which feminist questions and commitments must be made to conform.

As another scene from the famously unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism, there are certainly good reasons why we need not mourn the passing of the domestic labor debate. At the same time, however, neither need we discount the possibility that any number of valuable insights and innovative analyses were produced at its margins. In the pages that follow, I want to revisit what was undoubtedly the most unorthodox of the contributions to the debate: the wages for housework perspective, for which Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (1973), is often credited as foundational.<sup>8</sup> My interest in this and other texts in the wages for housework tradition from the early to mid-1970s centers on three aspects of the project that I want to recover and then to reconfigure in order to propose a somewhat different and potentially more timely analysis and strategy: an analysis of the family as part of a new phase of capitalist development that the feminists in this tradition tried to capture

with the term “the social factory”; the category of the “refusal of work,” which serves to critique not just the structures and divisions of work but also its ethics; and the demand for wages for housework—which, I should note at the outset, appeals to me because of the authors’ conception of the practice of demanding, of what a demand is, and of what it can do, rather than because of the specific content of the demand. Gathering these three elements together, I will consider toward the end of the chapter an alternative demand: the demand for basic income.

As I mentioned above, to locate and develop what I see as its more timely dimensions, I want to reconsider the wages for housework perspective in light of and in relation to the autonomist Marxist tradition that it drew upon, and whose later developments it helped inspire.<sup>9</sup> Highlighting some of the links between autonomist Marxism and wages for housework accomplishes two things. First, drawing on the broader Marxist framework to which the feminist project was linked can serve to clear up certain misreadings of those elements of the wages for housework texts that I want to reappropriate. Second, setting the discourse in dialogue with more recent autonomist work will help me construct a revised perspective and a very different demand.<sup>10</sup>

#### REPRODUCING THE SOCIAL FACTORY

To the chagrin of the more orthodox participants in the domestic labor debate, who saw domestic labor as separate from capitalist production proper, Dalla Costa and James insisted that, despite what Marx both did and did not write, domestic labor is essential to the production of surplus value, and the site of its extraction is what they called the social factory (1973, 30–31). This argument, however, has not been well understood; in particular, the concept of the social factory has generated confusion, with some readings casting it as a misguided analogy intended to bring the household under the rubric of a Marxist analysis of industrial production.<sup>11</sup> The concept was, in fact, also used by other autonomists at the time and was deployed here by Dalla Costa and James to particularly generative ends.<sup>12</sup> Rather than a claim about how the household resembles a factory, the concept gestures toward a broader, more compelling, and—as I will explain below—timely analysis of contemporary capitalism. The theory of the social factory rests on the idea that beyond the factory, what Dalla Costa and James sometimes called “the community,” or society itself, is involved in capitalist relations. The concept thus sig-

nals an alternative to theories that isolate capitalist production in the times, spaces, and relations of waged labor.

Dalla Costa and James generally used the concept of the social factory in a rather limited way to think about some of the interdependencies between two fields of social cooperation, the household and the waged labor economy. The wage relation, understood as the fundamental social relation of capital, was the key point of linkage between the two realms. As Dalla Costa and James explain it, the institution of the family serves as an important though obscured component of the wage system; as a social relation of the waged to the unwaged (12), it is an expansive category that includes “the unemployed, the old, the ill, children, and housewives” (James 1976, 7). The family functions in this sense as a distributive mechanism through which wages can be imagined to extend to the nonwaged, underwaged, not-yet-waged, and no-longer-waged. As a privatized machine of social reproduction, the family serves to keep wages lower and hours longer than they would be if the general assumption were that individuals needed either to be able to secure commodified equivalents to the goods and services produced within private households or to have enough time outside of waged work to produce the goods and services themselves. Although the family continues to serve as a crucial element of the wage system, it remains a hidden partner, its role concealed by all those discourses that naturalize, romanticize, privatize, and depoliticize the institution. Since the wage system, even in this expanded sense, does not of course succeed in incorporating everyone or giving everybody a living wage, the ideology of the family performs a kind of mopping-up function, enabling us to accept the legitimacy of the wage system despite its shortcomings by encouraging us to imagine that it can provide for those capable of living up to its norms of family form and responsibility. By linking the family to the wage system, by describing it as a pillar of the capitalist organization of work (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 33), Dalla Costa reminds us of the ways in which the institution of the family not only helps to absorb reductions in the price of labor and to produce lower-cost and more-flexible forms of feminized labor, but also provides the ideological basis for relieving the state and capital from responsibility for much of the cost of social reproduction.

This focus on the wage, which we find in Dalla Costa and James’s analysis as that which sutures the household to the waged labor econ-

omy, is something that the authors share with the broader autonomist tradition. Why privilege the wage this way? Because, in keeping with autonomist approaches to Marx, the wage is understood as the dominant mechanism by which individuals are incorporated into the capitalist mode of cooperation: "Since Marx," Dalla Costa insists, "it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage" (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 25–26). More important, the wage is a contradictory phenomenon: it is the mechanism by which workers are integrated into the production of surplus value and also a point of leverage and a resource for creating a life outside of work (see Negri 1991, 132; Baldi 1972, 18; Read 2003, 100). The wage is, in other words, one of the most direct expressions of the relation of power between capital and labor and one of the most tangible objects of struggle over its terms. As two proponents of wages for housework, Nicole Cox and Silvia Federici, explain it, "the wage always has two sides: the side of capital which uses it to control the working class by trying to ensure that every raise is matched by an increase in productivity; and the side of the working class which increasingly is fighting for more money, more power, and less work" (1976, 11). The wage can facilitate both the accumulation of capital and the expansion of workers' potentially autonomous needs and desires.

The wages for housework perspective sought to challenge dominant understandings about who is disciplined by the wage and who is involved in struggles over wages. Just as Marx argued that the wage serves to hide the surplus labor expended by waged laborers in the production of surplus value, the wage also obscures the contributions of unwaged labor toward the process of valorization and, consequently, the true length of the working day (Cox and Federici 1976, 9–10). Cox and Federici express it this way: "We know that the working day for capital does not necessarily produce a pay-check and does not begin and end at the factory gates" (4). They offer a more expansive account of not only who is involved in the wage relation and thus who might contest its terms, but also what counts as a wage struggle, in this case going beyond the focus on wage rates to include efforts to secure the provision of social services and reductions of work time.

Dalla Costa and James's argument was one of the early references to the concept of the social factory in the autonomist literature, where it has since been developed further. One could argue that it was the feminist insistence on expanding the concept of labor beyond its waged forms

that helped to open the door to a new conceptualization of the structure of capitalist social production, to which the category of the social factory was an early contribution. Later we will return to the concept of the social factory to consider how it has been transformed under the conditions of post-Fordism, and the consequences of this for the project of mapping the social factory's sites and relations. Here I want to continue the review of the 1970s literature and consider a second point of interest: the refusal of work.

#### THE REFUSAL OF WORK

When authors like Dalla Costa and James maintained that the family is a site of social production and, in a move we will discuss later, demanded that women receive wages for the work that they do there, the point was not to extol the virtues of domestic work. On the contrary, these authors insisted that work is nothing to revere. Departing from those discourses on both the Right and the Left that acclaim and moralize work, the wages for housework movement and analysis is part of a broader tradition—one that I think we should recover and extend—that embraces the refusal of work as part of its project. But this refusal, one of the most provocative and potentially promising elements of the approach, is also one of its most poorly understood. Some readers, including Seyla Benhabib and Drucilla Cornell, have characterized the movement as a prime example of Marxist feminism's commitment to a "utopia of labor," a feminist version of the orthodox Marxist celebration of productive activity (1987, 4). To grasp the specific character of the critique of work that animated wages for housework both in theory and in practice, one must recognize its roots in and resonances with the autonomist tradition. This is one of those instances when historicizing the argument proves critical; otherwise we may fail to understand one of its central analytical orientations and political commitments.

The refusal of work, to recall the discussion of the concept in the previous chapter, is one of the dominant themes of autonomist critical analysis and political practice. As we noted there, it marks an important departure from those elements within Marxism that are beholden to the productivist valorization of work, including both orthodox Marxism's commitment to the model of economic modernization and humanist Marxism's metaphysics of labor. Against such productivist currents, autonomist Marxism rejects both the utopian vision of life made produc-

tive and the ontology of man the producer. The refusal of work is not a rejection of productive activity *per se*, but rather a refusal of central elements of the wage relation and those discourses that encourage our consent to the modes of work that it imposes. It comprises a refusal of work's domination over the times and spaces of life and of its moralization, a resistance to the elevation of work as necessary duty and supreme calling. It is at once a model of resistance and a struggle for a different relation between life and work that a postwork ethics and more nonwork time could help secure.

In this context, then, calling domestic labor "work" was not meant to elevate it but was imagined rather as "the first step towards refusing to do it" (Federici 1995, 191). Seeking paid work was not a viable way to refuse domestic work: "Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink" (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 33). Given that capitalist economies have responded to the feminist rejection of prescribed domesticity by continually increasing the number of women in the workforce, and that women often do not escape the primary responsibility for unwaged reproductive labor even when they work for wages, a broader critique of work is required. We must, Dalla Costa urges, "refuse the myth of liberation through work"—after all, "we have worked enough" (47).

If the demand for wages was not meant to celebrate domestic work, neither was it intended to sanctify it. These feminists' insistence on the productivity of unwaged domestic work was not a moral claim: "It is only from the capitalist viewpoint that being productive is a moral virtue, not to say a moral imperative" (Cox and Federici 1976, 6). Here we can get a clear sense of the difficulties with and radical ambition of an agenda that sought to contest at once the invisibility of domestic work and its moralization, to redress both its devaluation as work and its overvaluation as labor of love. Indeed, the application of the refusal of work to the field of unwaged domestic work substantially raises the stakes of the project of refusal: it is one thing to refuse waged work, but quite another to contest the institution of the family and the modes of labor it organizes and imbues with meaning. Applied to unwaged domestic labor, the refusal of work means the rejection of its present familial-centered organization and gendered distribution of labor, as well as the refusal to defend such a critique by recourse to some all-too-familiar romanticization of the domestic realm's relations and rituals.



This deployment of the strategy of refusal within the terrain of domestic work not only radicalizes but also clarifies the practice. Refusing work—in this case, refusing domestic work—does not necessarily mean abandoning the house and denying care; rather, it mandates an interrogation of the basic structures and ethics that govern this work and the struggle for ways to make it, as it were, unproductive. In this sense, the feminist refusal of work might serve as an antidote to the cultural obsession with work, thereby opening a space in which to discuss its present terms. In the United States today—where the work ethic reigns supreme, where work is mythologized and exalted, and where even attitudes must be productive—the critique of work and the instigation of what Dalla Costa calls “the struggle not to work” are both more vitally important and more difficult to develop (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 47).

The refusal of housework involves not only the refusal of its present organization and distribution together with its moralization, but also the refusal of the two common alternatives to the family-based model of reproduction: first, the commodification of domestic work, this different kind of privatization that continues to serve as the default solution of mainstream liberal feminism; and second, its socialization—that is, the making public of domestic work by means of state-funded services including child care, public laundries, and canteens or communal eating places proposed by some radical and socialist feminists (see, for example, Benston 1995, 106). That is, the feminists in the wages for housework movement rejected not only the capitalist but also the socialist remedies defended by other feminists at that time. Wages for housework extended the autonomous Marxist critique of socialist production—a vision they saw as nothing more than the substitution of state control for private control over the same structure of production—into the field of reproduction. Socialism was understood as a program intended to rationalize production in the social factory, to perfect rather than transform the work society.<sup>13</sup> Of course, the critique of publicly funded services to support domestic work was not then and is not now unfamiliar. But this critique did not conjure up the specter of motherless children starting fires in regimented, state-run nurseries so much as it sought to advance the argument that making such services public would not truly change things. Along with other autonomists, these feminists saw socialism as more of a managerial project than a revolutionary one; in this case, more a matter of shoring up family-based care and enabling increasing num-

bers of women to perform waged work than an effort to change the current regime of productive cooperation centered on waged employment and the family. They did not fail to include in their list of demands the provision of various state services, including child care. But these were treated as necessary reforms rather than as radical demands that pointed in the direction of something different. They were more interested in other kinds of demands: demands for time and money. "We want canteens too, and nurseries and washing machines and dishwashers," Dalla Costa writes, "but we also want choices: to eat in privacy with few people when we want, to have time to be with children, to be with old people, with the sick, when and where we choose." To have choices requires having time, and "to 'have time' means to work less" (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 38). By enabling women to avoid a second shift of waged work, wages for housework could buy some of this time.

#### THE LIMITS OF THE ANALYSIS

Clearly one must be selective in drawing from a thirty-year-old feminist project, especially a movement and collection of manifestoes developed in a specific time and place. It might be useful to pause briefly here in order to acknowledge a few of the limitations of the analysis. None of the shortcomings I will go on to list, it bears mention, is unique to the wages for housework literature of this period; all should be familiar to readers of 1970s feminist theory. These problems include a tendency toward what could be described as a kind of methodological fundamentalism. One can see this in the literature's predilection for the universalizing claim—what Donna Haraway once described as a reluctance to embrace the status of a partial explanation (1985, 78)—but also in its commitment to the primacy of production, its assumption about the greater efficacy of economic forces over those that the authors deem more properly (and often, indeed, "merely") social, cultural, or political.<sup>14</sup> This is accompanied in some cases by a tendency toward reductionism, as exemplified in Dalla Costa's claim that "the role of the working class housewife . . . is *the* determinant for the position of all other women (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 19) and in the various attempts to reduce complex gender formations and identities to the female role that then seems to have been attributed solely to the constitutive force of capital. Related to this is the authors' unproblematic assumption of and commitment to a unified and ultimately global community of women. Symptomatic of this

disavowal of differences among women is the frequent insistence that housework is what all women have in common (see, for example, Dalla Costa and James 1973, 19) and hence that wages for housework is a demand that could inspire all women. In its least persuasive form, wages for housework was even described as the *only* revolutionary perspective (Federici 1995, 188).

Perhaps a more interesting problem to consider is one that the demand for wages was originally intended to remedy: a tendency toward functionalism, whereby capital is attributed a kind of monolithic unity and sole agency, and workers are reduced to the victims of its machinations. The explanations of complex social formations such as the family that assume capital—which often takes the place of a person in the narrative—always acts in its own best interest end up overestimating the autonomous power of capital and underestimating the contradictions and antagonisms that its relations inevitably generate. This tendency to attribute too much coherence, foresight, and force to capital—together with too little heterogeneity, autonomy, and agency to women—is in tension with an equally strong commitment to one of the fundamental principles of autonomous Marxism, that of the leading role of the proletariat, a principle that in other respects these feminists clearly seek to advance. According to this assumption, workers should be seen not as capital's victims, but as its potential antagonists and even saboteurs. It is working-class refusals and assertions of need and desire that provoke capitalist development; thus, milestones in the history of capitalist development should be understood as political attempts to reestablish capital's power in response to workers' insubordination (see, for example, Tronti 1980, 31–32). Dalla Costa and James's fidelity to this methodological reflex is exhibited in their interpretation of Marx: "For Marx," James writes, "history was a process of struggle of the exploited, who continually provoke over long periods and in sudden revolutionary leaps changes in the basic social relations of production and in all the institutions which are an expression of these relations" (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 5). What might be functional constituents of capitalist production have the potential to be, and at various moments in history have in fact become, its active and potentially subversive antagonists.

The demand for wages for housework seems to have intrigued Dalla Costa and James, initially at least, as a mechanism for the development of feminist subjectivity. Far from being a seamless system, the social factory

is rife with tensions and contradictions that open spaces for critical perspectives and political action. But unless women make demands, they argue, the family will continue to be functional for capital (43). The task is to identify and cultivate feminist dysfunctionality, and the demand for wages was one way they hoped this could be accomplished.

#### A DEMAND FOR WAGES

There is an interesting ambiguity in much of the wages for housework literature: Should the demand for wages be read literally or figuratively? Was it presented as a concrete policy objective or a critical ploy? Was it intended to be an end in itself or a means to other ends? Indeed, “it is still not clear,” writes Ellen Malos in 1980, “whether campaigners for wages for housework really want what they are asking for” (1995a, 21). Dalla Costa and James offer some interesting responses to such questions. Although it is usually recalled in the secondary literature in feminism as a pivotal text in the wages for housework movement, Dalla Costa and James’s *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* addresses the demand for wages only very briefly and dismisses it on the ground that it would only further entrench the gender division of labor in the home (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 34). In two footnotes to the text, the demand for wages receives a still rather tentative, but certainly more positive endorsement. It should be read, Dalla Costa suggests in these notes, not only as a demand, but also as a perspective. In the discussion that follows, I want to begin with this formulation, one that other movement texts echo, and develop it further into what I see as the most compelling reading of the demand. The discussion will be divided into two parts, the first elaborating the demand as a perspective and the second focusing on it as a provocation. The limitations of the content of this specific demand will be addressed later; for now, I want to explore what a demand is and what it can do, drawing out some of its multiple valences as a theoretical focus and practical strategy.

#### THE DEMAND AS PERSPECTIVE

As its advocates consistently argued, wages for housework is not just a demand, it is a perspective (see, for example, Dalla Costa and James 1973, 53, n. 16; Federici 1995, 187). As a perspective, it is not only a matter of the content of the demand, but of what it is that “we are saying” when “we demand to be paid” (Edmond and Fleming 1975, 7), a matter of the

critical analyses that inform and might be elicited by the demand. More specifically, the demand for wages was conceived not only as a concrete reform, but as an opportunity to make visible, and encourage critical reflection on, the position of women in the work society—both in the waged labor system and in its satellite, the family. Toward this end, its promoters suggested that wages for housework could function as a force of demystification, an instrument of denaturalization, and a tool of cognitive mapping.

First, as a force of demystification, the demand for wages aimed to produce some critical distance from the dominant discourses of work and family. In particular, the demand aimed to trouble that conception of the family sustained by its sharp contrast to the world of work. By naming part of what happens in the family as work, the demand for wages confounds the division between work as a site of coercion and regimentation and the family as a freely invented site of authentic and purely voluntary relations. The demand “makes clear this is a job like any other, that must be paid like any other, and that *we can refuse like any other*” (Power of Women Collective 1975, 87). It calls into question the ideology of separate spheres that subtends the idealization of the family as haven in a heartless world by obscuring the role that economic imperatives, gender norms, and compulsory heterosexuality play in shaping familial relationships. In the words of one advocate, “we want to call work what is work so that eventually we might rediscover what is love and create what will be our sexuality which we have never known” (Federici 1995, 192). As a perspective, then, the demand was an attempt to demystify and deromanticize domestic labor, while simultaneously insisting on its necessity and value. Not only can it demystify the relationship between work and family, but the wages for housework perspective also sheds critical light on the wage system. From this angle, one benefit of the wages for housework perspective is similar to a benefit that some proponents of comparable worth claim for that demand. Besides the concrete gains that many women would realize from comparable worth legislation, its radical potential lies in its ability to open up the wage relation to new kinds of scrutiny by politicizing estimations of skill and determinations of value (Blum 1991, 16–17). The wages for housework perspective has a similar potential to demystify the wage system insofar as it can draw attention to the arbitrariness by which contributions to social production are or are not assigned a wage.

Clearly one of the primary attractions of the wages for housework perspective was its denaturalizing effect. To insist that a woman receive payment for what is supposed to be a spontaneous desire rooted in women's nature produces a certain cognitive dissonance. One advocate underscored the value of the demand in these terms: "*It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us*" (Federici 1995, 190). To demand a wage for a practice "so identified with being female" is to begin a process of disidentification: "Even to ask for a wage is already to say that *we are not that work*" (Edmond and Fleming 1975, 6). Thus, "to the degree that through struggle we gain the power to break our capitalist identification," women can, Cox and Federici claim, at least determine who it is that "*we are not*" (1976, 8; emphasis added).

Finally, advocates saw the wages for housework perspective as a means by which to chart the relationship between production and reproduction within the social factory. The demand for wages was in this sense a tool for what Fredric Jameson calls cognitive mapping—that is, an attempt to construct "a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (1991, 51). The demand did not offer a ready-made guide, but rather compelled its audience to participate in its development. "The practical, continuous translation of this perspective" is, Dalla Costa claims, feminist work (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 53, n. 16), a form of analytical labor that the demand as a form requires of its addressees. To make sense of the slogan "wages for housework," one has to fill in the blanks of the broader analysis that supplies the demand's warrant and rationale. The perspective that both informs and emerges from the demand conceives the household as an economic unit with complex linkages to the waged-labor economy—a structural component of, rather than a haven from, the world of work. Insofar as the demand operates as a condensed form of analysis of the household and its relationship to larger economic forces and logics, it disturbs the model of separate spheres, demanding that we map across the borders of the public and the private, between the realms of work and family. In particular, the perspective suggests an alternative map of the working day, one that challenges the typical conception of the day as it is defined by

wages. “Up to now,” the demand’s supporters explain, “the working class, male and female, had its working day defined by capital—from punching in to punching out. That defined the time we belonged to capital and the time we belonged to ourselves.” “But,” they continue, “we have never belonged to ourselves, we have always belonged to capital every moment of our lives. And it is time that we made capital pay for every moment of it” (Cox and Federici 1976, 12).<sup>15</sup>

#### THE DEMAND AS PROVOCATION

As was the case with the demand for wages for housework as a perspective, the demand as a provocation had utility beyond the merely practical. What is often overlooked in assessments of the demand is its performative dimension: as a perspective, it functioned to produce the feminist knowledge and consciousness that it appears to presuppose; as a provocation, it served also to elicit the subversive commitments, collective formations, and political hopes that it appears only to reflect. The collective practice of demanding thus has its own epistemological and ontological productivity. As not only a perspective but a provocation, the demand for wages should be understood as an attempted claim and incitement of antagonism, collective power, and desire.<sup>16</sup>

As a way to gain some purchase on the demand as a provocation, let us first take a step back and reflect on what it means to make a demand. There are several ways to conceive the demand for wages. One could describe it as a proposal for reform—specifically, a policy or program designed to rationalize the wage system by making up for some of its deficiencies. Although this description is accurate to a degree, to get a sense of what is missing from it, consider the difference between a demand on the one hand and a request or plea—a first step in an effort to seek compromise or accommodation—on the other hand. Neither the policy proposal, with its aura of neutrality, nor the plea, with its solicitousness, manages to capture the style and tone of the demand for wages for housework; none of them conveys the belligerence with which this demand was routinely presented, or the antagonism it was intended thereby to provoke. Although the demand for wages may have been, at least in part, a serious bid for reform, there seems to have been little effort on the part of its proponents to be seen as reasonable or to meet others halfway, and little interest in working within the logic of the existing system and playing by its rules. Consider the response by two of

the demand's advocates to the charge that the demand for wages was economically unfeasible:

As for the financial aspects of Wages for Housework, they are "highly problematical" . . . only if we take the viewpoint of capital—the viewpoint of the Treasury Department—which always claims poverty when it is replying to the working class. Since we are not the Treasury Department *and have no aspiration to be*, we cannot see with their eyes, and we did not even conceive of planning for them systems of payment, wage differentials, productivity deals. It is not for us to put limits on our power, it is not for us to measure our value. It is only for us to organize a struggle to get all of what we want, for us all, and on our terms. For our aim is to be priceless, to price ourselves out of the market, for housework and factory work and office work to be "un-economic." (Cox and Federici 1976, 14)

There are two points to note about this passage, one about style and another about content. First, refusing to adjust their arguments so as to appeal to their various interlocutors, the demand was typically delivered insistently, without the possibility of compromise. In the words of another proponent, "We want our wages, and we're not waiting!" (Fortunati 1975, 19). They were not opening an exchange of ideas so much as they were "serving notice" (Campaign for Wages for Housework 2000, 258). Second, although securing wages may have been their immediate goal, the statement makes it clear that this was not the only goal, a point to which we will return a little later.

Still less does the demand for wages resemble an effort to persuade, let alone to coax, entice, or seduce. For example, those who demanded wages were not looking for recognition for women's sacrifices or selflessness. "Our power," explain two of the demand's advocates, "does not come from anyone's recognition of our place in the cycle of production, but from our capacity to struggle against it" (Cox and Federici 1976, 6). Rather than inhabit the subordinate position of housewife and try to use it to their advantage as moral high ground and a way to evoke either sympathy or guilt, they were more interested in announcing their power. As James explains in regard to their relationship to other Left groups and trade unions, "we're neither debating with them nor moralizing at them"—rather, James and her colleagues will speak to them in the shared vocabulary of material class interest (1976, 27). Instead of assuming the



position of injured party, these feminists present themselves as a force to be reckoned with. In this sense the demand is a “rejection of defense as a strategy” (James 1976, 26).

The demand was thus not only a declaration of revolutionary antagonism, but a demand for power in at least two senses. First, in making a “demand for autonomy” (James 1976, 26), the proponents of wages for housework sought the conditions—in this case, the income—that could secure for women a measure of independence from men, from capital, and from the state. This is why proponents of the demand were critical of those feminists who focused not on less work and more money for women, but only on achieving the “socialization of housework” through the provision of state services like child-care centers or collective kitchens: “In one case we regain some control over our lives, in the other we extend the state’s control over us” (Federici 1995, 193).

But the demand for wages was not only a demand for autonomous power, it was also an occasion to acquire and nurture that power; it is about “the autonomy that the wage *and the struggle for the wage* can bring” (James 1975, 18). Here we see more clearly the demand’s status as a means rather than an end. Indeed, Dalla Costa argues that we need a better understanding of what a demand is:

It is a goal which is not only a thing but, like capital at any moment, essentially a stage of antagonism of a social relation. Whether the canteen or the wages we win will be a victory or a defeat depends on the force of our struggle. On that force depends whether the goal is an occasion for capital to more rationally command our labor or an occasion for us to weaken their hold on that command. What form the goal takes when we achieve it, whether it is wages or canteens or free birth control, emerges and is in fact created in the struggle, and registers the degree of power that we reached in that struggle. (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 53, n. 17)

By this reckoning, wages for housework was not primarily or immediately about wages but about power; the demand was a provocation to collective action, what James describes as an “organiser of power” (1976, 28). It was not just a goal but also a movement, a process of becoming the kind of people who—or, rather, the kind of collectivities that—needed, wanted, and felt entitled to a wage for their contributions. In this respect, it was a demand for the power to make further demands—for more

money, more time, better jobs, and better services (see, for example, Dalla Costa 1975, 126). A demand is in this sense always a risk, a gamble, the success of which depends on the power that the struggle for it can generate. We get a clear sense from the passage quoted above that for Dalla Costa and James, the content of the demand—whether, for example, it was for wages or free birth control—was less important than the political act of demanding itself. To the extent that the demand could provoke the collective power to pursue something different, something more, it was worth pursuing.

By this reading, then, the demand for wages was a provocation of antagonism, power, and, finally, desire. Although sometimes predicated on a sense of what housewives need or what they deserve, what is more striking is how often the demand was articulated in terms of what its advocates want. “We don’t *want* the jobs,” declares one tract, “we want the money” (Los Angeles Wages for Housework Committee 1975, 124). Here it might be instructive to return to the terminological terrain on which we began this discussion to consider the differences between a demand as something someone wants and a claim of need or a rights claim. Rather than finding the demand’s foundation in the more impartial register of a real, demonstrable need or in a rights claim in the guise of which it could be cast as a “legitimated demand,”<sup>17</sup> the proponents of wages for housework were more often content to present the demand as a statement of desire: “We are going to make them give us what we want” (Fleming 1975, 91).<sup>18</sup> In comparison to needs and rights—both of which allege some measure of objectivity, the former because of its resonance with the biological, and the latter through its association with the juridical—demands register more clearly the subjective dimensions of the assertions. To put it in different terms, whereas needs and rights can be imputed to subjects or advanced on their behalf, demands are asserted by them. Indeed, the act of demanding connotes a kind of personal investment and passionate attachment, the presence of a desiring subject behind the demand. In contrast to a demand, a claim—in this case, a rights claim or a claim about needs—assumes a kind of impersonal distance from those who would assert it: “one” might advance a claim, but it is “we” or “I” who makes a demand. Whereas a claim operates more legibly on a register of rational exchange, a demand packs more of an affective charge. To return to an earlier point, demands presume a

field of conflict and relations of antagonism that the language of needs, rights, and claims more often serve to circumvent, forestall, or deny.

Again, the performative dimension is crucial: the demand for wages was less about meeting existing needs than expanding them, less about the satisfaction of desire than its cultivation. What campaigners for wages for housework wanted was, as they often repeated, more time and more money. As a provocation of political desire for more, the demand for wages clearly set itself apart from familiar modes of Left asceticism, a point its proponents were acutely aware of: “The left is horrified by the fact that workers—male and female, waged and unwaged—want more money, more time for themselves, more power, instead of being concerned with figuring out how to rationalise production” (Cox and Federici 1976, 18). Rather than demand only what they think they are likely to be conceded, as other practitioners of Left politics might advise, advocates of wages for housework aimed for what they wanted. Indeed, the demand for wages for housework was sometimes asserted with a kind of joyful excessiveness, as exemplified in one tract billed as a “notice to all governments,” which concludes its announcement of the demand for wages with a final declaration that reads rather like a ransom demand: “WE WANT IT IN CASH, RETROACTIVE AND IMMEDIATELY, AND WE WANT ALL OF IT” (Campaign for Wages for Housework 2000, 258). Whereas, the tract announces, “we have brought up our children to be good citizens and to respect your laws,” now, the writers warn, “we will bring them up to EXPECT more.” Self-sacrifice is rejected as both strategy and ideal. “Our problem,” Dalla Costa argues, “is that we never have enough, not that we have too much” (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 43).

This brings us back to the beginning of this discussion, and the question of whether the demand for wages for housework was something its proponents wanted to achieve. The answer would seem to be equally yes and no. On the one hand, the demand for wages was conceived and pursued as a concrete goal. It was not, they explain, that securing wages is in itself “the revolution,” but rather that it is “a revolutionary strategy,” one that might effect a shift in the economy of power in a way that could create possibilities for new struggles and further successes (see Cox and Federici 1976, 14). On the other hand, although it may have been an objective, it was also—and more important—a means to other ends. Its proponents describe it as a demand for money, but also as a demand for

power and an occasion to cultivate it. That was what James means when she describes wages for housework as “the perspective of winning” as opposed to a program of merely gradualist change (1976, 27). It was a means by which to constitute a feminist and anticapitalist political collectivity whose ultimate aim was the radical transformation of the institutions of work and family. To recall a passage quoted earlier, the advocates’ aim was to be “priceless,” to extricate a portion of their lives from capital’s logics and purposes, to make housework—together with other forms of work—“uneconomic,” to render them unproductive. The demand for wages for housework thus possessed a dual character: it was a reformist project with revolutionary aspirations.

It is important to remember that in her foundational essay, Dalla Costa only endorses the demand for wages in a footnote added after the essay was first drafted in June 1971, after the demand had gained a certain currency within feminist movements in Italy and elsewhere. It was only once the demand began to be advanced with increasing “strength and confidence” that it could be imagined as a viable locus of feminist and anticapitalist organizing (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 52, n. 16). Unfortunately, what Dalla Costa, James, and others support in these texts as a tactic was sometimes conceived, as Malos observes, as a total strategy (1995a, 20); and the movement for wages for housework continued long after it ceased to garner support from and inspire the imagination of feminists beyond those who had already enlisted. It is important to recognize that as tactics of movements, demands will come and go. To borrow the words of Barbara Taylor in the epigraph to this chapter, “they appear—and are lost again” (1983, ix). Demands that function as perspectives, and especially those that serve as provocations, will always be ephemeral achievements: bound by circumstance, they build on the energies and resistances of specific moments. One can imagine, for example, how the demanding assertion of feminist antagonism and power in particular might have appealed to feminists in the early 1970s as they contended with popular notions of feminine competition, weakness, and self-sacrifice. Today there are some new possibilities for, and obstacles to, change. In the present context, rather than try to preserve or resurrect the content of demands from the past, we should consider demands with the content, rhetorical style, and intended effects that could render them more adequate to this moment.

Alisa Del Re expresses what is arguably one of the key problematics of Marxist feminism in these terms: "Confronted by a system founded on the concealment of the actual costs of reproduction—which women have paid for until now, and calculable in terms of money and labor, but also in terms of quality of individual and social life—women must find a way to present their bill" (1996, 110). As the proponents of wages for housework so vigorously insisted, simply moving into the waged-labor force does not, in and of itself, present the bill. They wanted to confront collectively the present systems of social production and reproduction rather than merely individually escape them. Exposing the productivity of reproductive labor might, they hoped, transform it into a potential source of power, a kind of lever. The demand for wages for housework was one way to publicize and politicize this labor, one way to present the bill.

Despite its promise as a perspective and provocation, however, there are at least two fundamental problems with the content of the demand for wages for housework that make it untenable today. First, as its critics have long argued, the gender division of labor would be further entrenched by the payment of this wage to housewives.<sup>19</sup> Some of its supporters contest this claim, arguing that the denaturalization of domestic work is the first step in empowering women to refuse it (see, for example, Federici 1995, 191; Cox and Federici 1976, 11). But this response remains unpersuasive: certainly there are other ways to make this labor visible and contestable that neither name a gendered subject nor offer the means to perpetuate the division of labor that is its material foundation. Second, rewarding more forms of work with wages would do more to preserve than to challenge the integrity of the wage system. A possible reply is that by drawing attention to the arbitrariness with which contributions to social production are and are not rewarded with wages, the demand for wages for housework carries the potential to demystify the wage system. Be that as it may, wages for housework nonetheless demands an expansion of the wage relation rather than a transformation of its terms. In this final part of the chapter, I want to consider a different way to present the bill, with another demand long familiar to the autonomist tradition: the demand for a basic guaranteed income.

We can begin with a description. Basic income is an income paid unconditionally to individuals regardless of their family or household relationships, regardless of other incomes, and regardless of their past, present, or future employment status (van Parijs 1992, 3). Designed to establish a floor below which income would not fall, basic income would enable many to be perhaps not independent of the wage system, but certainly less dependent on its present terms and conditions. The idea is not new to US politics. In the 1960s, various proposals along these lines were debated within the Nixon administration and received extensive consideration in the media (Aronowitz et al. 1998, 67; Theobald 1966, 16–17). As noted in the previous chapter, from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s, the National Welfare Rights Organization supported basic income as an alternative to the precariousness and invasiveness of—as well as the social hierarchies created by—the welfare system. And the group was not alone: as Brian Steensland observes, “guaranteed annual income plans were *the* welfare reform strategy of the late 1960s and 1970s” (2008, ix). Since the 1980s, it has been the subject of growing interest on the part of both academics and activists across Europe and North America, as well as in many other locations.<sup>20</sup> Proponents argue that it can be paid for by a variety of measures, most important by a streamlined, more progressive, and more effective system of individual and corporate taxation (McKay and Vanevery 2000, 270; Chancer 1998, 120–22).

Several details of the demand for basic income are debated by its advocates, including the amount of the income, what if any conditions should be imposed on it, and the timing of its distribution. As I will explain, to be both a worthy alternative to wages for housework and a substantive contribution to a postwork political project, the income demanded should be sufficient, unconditional, and continuous. The level of income considered “basic” is the first and perhaps most significant point of contention, as the amount determines whether the income would merely subsidize low-wage jobs or would give individuals the freedom to opt out of waged work (Pateman 2003, 141; Gorz 1999, 81–84). To be relevant to the politics of work refusal, as was the demand for wages for housework, the income provided should be large enough to ensure that waged work would be less a necessity than a choice (see McKay 2001, 99). An income sufficient to meet basic needs would make it possible either to refuse waged work entirely, or, for the majority who would probably

want the supplementary wage, to provide a better position from which to negotiate more favorable terms of employment. If the income were merely a small addition to wages, it would risk supporting precarious employment and rationalizing the present wage system. At a level adequate to live on—as a basic *livable* income—it would represent a more substantial rupture with the current terms of the work society.

The second point of debate is whether or not conditions would be placed on receiving the income. What some advocates call a participation income would, for example, require the recipient to make some kind of socially useful contribution, like performing volunteer or caring work, or studying (Robeyns 2001, 85). The problem with this approach is that it maintains the commitment to an ideal of social reciprocity centered on work, even if it allows a more expansive notion of what would count as a productive contribution. As an alternative possibility, a citizen's income or social wage that is paid unconditionally is preferable to a participation income because of the way it more thoroughly separates income from work (Pateman 2003; McKay 2001). Finally, some proponents prefer a one-time payment in the form of a stakeholder grant, and others a regular payment over a lifetime.<sup>21</sup> One way to think of this is in terms of the difference between an inheritance and an income: as a capital grant, the former might serve to redistribute some wealth, but the latter more clearly offers itself as either a supplement to or a substitute for a wage. The primary target of a stakeholder grant is economic inequality; in the form of a regular payment over time, the payment also offers at least some degree of freedom from the times, spaces, activities, and relations of paid work. To summarize, the specific demand for basic income that I want to consider as a successor to the demand for wages for housework and a tactic of a contemporary postwork politics is a basic income rather than a wage support, an unconditional income instead of a participation income, and a social wage as opposed to a capital grant.

#### FROM WAGES TO INCOME: THE DEMAND AS PERSPECTIVE

To explore the possibilities and limits of the demand for basic income, I want to apply the conceptual scheme gleaned from our earlier examination of the demand for wages for housework and consider it in this section as a perspective, and in the next as a provocation. To recall the previous discussion, the demand for wages for housework was predicated upon a critical perspective on the nature of both work and family

and a mapping of their relationship across the times and spaces of the social factory. In order to appreciate how the demand for basic income as a perspective might build on and improve upon the perspective of wages for housework, we need to return the latter's analysis of the social factory and update some of its terms.

The wages for housework analyses were grounded in an essentially Fordist model of the social factory, with production and reproduction parceled out into separate spheres represented by the iconic figures of the male proletarian and the housewife. The advocates' insistence on the productivity of reproductive labor was a bid to subvert this model of separate systems. Indeed, the focus on housewives and the claim about the productivity of their work, together with the assertion of the political character of relations in the supposedly private sphere of the family, were at once the product of this Fordist order's own imaginary and perhaps one of the more trenchant expressions of its refusal: a refusal of the privatization and depoliticization of the personal, a refusal of the naturalization of allegedly nonproductive domestic practices, and a refusal of the gendering of the division between production and reproduction. But in the move from an industrial to a postindustrial economy, from Keynesian to neoliberal regimes of governance, from Taylorist to post-Taylorist labor processes and management strategies, and from a Fordist wage relation predicated on mass production for mass consumption to a more heterogeneous model of the wage relation based on flexibility, the relation between production and reproduction that the wages for housework perspective attempted to map becomes even more complex and the borders between them more difficult to discern. In the context of what I will summarize as post-Fordism, the distinction on which both the analysis and political project rested becomes even less tenable.

Consider the relation between waged production and domestic reproduction. First, wages for housework's insights into the productivity of reproductive labor and their analysis of unwaged housework and caring labor as part of the process of value production must now be developed further. The interpenetration of production and reproduction has deepened as domestically produced goods and services continue to be replaced with commodified forms, and as many modes of service and caring labor are transformed into waged forms of employment. Production and reproduction thus come to resemble one another more closely, in terms of both their respective labor processes and their out-



comes. Second, not only is reproductive labor more clearly productive today, as evidenced by its many waged forms, but productive labor is increasingly reproductive in the sense that it often creates not only strictly economic goods and services but also social landscapes, communicative contexts, and cultural forms. Indeed, social practices and cultural codes are both inducted into the production and circulation of commodities and generated from it. “In effect,” Antonio Negri argues, “productive labor is no longer ‘that which directly produces capital,’ but that which reproduces society” (1996, 157).

Not only do productive and reproductive labor increasingly overlap, with the distinction between what each creates—whether commodities or socialities—more difficult to see, but the borders around each activity and the list of those engaged in them are also harder to discern. For example, in an economy that draws on the accumulated knowledges—scientific, technological, informational, and communicative—of what Marx once called the general intellect (1973, 706), the circuits of value production can more clearly be seen to extend both across social space and over historical time. As Paolo Virno explains it, “the productive co-operation in which labor-power participates is always larger and richer than the one put into play by the labor process” (2004, 103). The work of reproducing the labor power required for this system of production is equally dispersed. Even when reproductive labor is conceived narrowly as the work of parenting, it is difficult to limit to the site of the household. Although we may imagine as private the relation between parents and children in the context of a family model where parents raise “their” children, it is clear that, to the extent that such children are eventually expected to assume their place as producers and consumers, they are also “public goods.”<sup>22</sup> Today it is arguably even more difficult to imagine restricting to individual parents the work of producing workers and consumers with the attitudinal orientations, affective capacities, and communicative skills required by postindustrial production and consumption. Productive subjects are reproduced both within and outside the wage relation, both within and beyond the family. When the notion of reproduction is expanded to cover the reproduction of the socialities necessary for production, the distinction between production and reproduction becomes even more amorphous. What Dalla Costa calls “the community”—the outside of the factory that includes the household—is, in an economy increasingly based on service and communication, even

more clearly essential to the reproduction of labor power.<sup>23</sup> The point is that in today's economy, both the labor of production and the labor of reproduction are difficult to limit to an identifiable set of workers, let alone to identities as specific as proletarian and housewife.

As the wages for housework movement's analysis of the social factory indicates, the time of production continues well beyond the formal working day, the space of production reaches beyond the discrete workplace, and the relations of production extend beyond the specific employment relation. The point I want to emphasize here is that in the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, these tendencies have been multiplied and amplified—or, at the very least, have been made more obvious. As a consequence, although the present terms of the work society still require work, the difference between production and reproduction and between work and nonwork becomes increasingly obscure, as the same task could be either a waged or an unwaged activity. As Virno aptly puts it, the difference between work and nonwork comes to resemble the more arbitrary distinction between “remunerated life and non-remunerated life” (2004, 103).

The wages for housework perspective on the social factory demystified both work and family by engaging some of the political-economic, ethical, and gendered discourses that undergird both spheres and promoted the cognitive mapping of the relations among work's various sectors. The demand for basic income has the potential to accomplish something comparable, although shifting the focus of its analyses from the Fordist to the post-Fordist social factory. Although its pedagogy is less clearly inscribed in the very language of the demand than the slogan “wages for housework,” the demand for basic income nonetheless presumes an analysis of the political economy of the contemporary wage system, and to engage with the demand requires a reconsideration of its standard rationale. Rather than register the fact that some workers—namely, those performing unwaged domestic work—are not now adequately included in the wage system, the demand for basic income points toward an even less reliable determination of who is and who is not included. The demand for basic income extends the insight of the wages for housework perspective that an individual's income depends on a network of social labor and cooperation broader than the individual wage relation (see Robeyns 2001, 84–85). Whereas the demand for wages for housework intended to expose the dependence of waged work on

household-based relations of reproduction, the demand for basic income entails, as Ailsa McKay and Jo Vanevery observe, “an implicit recognition that all citizens contribute to society in a variety of ways,” including contributions “that may or may not have monetary value or even be measurable” (2000, 281). The demand for wages for housework sought to expose some of the inadequacies of the relationship between work and income by imagining what it might take to repair the wage system; the demand for basic income’s proposal to break the link between work and income highlights the arbitrariness of which practices are waged and which are not.<sup>24</sup>

A major difference between the two demands is that whereas the demand for wages for housework served better as a critical perspective on the wage system than as a concrete proposal for reform, the demand for basic income offers both a critique and a constructive response. As a reform, basic income could help address several key problems of the post-Fordist US political economy that renders its wage system unable to function adequately as a mechanism of social distribution. These include the increasingly inadequate quantity and quality of waged labor manifest in high levels of unemployment, underemployment, and temporary and contingent employment, as well as the problem—noted in chapter 1—of measuring individual contributions to increasingly collective and immaterial labor processes. The demand for basic income poses a critique but also provides a remedy: reducing our dependence on work.

The demand for basic income presumes and evokes a critical perspective not only on the relationship between income and work, but also on the relationship between income and family membership. To recall our earlier discussion of wages for housework, as a perspective that demand tried to make visible the interdependence between the wage system and the institution of the family. The family is not a separate sphere, but part of society’s economic apparatus. The family and its ideology help to obscure the costs of productive labor by privatizing, feminizing, and naturalizing much of the work involved in its reproduction. The problem is that neither the wage system nor the institution of the family is able to meet the needs of those individuals whose forms of productivity and intimacy do not line up with such restrictive institutions of social cooperation and economic distribution. One of the advantages of basic income is that, as McKay and Vanevery point out, it would be distributed to individuals irrespective of family membership or household form

(2000, 281). In this way, the demand refuses to privilege either work or family as institutions on which an individual must depend if he or she is to secure the necessary means to support a life. Once again, the advantage of basic income is that it can both generate critical perspectives and offer an effective policy change. Whereas the wages for housework perspective sought to expose the link between the wage system and the family, as many have observed, its achievement risked preserving the relationship. As a perspective, the demand for basic income raises questions about whether narrow definitions of either work or family can or should suffice as principles governing the allocation of income (see McKay and Vanevery 2000, 268); as a concrete reform, it could ease the economic strain that can compel individuals to participate in both waged work and family membership. As Carole Pateman notes, “a basic income has the potential both to encourage critical reassessment of the mutually reinforcing structures of marriage, employment and citizenship, and to open the possibility that these institutions could be re-made in a new, more democratic form” (2006, 110).

The demand for basic income thus recalls and amplifies both the antiproduktivism and the antifamilialism of the wages for housework perspective. As a means to challenge at once the work ethic and the family-values discourse with which it is linked, this demand is reminiscent of an earlier demand for basic income that was advanced within a movement often cited in the wages for housework literature as a source of inspiration. The welfare rights movement, in both the United States and England, was another “revolt of the wageless” that the wages for housework authors found instructive (see, for example, Edmond and Fleming 1975, 9; Cox and Federici 1976, 12). The demand for a basic income was in fact a key tenet of the US National Welfare Rights Organization in the 1960s and 1970s. Like advocates of wages for housework, the organization attempted to gain recognition for the labor of parenting while at the same time refusing the work ethic’s praise for and privileging of work. Eileen Boris explains that the organization “recognized the necessity of not merely expanding the definition of work to embrace the unpaid labor of care giving or motherwork, but of refocusing the debate from work to income” (1999, 37). These activists were, Felicia Kornbluh (1997) argues, animated less by the notion of a right to work than by a right to consumption predicated upon an adequate level of income. As

an effort to secure an income independent of wages, the demand for basic income registers the refusal of an ethics that enforces dependency either on marriage or the wage relation; indeed, the demand calls into question the adequacy of any ideal of social reciprocity that is reduced to a series of individual contracts.

#### BASIC INCOME AS PROVOCATION

As a perspective, a demand encourages critical reflection on the present order of things: what are the problems the demand seeks to address, and what is the rationale for the solution it puts forward? As a provocation, a demand points toward the future: what would be different if, for example, wages were paid for housework, or income were provided irrespective of work or family membership? As a mode of provocation, the collective practice of demanding should be understood also as a constitutive event, the performative force of which inevitably exceeds the scope of the specific reform.

There are a number of different ways to approach basic income as a provocation to something new. I want to touch, very briefly, on two that bear interesting resemblances to the earlier discussion of the demand for wages for housework: basic income as a provocation to freedom and as a provocation of desire. As for the first of these, although the demand for basic income can certainly be seen as a means to reduce inequality, it can also be understood as an invocation of the possibility of freedom. By “freedom” I mean neither individual self-sovereignty nor libertarian license,<sup>25</sup> but rather what the wages for housework tradition envisioned as a condition of collective autonomy: freedom as the time and space for invention. Basic income can be demanded as a way to gain some measure of distance and separation from the wage relation, and that distance might in turn create the possibility of a life no longer so thoroughly and relentlessly dependent upon work for its qualities. Therefore, we might demand a basic income not so that we can have, do, or be what we already want, do, or are, but because it might allow us to consider and experiment with different kinds of lives, with wanting, doing, and being otherwise. The demand for basic income could also be an occasion to contemplate the shape of a life beyond work, the kind of freedom that, as Marx speculates, “begins only when labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends,” in a sphere of existence that lies “beyond the

sphere of material production proper” (1981, 959). The demand can serve thus as a provocation to imagine the possibilities of a postwork alternative in which the structures, relations, values, experiences, and meaning of work might be substantially refigured.

But perhaps the most provocative aspect of the demand for basic income today is its anti-asceticism. Indeed, it is worth noting that in debates about basic income, cost is not necessarily the primary point of contention.<sup>26</sup> Rather, it is the ethics of the demand that often seems to generate the most discomfort—specifically, over the way the demand is seen to denigrate the work ethic and challenge ideals of social reciprocity that have been so firmly attached to the ideal of the labor contract.<sup>27</sup> Here too the demand for basic income echoes the demand for wages for housework: both speak to the possibilities of subjects rich in desires and needs. As a provocation of desire—for more money, more time, more freedom—the demand for basic income, like the demand for wages for housework, sets itself apart from so many other approaches to political claims making. Rather than preach the ethics of thrift and savings, the politics of concession, or the economics of sacrifice, the demand for basic income invites the expansion of our needs and desires. In contrast to the more familiar styles of political analysis and strategy that revere work and decry consumerism, it rejects the usual prescription that we should work harder and want less. On the contrary, the demand is excessive, defying what are proclaimed to be reasonable limits on what we should want and demand. By challenging the link between individual production and consumption, by refusing the notion that waged work is the only legitimate means of access to even a minimal standard of living, the demand for basic income points in the direction of a life no longer subordinate to work. On the one hand, this refusal of asceticism may render the demand more difficult to achieve and, in that sense, limit certain aspects of its power as a perspective and provocation. On the other hand, to anticipate an argument I will pursue in chapter 5, the demand is also compelling because it departs from those strictly productivist values that link the worth of individuals to their commitment to work and that tether access to income to its performance. Precisely where the demand fails to pass muster with a model of political calculation sutured to the present may be where it can succeed in sparking the political imagination of, and desire for, a different future.

Using our earlier reading of the wages for housework literature as a model for our consideration of the demand for basic income allows us to recognize the latter demand as not merely a policy proposal but a perspective and a provocation, a pedagogical practice that entails a critical analysis of the present and an imagination of a different future. What makes this demand a worthy successor to the 1970s demand for wages for housework has to do with its advantages as a perspective and provocation, but also as a reform. Indeed, it is arguably a better vehicle by which to advance some of the key goals of the earlier movement: as a perspective, it can challenge both productivist ethics and family values and provoke the possibility of a social form that no longer privileges these now-dominant regimes of economic production, social cooperation, and political order. The potential of the demand to be both epistemologically and ontologically generative ensures the value of advancing it despite the fact that its success in the short term is a long shot. What increases its worth as a successor project is that as a practical reform, basic income offers tangible benefits to a broader constituency than the housewives who were the focus of the earlier demand. In terms of the two critiques of the demand for wages for housework discussed above—namely, that the gender division of labor would be further entrenched by the payment of this wage to housewives, and that the integrity of the wage system would be upheld rather than contested by rewarding more forms of work with wages—the demand for basic income is a more viable alternative. By proposing to award the income universally to individuals and thus lessening the dependence of income on work, basic income not only recognizes but offers a response to the inability of both the wage system and the institution of the family to serve as reliable mechanisms of income distribution.

Reading the demand for basic income in conjunction with the wages for housework literature can also reveal one potential weakness of the demand: its gender neutrality. This raises questions about the capacities of basic income as both a feminist perspective and a feminist reform. Can it promote the kind of critical reflection on the organization of social reproduction and the gender division of its labor that even the slogan “wages for housework” could so often elicit? And would the

provision of a basic income reinforce the gender division of domestic labor because, as some opponents argue, fewer men than women would leave paid employment (Gheaus 2008) or challenge that division, as some supporters claim, by giving more men the opportunity to contribute to unpaid caring work (Pateman 2003, 141)?

In sorting through these questions, it might be useful to return again to wages for housework and consider the advantages and disadvantages of the feminist contents of that demand. As I noted above, one way to understand the wages for housework project is as part of a larger effort to publicize and politicize the contradiction between social reproduction and capital accumulation. After all, as James argues, “Marx’s analysis of capitalist production was not a meditation on how the society ‘ticked.’ It was a tool to find the way to overthrow it, to find the social forces who, exploited by capital, were subversive to it” (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 6). The point was not to present a theoretical replication of capitalist logics, but to stimulate the autonomous needs and desires of those on whom capitalism depends for its reproduction. Despite what was often presented in terms of a broad conception of social production that extended across the social factory and an expansive notion of who might be included in the political projects that would contest its organization, housework was their focus and the housewife their privileged political subject. Why focus on housework as the specific site of antagonism? Because, they argued, that is what all women have in common; all women are housewives (19). This was, needless to say, a contentious claim. What did they intend by it? They did not mean that all women were unwaged wives and mothers; rather, they seemed to mean that the gender division of domestic labor, exemplified in the figure of the housewife, was fundamental to the production of gender difference and hierarchy; it was more like a shared condition or context that touched all women’s lives directly or indirectly. Given that, they assumed that the housewife could be imagined as a site of identification for women, on the basis of which they could be hailed into militancy as feminists.

This model of identity politics proved to be something of a double-edged sword: certainly one can appreciate the effort to locate a common ground within a terrain of struggle around which people might organize; yet, like other forms of identity politics that seek to draft people into political collectives on the basis of a shared identity, the approach both alienated women who were for any number of reasons not willing to be



included in the category of housewife and risked further entrenching an identity that the advocates were invested in consigning to the dustbin of history. Whereas the demand for wages may have had a denaturalizing effect, the demand by housewives for wages for housework threatened to resolidify this labor as women's work performed in the family.

Precisely because it does not address its potential recipients as gendered members of families, the demand for basic income is arguably better able to serve as a feminist perspective and provocation. Not only does it avoid reproducing reified gender categories, but its benefits are not exclusive to a particular group. For this reason, the demand can speak to the concerns of a number of differently situated subjects—including, but not limited to, a broader constituency of women than the demand for wages for housework was able to reach. However, given the demand's gender neutrality, to ensure that the organization of social reproduction and the gender division of its labors are taken up as part of the perspective generated by the demand's explication and circulation, the discursive agenda will need to include both that organization and its gender division. In any case, it is not clear that the gender division of unwaged household and caring labor can be engineered out of existence, that the struggle against it can be won through legislative means or on the terrain of public policy. As the example of wages for housework suggests, the explicit feminist substance of the demand for basic income may be less significant than the political process of its proposition as part of a larger feminist project. By this measure, 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" (Dalla Costa and James 1973, 53, n. 17).

## CONCLUSION

Although I have stressed the more visionary dimensions of the demand for basic income, I want to conclude with a reiteration of its practicality—to insist, borrowing language from the chapter's epigraph, that as a goal it is not only "visionary and utopian," but also "necessary and realistic" (Taylor 1983, ix). First, it offers tangible assistance to a variety of differently positioned workers. Its benefits include much-needed support for the unemployed, underemployed, and precariously employed; a stronger position from which to negotiate better working terms and conditions; a measure of relief from the economic forces that can con-

strict choices about family membership and household formation; and support for the unwaged domestic and caring labor that has long been central to feminist political agendas. Second, the demand for basic income recognizes and attempts to address economic trends that render the present system of income distribution increasingly inadequate. When the productive and reproductive sectors of the economy are not just interdependent but interpenetrated; when the productivity of our practices so often exceeds the scope of what is included in the wage relation that what one does or does not get paid for appears ever more random; and when the model of full-time, lifelong, secure employment is less and less plausible as a social norm and work-based benefits are harder to come by, a guaranteed basic level of revenue offers a more rational way to allocate income. The authors of “The Post-Work Manifesto” argue that “what has been called utopian in the past must now be recognized as “a practical necessity” (Aronowitz et al. 1998, 69). By pursuing a more substantial alteration of the wage relation, the demand for basic income attempts to address—rather than continuing to ignore or deny—the realities of post-Fordist work, to offer a measure of security in an economy of precariousness.