

# Values beyond value? Is anything beyond the logic of capital?

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## Abstract

We are living in a time when it is frequently assumed that the logic of capital has subsumed every single aspect of our lives, intervening in the organization of our intimate relations as well as the control of our time, including investments in the future (e.g. via debt). The theories that document the incursion of this logic (often through the terms of neoliberalism and/or governmentality) assume that this logic is internalized, works and organizes everything including our subjectivity. These theories performatively reproduce the very conditions they describe, shrinking the domain of values and making it subject to capital's logic. All values are reduced to value. Yet values and value are always dialogic, dependent and co-constituting. In this paper I chart the history by which value eclipses values and how this shrinks our sociological imagination. By outlining the historical processes that institutionalized different organizations of the population through political economy and the social contract, producing ideas of proper personhood premised on propriety, I detail how forms of raced, gendered and classed personhood was formed. The gaps between the proper and improper generate significant contradictions that offer both opportunities to and limits on capitals' lines of flight. It is the lacks, the residues, and the excess that cannot be captured by capital's mechanisms of valuation that will be explored in order to think beyond the logic of capital and show how values will always haunt value.

**Keywords:** Value; values; capital; personhood; caring; labour

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## Introduction

The paper is informed by three different temporalities. Firstly, it speaks to the present when the 'market has become God' as Tom Frank (2001) puts it. Where

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the control society of ‘capitalist realism’ identified by Mark Fisher (2009) traps us in the manifestations of neo-liberalism, where the market is an information processor with knowledgeable agency (Mirowski 2013). The logic of capital is to make capital, wherever, whenever, from whomever. This dynamic logic opens out, monetizes and commodifies every aspect of our lives, making every thing, person and interaction subject to the value that can be realized in exchange. Frank notes how ‘the morphing of the language of democracy into the cant and jargon of the marketplace’ made market populism identifiable with the will of the people.<sup>1</sup> Many sociologists, among others, have proposed that our subjectivity changes to fit capital’s logic; we become the living embodiment of capital. The naturalizing and normalizing of capitalism via market populism reduces ideas about what constitutes a person to the imperatives of the market and humanity is reduced to rational action and self-interested calculation through the figure of Mr Homo Economicus. So, like the Nina Simone song I want to ask ‘Is this all there is’? How and why could this be possible? How did we get here? Is there any escape?

The second temporality is my research trajectory. I came to values and value over many years trying to understand the role of domestic labour in the reproduction of capitalism. Is domestic labour just a cost to capitalism rather than a form of surplus value, as Marx suggested, or is it the motor of capitalism? (Without biological reproduction there would be no workers). The ‘domestic labour debate’ is to me still one of the most important debates in sociology, thankfully recently revived (Farris 2012; Federici 2004). I’ve tried to understand how value and values are lived by those who do the work of reproduction, and so my longitudinal ethnographic analysis of respectability, published as *Formations of Class and Gender*, was brought into the present recently through our ESRC project on *Reacting to Reality TV; Audience, Performance, Value*, which explores moral economies. Both projects detail how women who are repeatedly symbolically positioned as pathological defend their value *through* values. Respectability was critical to the women’s ability to realize economic value. Values and value were tightly hinged. In another ESRC project ‘*Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety*’ (Moran, et al. 2004) we found the relationship between property (value) and propriety (values) to be crucial to understanding the formation of safe gay space.

The third temporality is a move into the future. I have just began an ESRC Professorial Fellowship, for which I am extremely grateful, this means that for the next three years I will be developing a ‘sociology of values and value’. In this project I will analyse how two areas of social life connect values to value. Firstly, prosperity theology, developed from Pentecostalism, and massively expanding across the globe (especially, West Africa, Latin America, mid-west USA and London), which is the organization of religion around the goal of future prosperity.<sup>2</sup> In the UK prosperity churches are usually identified as ‘Black majority churches’<sup>3</sup>; the ‘*Being Built Together Report*’ (Rogers et al.

2013) revealed 240 plus such churches in the London borough of Southwark alone, leading the authors to propose that this represents the greatest concentration of African Christianity in the world outside of Africa. I will ask what values remain after faith has been directly monetized?

The second area is Facebook, which has made considerable capital from monetizing friendship through the algorithmic conversion of 'likes' into advertising sales (Gerlitz and Helmond 2011), combining new monetization with old by raising capital through stock-market listing. As of Tuesday 23 August 2013 Facebook has a market capitalization value of \$100.6 billion (The *Guardian* 2013b). I am interested in whether this monetizing process reconfigures the values of friendship or not. More generally, how do modalities of co-presence, being-with and digital distance influence our values?

This paper is thus a statement of intent, a projection into the future, developed from understandings of the past and present. I am aware that many sociologists have tried to understand the relationship between values and value, and I draw on legacies from Marx's analysis of labour and alienation, Durkheim's social solidarity and anomie and Weber's protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism, which are all theories of modernity's disenchantment. More recent attempts to describe 'the new spirit of capitalism' such as Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) show how hippy critique was developed into new modes of profit creation. Another sociology of the 'new spirit', Richard Sennett (2006) describes how corporations have become more diffuse, unstable and decentered in contrast to the 'iron cage' of bureaucracy described by Weber. Likewise, Paul Heelas (2002) demonstrated how the work ethic is *the* necessary source of self-valuation, justification and esteem. De-radicalization, insecurity and ubiquitous self-disciplining offer reworked forms of disenchantment.

All these theories from classical to modern assume a structure of feeling – usually disenchantment and/or instrumentalism and greed – which are somehow internalized into dispositions that shape the subject, such as the rational, reflexive, acquisitive, knowing, omnivorous subject, etc. (Skeggs 2004a). However, there often appears to be an uncanny correspondence between social theories and the logic of capital, so much so that what at first appears to be critique often ends as legitimation (e.g. individualization). I can understand how this easily happens: value is a very slippery concept. Gregory (1997) notes that value both *describes and prescribes* so that people are then *both* subjects and makers of values. I begin with what appears at first glance to be a straightforward definition; value is economic, quantifiable and can be measured. It is primarily monetized, but as with education, not always, whereas values are moral, cultural, qualitative and difficult to measure.<sup>4</sup> The slippage between values and value should not surprise us, for as Gunn (1995) notes:

In the early modern period the property /selfhood interconnection must have appeared almost tautological; one word for property was propriety

deriving from the Latin *proprius*, that is, own or peculiar to oneself. What is proper to oneself is that which – existentially and etymologically! – one owns. (1995: 48)

Historically, repeated attempts have been made to analytically isolate economic and non-economic forms of value, a project David Graeber (2001) argues has failed with disastrous consequences. A central argument of this paper is that they must be understood together and rather than assuming we know what either is we should interrogate their relationship and production. Throughout the paper I will thus pay close attention to the history of ideas that shape what we know as values and value. Ideas such as equivalence and propriety inform the mechanisms of valuation such as calculation and are performative; that is they enable particular processes of valuation, such as judgment, evaluation and expectations, to come into effect and occlude others. Even those who show how new forms of valuation generate unpredictable results, producing new forms of capital, remain largely located in the domain of value underpinned by the same ideas that shape interpretation (Adkins and Lury 2012).

I thus begin with a history of language of value/s as it demarcates domain distinctions, noting the significance of labour. I then explore which types of people can be recognized as having value/s and how this applies to specific incursions of capital logic, ending with attention drawn to the contradictions, ethical practices and affective attachments that may make value/s differently.

### **A brief history of different domains**

So let me begin by focusing on the ‘market as God’ ideology. Firstly, it is most definitely an ideology. Naturalizing the market legitimates the interests of capitalists and those who benefit from capital, those who have power and access to the symbolic means of promotion and production, and those who insist that real democracy is only possible when market forces are liberated and money is free to do what it wants (although enabled by the State when it fails (Mirowski (2013))). As Marx noted:

The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (Marx 1970[1857])

Secondly, in the language of the market, all objects, things and people can be allocated a value, reducing everything to an equivalence.

The umbilical connection between property and propriety from the fifteenth century, as noted by Gunn above, became institutionalized in law and social institutions through the social contract. John Dewey’s (1939) *Theory of*

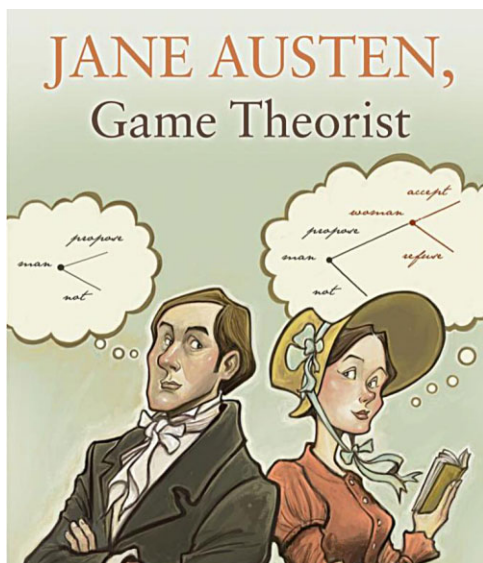
*Valuation* also alerts us to the ambivalence inherent in the meanings of value/s, for instance, praise, prize and price are all derived from the same Latin word 'pretiare' which means to value. Estimate and esteem have a common root and appreciate and appraise used to be used interchangeably. The word 'dear' is still used as equivalent to both precious and costly and the term 'spent' was applied to public, household and sexual economies (Stark 2009). The word 'economy', only came to be associated with money and exchange following the financial revolution of the 1690s. Initially, as Mary Poovey (1995) notes, it was associated with domestic management of a household, only later signaling the management of national resources and becoming an academic discipline. This linguistic shift demonstrates how an imaginary entity, a symbolic representation is performative and becomes institutionalized.

A similar domain construction can be seen in the etymology of the term capitalism. Slater (1997) illustrates how the word 'capitalism' had very little currency in Western thought until after the publication of Sombart's (1902) *Modern Capitalism*. Marx rarely used the word, Adam Smith not at all. 'Capital', however, had a hectic history from the twelfth century onwards.

Domain construction also requires techniques and methods. For instance, James Thompson (1996) notes how the eighteenth century was critical to promoting early market populism by encouraging people to think of life through the method of calculation. As Adorno and Horkheimer (1993[1944]) detail, there was a 'drive toward an abstract and consistent and therefore predictable representation of exchange, that is, toward (new) scientific, quantitative, and mathematical modelling' (1993[1944]: 28). This drive involved the calculation and quantification of labour and made the person an object of calculation, subject to domination and to impersonal forces beyond their control. For instance, Slater and Tonkiss (2001) illustrate how Bentham encouraged people to engage in a cost-benefit analysis of their lives through 'felicific calculus'.

In his study of the modern novel in eighteenth-century England Thompson (1996) maps how the concept of value came to be understood through two emerging and divergent discourses: political economy and the novel. These different forms – one to do with finance the other with romance – enabled value to have intimately connected meaning in different domains of experience, public and private, allocating men's and women's concerns to different objects, money and emotion, as Jane Austen, Trollope and Gissing so vividly demonstrate. The domains are dialectically performative so that the presence of one calls on the absence of the other, and the traffic between the two domains enables the mechanism of calculation to permeate both.

Both political economy and the novel grew out of concerns with value and variables, developing the mathematical and narrative technology of expectation '*what if*': In novels characters are inserted into plot as variables, revealing a return of value (or not). Thomson documents how political economy and the

**Figure I:**

Source: *Jane Austen, Game Theorist*, 2013 by Michael Suk-Young Chwe (Princeton University Press)

novel operated as forms of modelling exchange. The *accounting of* counting and *accounting for* character via narrative establishes *expectations*, of what one can expect to happen in certain circumstances: why they should get married, to whom (exchange), how it may happen (narrative) and how they are supposed to feel about it (affect). This calculative modelling has been made explicit in a new book (see Figure I):

Yet what we see from Austen and Trollope especially are the limits to calculation. Forensically detailing how women are held to account by their proximity to propriety and accounted for through their ownership of property (or not), these novelists generate hope that love can overcome. The affective disrupts the realm of rational calculation. The novels show how it is a fantasy to cleanse the economy from irrational affects. But these novels do produce a significant spatial gendered legacy, whereby *it appears* as if one is rational, public and masculine (economy) whilst the other is irrational, private and feminine (affect), spaces for placing different gendered persons. However, it was not just women who were associated with all the attributes that Mr Homo Economicus should not have.

### **Equivalent persons/subjects of value**

Firstly, the domain of affect was symbolically associated with *all* that was irrational, not just gender but also race and class. Peter Stallybrass (1998)

drawing from the work of Pietz (1985; 1987), notes how civilization was defined through a person's attachment to objects, people (e.g. slaves) and things. The European colonialist who only saw the value of 'things' in exchange from which capital could be realized were symbolically distinguished from West Africans who were defined as primitive because of their sentimental attachment to fetishes. The ideologies developed since the twelfth century to de-legitimate slaves by rendering them inhuman were modified to draw distinctions between the civilized and the primitive (Fryer 1984). Similar associations of primitivism and irrationality were also attributed to the English working class (Kahn 2001). To be able to benefit from and treat people and things as objects of exchange, to buy people, became the prerogative of the European civilized bourgeoisie (See Skeggs (2004b) for a fully developed argument).

Secondly, we see this institutionalized in the idea of the 'fit and proper person', a category of law since the seventeenth century. This category was first used to assess whether a Bristol businessman – Lascelles – was responsible enough to own slaves. As legal theorists demonstrate, the proper has been one of the major ways by which social relations have been organized (Radin 1993). Rather than simply recognizing objects or people as already proper the law creates property, and confers certain characteristics on physical and abstract objects. Davies (1998) details how property-thought, or thought of the proper, regulates not only the distribution of resources in society, but also our conceptions of self, knowledge, identity and value. Becoming a proper person is reliant upon the legal social contract that is premised upon exclusion.

We can see this in the category Mr Homo Economicus, the representation of the possessive individual of seventeenth century contract theory (which became *the* Liberal social contract), by which 'the individual' was defined through *his* capacity to own property in his person: he is seen to have the capacity to stand outside of himself, to separate 'himself' from 'his body' and then to have an imagined and legalized proprietorial relation to himself as property (Macpherson 1962). Carole Pateman (1988) notes how the social contract was devised on relationships between those who could *not* be imagined as propertizable to each other, people who could *not* be exchanged. Those who were exchangeable: slaves, women and working-class labourers were excluded (Skeggs 2011).

Marx (1970[1857]) explores how this language of property connects to individuality in classical political economy. Thirdly, he shows how The Count Destutt de Tracy (1817[1970]) undertakes to prove that *propriété*, *indivulité* and *personnalité* are identical: 'nature has endowed man (sic) with an inevitable and inalienable property, property in the form of his own individuality' (1970[1817]: 100). Marx shows how this argument is put to work rhetorically to defend bourgeois existence, that is, 'if you take away my property you destroy me as an individual'.



Fourthly, in the history of the development of civilized European personhood, the mass 'at home' and the primitive were considered *not* to possess interiority (Bennett 2003; Blackman 2007). This was not a purposeful denial of psychology; rather, the location of psychology was registered symbolically *only* with the bourgeoisie. Again this distinction was constitutive (Pfister and Schnog 1997; Rieff 1966), one's gain is another's loss. The mass was defined as lacking in the capacities and properties that the bourgeoisie claimed for themselves.

And fifthly, as Hazel Carby (1987) notes 'a black woman's reproductive destiny was bound to capital accumulation; black women gave birth to property and, directly, to capital itself, in the form of slaves' (1987: 24). The father of most slaves, the white plantation owner as a liberal possessive individual, did not pass on his lineage to his children. Instead he legally denied his children the rights he owned, producing children as capital accumulation through rape. These different legacies, institutionalized through the violence of the sexed and raced division of labour and the social contract shape the conditions of possibility for what it means to become a subject of value, or not.<sup>5</sup> Key to this are the social relations that enable different forms of labour to be valued, exchanged and associated with specific forms of personhood.

### **Labour as value**

One of the most important legacies we have for understanding values and value is through labour. John Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* (published 1740 [1963[1980]]) was probably the first labour theory of value,<sup>6</sup> developed from engagement with the Scottish Civil Law. Locke details how the moral, social and legal recognition of property constitutes norms (Gunn 1995). Gunn maintains that Adam Smith (1757) uses Locke's analysis in his development of political economy. But for Smith some labour produces property and some does not. However for Marx who develops the labour theory of value *labour is the source of all value*. Without labour there is no capital as capital develops through primitive accumulation. And the labour-capital relation shapes all social relations.

What is significant for our purposes is Marx's insistence (unlike the European colonists) that '*value is not a thing, a physiological quantum of input but a social relation*' (Gunn 1995: 43). For Marx labour is *not* a property of the self, in contrast to the Liberal social contract; rather, it is an action that the self is forced to undertake in order to survive: one labours to live. Unlike other political economic theorists, Marx insists that labour power – the capacity to labour over time – is a value that can only be known in exchange.

For Marx, the essential illusion of capitalism is the myth of equal conditions for the exchange of labour. This myth is promoted by classical political



economy and liberalism. Marx shows how it is not just capital but also bourgeois law (the social contract) that establishes the myth of equivalence, by legislating for a formal equality between the worker and the employer who are both supposedly free to exchange their property (be it labour power, dispositions or capital). Yet this supposed freedom to exchange, he argues, is *the* great trick of liberalism since workers are invited to consider themselves as owners of their labour power and thus as subjects endowed with the freedom that is equivalent to their employer. As Feher (2009) notes, 'what one sees is a worker whose freedom amounts to dispossession' (2009: 22).

Just as capital logic assumes that all things have equivalence – a value that can be exchanged, for Marx this logic was applied to humans via the illusion that their labour was equivalent to capital. Labouring to produce commodities turns the worker from a human being where all sensuous practice is lost, into a commodity, indeed as Marx (1959) notes, the most wretched of commodities.

In Marx's later works (*Capital*) the fetishism of commodities offers a more extensive subjection of the worker, *as all relationships between people are disguised as relationships between commodities*. In a prescient analysis Marx notes how market forces (modes of production) and commodities shape all social relations whilst making labour and capital invisible. But values, other than the experience of alienation, are absent in this abstract analysis.

Fierce debates continue over Marx's theory of value (Saad-Filho 2002), over whether the labour theory of value still has significance or what form surplus value takes as it moves globally, or whether value is measurable and can be quantified (Lazzarato 1996). There are also significant divisions between those who understand Marx's theory of value as the fundamental relation between capital and labour, and those who want to be able to test the empirical-mathematical viability of his formulations.

However it is important to note that Marx's analysis of value was an abstract analysis of the workings of capital, not an empirical description. It is our role as contemporary sociologists to understand how capital proceeds and put theories to work.

Thus, for the purposes of this analysis I understand capital not as a totalizing homogenous dynamic but through uneven application (Smith 1984), through many different lines of flight and through the production of difference that ruptures its logic (Hong 2006). It is also important to distinguish between capital as an abstract logic and the capitalists who put this logic into effect. Historians of labour show how capitalists mobilize race and gender differences between groups to maximize their power and profit. Lowe and Lloyd (1997), Roediger (1991) and Roediger and Esch (2012) demonstrate how capitalists have a long history, developing from slave management, in playing the race card to divide and conquer. Likewise the sexual division of labour has been used to great effect to reduce wages for all workers. It is the designation of

difference that manifests in personhood that both offers opportunities and limits capital's lines of flight.

### **Constitutive exclusions and openings**

So far we have seen how value was institutionalized through calculation, exchange and legal definitions of property and personhood. The subject of value was Mr Homo Economicus, the public, rational, masculine, white and bourgeois subject. All that he was not was allocated to the sphere of values and associated with difference, the irrational, improper, private, and affective. Underpinning this allocation was the fetishizing of labour, appearing through the myth of liberalism as if all labour is equally free to exchange, with a duty to produce oneself as proper – the proper 'subject of value' (Skeggs 2004a). The improper person was the constitutive limit, and the term constitutive is central. For without the improper the proper subject of value cannot be recognized. The mass, the primitive, the dangerous and contagious were made symbolically recognizable by those who considered themselves to be everything but. This process has intensified in the present, where the persistent circulation of images of degradation, contagion, danger and primitivism continue.<sup>7</sup>

So it is interesting that most of our current theories of subjectivity describe capital's subject of value. For instance, Giddens' (1991), theory of individualization or Ulrich Beck's (1992) ideas about reflexivity, reproduce the original myth of liberalism by assuming that the resources required to pursue individualization or become reflexive subjects are equally available. Likewise, theories of neo-liberalism and governmentality often assume that we have internalized the norms of capitalism and pursue self-interest and future accrual. An exclusionary subject position is perceived to be somehow universally available, ignoring the historical legacies of person production. Moreover, the role of labour is disregarded and commodity consumption becomes *the* prism by which personhood is understood. Many sociological theories assume that everybody is performing universal normative white Western bourgeois proper personhood when in fact many groups of people are still repeatedly positioned as *the* constitutive limit to it.

Yet it is not insignificant that the areas that most complicate the incursion of the logic of capital into our lives are often (but not always) the domains traditionally associated with those considered as improper persons: women, racialized groups and queers. In the BJS lecture (<http://www.lse.ac.uk/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=2057>) I outlined many areas that have been capitalized, including bio-capital, academic performance and the affects of suffering and abjection. Here I concentrate upon one domain: caring labour, which exposes the

creativity of capital's lines of flight, the entangled relationship with the State, the significance of gender to understanding capital, class and race differences and the paradoxical limits to capital's incursions.

### **Capitalizing care?**

Essential to the maintenance and future of capital, capitalists have long tried to give responsibility for the reproduction of the workforce to either the family and/or the State. The shift in the re-organization of reproductive labour has been driven by capital. As wages decrease the male breadwinner 'family wage' is not enough and more women are drawn into the workforce, creating a crisis in care provision. Since the 1970s Western states have paid for more population maintenance but have attempted to pay less by privatizing State responsibility. We can see the mix of residual forms (the family) and emergent forms (via monetization) in vivid detail in the UK at the moment where the shift from family based free care to welfare state provision to privatization offers an unstable mix. Caring has become one of the most privatized areas of State provision, but one that is difficult to *entirely* commodify. Let's explore why.

The economy of caring is a mix of State, private equity, low-paid and unpaid labour. A report by Buckner and Yeandle (2011) using government statistics estimate that contributions made by carers in the UK is a remarkable £119 billion per year. Over 6 million carers (mainly women) in the UK provide unpaid labour. As they note £119 billion is considerably more than the annual cost of all aspects of the NHS, which stood at £98.8 billion in the year 2009–2010. This estimate is equivalent to £2.3 billion per week, £326 million per day, £13.6 million per hour and a £18,473 contribution from every carer in the UK.

Elderly State care provision has been packaged and sold off to private companies, such as Southern Cross or CarehomeUK. (See <http://www.carehome.co.uk/> for a choice of over 21,000 care and nursing homes in the UK). Currently in Cambridgeshire, companies including Serco, Virgin Care and Circle are competing for a five-year contract to run older peoples' services worth a minimum of £800 million of State funding.<sup>8</sup>

Yet this market model is not working as the collapse of Southern Cross in 2011, which at the time was the largest company in the sector, revealed. Southern Cross could no longer meet its £230m rental obligations and went into administration. It had been funding the majority of its growth through short-term liabilities. A report (August 2013) by *Company Watch* on care homes covers 4,872 firms operating 20,000 care homes across the UK. Of these, 1,449 were rated as 'financially vulnerable and almost 700 were found to be "zombie" business, companies with liabilities worth more than their assets. The combined negative net worth of these "zombies" came in at £217m'

(Burn-Callander 2013). As the State sells off its provision, private equity companies strip caring companies, with disastrous consequences. The State then has to pick up the bill for the fall-out for it cannot fully de-regulate the caring industry through obligations to protect its citizens. However this does not stop it trying as the example of Cambridgeshire shows. The big problem for capital is that caring is a regulated market and there are limits to the exploitation that can take place. Emergent capital underfunds provision in order to extract profit from a service that many people are not willing or cannot pay for, or believe it should be free (provided by the family or the welfare state). There is no strong, readily monetizable 'customer demand'.

The State has also devolved administrative responsibility for the purchase of care onto those who need it, created radically different and unstable markets with a huge number of sub-contractors, complex regulation and a great many workers on zero hours contracts. Support given to family care providers has also been reduced through the punitive attacks on the poor and disabled through changes to incapacity benefit, the bedroom tax and increased VAT. Although testing for entitlement to support has provided a substantial source of wealth for private companies such as ATOS.

Without the gift of free caring labour by the 6m unpaid carers capital would have significant problems and costs reproducing, servicing and sustaining the future, present and ex-workforce. Without unpaid caring the State would not be able to fulfil its duty of care. Without migrant low paid carers many Western women would be unable to enter the workforce, and without family care migrant labourers from the South would not be able to provide care for the developed nations of the North.

These residual and emergent forms are compounded and made even more contradictory by the act and labour of caring. Mothers, for instance, no matter what libertarian economists propose about trading in babies, usually want to care for their children who they love. And even if they don't there is a legal obligation to do so. Elderly care is also complicated by duty, obligation and love. Caring for others often slips between the labour of 'caring for' and the affect of 'caring about' (Finch and Groves 1983; Ungerson 1987). Moreover, caring for others often becomes a source of care for self. For those without access to traditional sources of value such as paid work and cultural capital, caring often provides the main demonstration of a women's worth. Yet some of the most acute and vitriolic gendered battles take place around care (see [www.mumsnet.com](http://www.mumsnet.com) for instance), shaped by class and race and ideas of the proper: 'what is the proper thing to do?' Who is the proper person to do it?

It is because of these complexities *and* that caring is gendered and not formally valued that capital's line of flight into caring is complicated. We can see caring as a crisis of value – the value of women's work. A fundamental problem is that care work is not valued as work, for it is seen as work that women provide because ethically they cannot but care.

But the caring that is offered as a gift beyond exchange relations is of a different form to the relations established to promote and reproduce the logic of capital. Caring offers us a different way of being in the world, relating to others as if they matter, with attentiveness and compassion, beyond exchange. Feminists have been arguing for some time that caring underpins a political ethics.

### **Beyond capital? Ethical practice and affective attachments**

Imagine; if every action was a transaction of exchange nothing could work, not even capitalism, because not every action is instrumental, even though many rational action theorists would like to think so. It is worth pointing out that for some time psychoanalysts have pointed to the fantasy of pure rationality as a masculine imperative, where everything can be calculated and known (Rotman 1980).

David Graeber (2011a) argues, after an extensive survey of anthropological literatures, that 'there is a certain communism of the senses at the root of most things we consider fun' (2011a: 99). He maintains that 'the surest way to know that one is in the presence of communistic relations is that not only are no accounts taken, but it would be considered offensive, or simply bizarre to even consider doing so' (2011a: 99), such as parties.

All my research and that of many others details ethnographically how social relationships are messy, irrational and full of contradictions. If we work with the idea that values and value are produced through social relationships (of different kinds) we need to be able to identify different value practices. Here I want to turn to values, to what Andrew Sayer (2011) defines as sedimented valuations that have become attitudes or dispositions, which we come to regard as justified.

I have previously shown how exclusion from the possibilities of being a proper person have forced people to inhabit social relations differently (Skeggs 2004b). The respectability forged through caring by the women of my ethnographic research took a very different form to that promoted by the middle-class state representatives who judged them. As subjects of constant devaluation (economically and symbolically), the women tried to make their life livable, using a very different value compass, inhabiting the vectors of space and time differently. They expressed powerful affects generated by capital but not as legitimation; instead as resentment against inequality and contempt for those who judged them. And as our television research showed, living the relations of injustice and inequality which blocked investments into the future, generated a very different relationality to others (Skeggs and Wood 2011, 2012). Another, more recent research project found widespread evidence of MacIntyre's (1981) 'spreading virtues', incommensurable moral

notions that enable us to define our relationship to others through care. Caring, selflessness, anti-cruelty, anti-greed, anti-instrumentalism, loyalty, against injustice, were all values practiced and expressed by our research participants. These values were generated *in opposition to* the logic of capital, against an instrumental 'dog eat dog world' (Skeggs and Loveday 2012).

Kathleen Stewart (1996), in an ethnography of West Virginia coal camps, describes how speech acts, such as critique of inequality and injustice reveal how a whole community forms itself through 'just-talk', talk of fairness and kindness that glues people together and is based on values of care rather than exchange. Care was articulated as a personal disposition to others, but one which was and should be a collective value. The distribution of care, through its various practices, was something that mattered very much and was seen to be a specific classed practice that made up relationality. It was about a perspective on the whole practice of life and an understanding of the conditions by which people lived; an ontology, not just a capacity. It is these empirical studies that question the internalization of the logic of capital because what really matters to us is other people.

There are many examples, especially if we look beyond the West, such as Saba Mahmood's (2005) research, who details how a pedagogy of ethical cultivation is developed to support other women and children in marginalized conditions. There is also a huge amount of work on charity and altruism, even individualized altruism, which shows mutual concern is always significant. Graeber (2011b) goes so far as to argue that the culture wars in the USA are better interpreted as a struggle over the access to the means to behave altruistically. And Luc Boltanski (2012) identifies a range of actions that are selfless and gratuitous, which he maintains belong to a regime of 'peace and love'. Sayer addresses what he and others such as Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) call lay normativity, demonstrating how concern and dignity are central to all social relationships. They argue that social science should direct its attention to the conditions of human flourishing rather than human destruction.

Even economists have been forced to admit that their models are unviable, if not downright embarrassing. The architects of austerity, Harvard economists Reinhart and Rogoff, who originally framed the argument that too high a 'debt-to-GDP ratio' (The *Guardian* 2013a) will always, necessarily, lead to economic contraction, and who aggressively promoted this belief during Rogoff's tenure as chief economist for the IMF, admit they had based their entire argument on a spreadsheet error (Graeber 2013). Although tragically austerity policies proceed as if no liability had been admitted, which tells us a lot about the current state of the State.

A recent Bloomberg article suggests 'Why Homo Economicus Might Actually Be an Idiot':

For anyone steeped in the prevailing thinking of our era, the obvious winner is the egoist. Darwinian evolution and the lore of modern capitalism tell us that only fierce competitors survive. Altruists, the game theorists teach us, are mathematically incapable of achieving dominance. Acts of cooperation are either errors born of ignorance or purely selfish strategic moves aimed at getting something of greater value. The idea that biological competition favors the greedy, creating the ultra-rational and incentive-driven homo-economicus, remains at the core of the models economists use to understand the world. It is taught to millions of students and informs the decisions of the planet's most powerful policy makers. (Buchanan 2013)

But even economics students are rebelling about the totalizing pseudo-religion of their curriculum.<sup>9</sup> It's as if the private feminine affective domain of Austen has returned to haunt the public political economy of calculative rational masculinity. On Monday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013 Robert Shiller was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics (a schizophrenic gesture as his co-winners are key architects of modeling, rationality and prediction). One of his key works '*Irrational Exuberance*' argues markets are driven by emotion.<sup>10</sup> Feminists could have told him that a long time ago and saved a lot of pain and suffering. But what is worrying even when this acknowledgment is finally dawning in the field of economics we can see variants of its behaviourism and determinism being reproduced elsewhere – especially, I've noticed, in the field of digital analysis where the technical network operates as a social network (e.g. Castells), or as an ecological autopoiesis system in a similar way to capitalist realism or market populism.

## **Conclusion**

I therefore want to argue that living within the logic of capital does not prefigure internalization. Capital establishes social relations but it does this *with* the State, through the social contract that legislates for particular forms of proper personhood, *and* with capitalists who are adept at maximizing potential profit from the play of difference. It is these relations *between* that establish gaps and contradictions by which capital reproduction is ruptured. The legacies that produce differences in symbolic person value allocate people to different domains of values such as caring that obstruct capital's lines of flight. As Raymond Williams (1973) notes, drawing on Gramsci, there are always temporal lags and also emergent and residual forms that escape the dynamic of capital. Capital's dynamic is uneven and ruptured and thus cannot control and capture everything; gender, race and class relations establish limits to the take-up of its logic.

Capital's call to neo-liberal governmentality is not easily heard by those who are excluded from and exist to mark the limit proper personhood, who have no



access to the resources to become capital's subjects of value. Those designated as improper do not internalize the norms as has been presumed, and as our previous empirical research and that of many others has shown (Skeggs 1997; Skeggs and Loveday 2012; Skeggs and Wood 2012). They occupy spaces not completely colonized by capital, calculation and conservatism. We see this in the protests against capital's logic, environmental struggles, the occupy movement and small-scale local responses to support people (e.g. food banks, creative solutions to the bedroom tax by Unite, etc.). These represent the expression of values beyond value, although not straightforwardly, as the recent 2011 UK riots showed.

It is therefore with those positioned as improper that I end my statement of intent for the future study of values and value with a methodological proposition to look beyond the logic of capital. This is not a projection of cruel optimism (Berlant 2006), but the hope for challenge enabled by the historical conditions of contradiction. This is an expression of hope against the hopelessness promoted by the vast apparatuses designed to destroy any sense of possible alternative futures. We may be disenchanted, alienated and experience anomie and subject to the imperatives of neoliberalism, market populism and capitalist realism, but these are not the only social relations that shape us. I for one am exceedingly angry about all the cruelty that is imposed on the poor and vulnerable by our current government but anger is not enough. For if we are just trapped in negative affects how do we live and flourish? And I'm not just talking about the ameliorations that enable us to cope on a daily basis, or the dispositions of cynicism and skepticism, but those moments when we can envisage a better world with better people, where we care and pay attention and affection to others.

It is moments of connection, of enchantment, of affective force that propel us to ethical generosity. Jane Bennett (2001) notes: 'presumptive generosity, as well as the will to social justice, are sustained by the periodic bouts of being enamored with existence, and that it is too hard to love a disenchanted world' (2001: 12). These moments have variously been described as joy by Spinoza (Deleuze and Deleuze 1978), wonder (Dalston and Park 1998), or love (Davis and Sarlin 2011). They enable us momentarily to resist capitals' logic, its disenchantments, its promotion of hopelessness and impossibility, disassembling our assemblages and setting us in the directions of that which has not yet been captured. And as Les Back (2004) shows, the love, care and connections of those symbolically designated improper, are expressed in radically different ways that may not be recognizable to the proper.<sup>11</sup>

If we can only see from within the blinkers of capital's logic we will never understand or recognize the values that live beyond value. Our own analysis will trap us into that which we are expected to reveal. We therefore, as sociologists, have a duty to look beyond and search for the gaps, the un-captured and better ways of being and doing. As Graeber (2011b) notes, this makes a

difference to who and what we align ourselves with or against, whether we legitimate the logic of capital or not. To do this we may need to pay attention to our own and others' moments of love, care, and enchantment, to the connections that enable us to flourish. And it is moments that may be significant. Rather than searching both sociologically and ontologically for a coherent political subject we should pay greater attention to the contradictions and eruptions that enable love and resentment to be connected through a person. These moments may block the logic of capital as it tries to capture absolutely everything, including our analysis.

(Date accepted: November 2013)

## Notes

1. Market populism was associated with authoritarian populism promoted by Margaret Thatcher in the UK (Hall 1983).

2. Although as many scholars have noted, there is little that would be recognized as traditional theology.

3. This term is not used by the pastors who would prefer an open call to potential supporters.

4. This has not stopped numerous governments attempting to do so – and ironically values measurement has become big business in itself, see the World Values surveys etc.). But also see also critiques such as the <http://culturalvalueinitiative.org/>.

5. To understand how this works in the contemporary I develop a theory of 'person value' (Skeggs 2011).

6. Although as Gunn (1995) notes, it was in fact a theory of property, which is just one aspect of value.

7. Made spectacularly visible in our Reality TV project.

8. Listen to BBC Radio 4 File on 4 'A Healthy Market' 12 November 2013 for an analysis of the extent of this privatization and the secrecy surrounding it (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03h3fx6>)

9. <http://manchesterstudentsunion.com/groups/post-crash-economics>.

10. A debate exists over who used the term first, Shiller or Alan Greenspan, the then- US Federal Reserve Board chairman. See [t.ritholz.com](http://t.ritholz.com).

11. They may be made purposefully intelligible even, so that they cannot be captured and used, see (Tyler 2011).

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