

**“Labours of Love”: *A Conversation on Art, Gender and Social Reproduction*  
by Danielle Child, Helena Reckitt & Jenny Richards**

**Peer Reviewed Version Submitted to Third Text**

**Abstract**

Taking the form of a discussion among an art historian, a curator and an artist, the article explores the assumption that it is love, rather than material gain, that motivates art and cultural workers. Addressing the internalisation of the ideology that one loves one's labour, the interlocutors consider the gendered and class conditions of work in the cultural and academic sectors. Reading 'theory' against 'practice', they reflect on their own work experiences and upbringings, their curatorial research, and their readings of feminist and Marxist theories of artistic and feminised labour. The discussion considers how the precarious conditions of cultural labour today divide and isolate workers, immersing them in antagonism and competition, and how reflections within feminist art history and theory have possibly downplayed the ongoing (rather than historical) importance of class as well as reproductive labour. Highlighting the dangers of over-identifying with work, the three contributors consider the potential of dis-identifying from work roles and from institutional conventions as one strategy that can potentially challenge the exploitation of the self as well as others. The article concludes with a consideration of how 'labours of love' might be collectively revalued and prioritised.

**Keywords:** Danielle Child, Helena Reckitt, Jenny Richards, academic labour, cultural labour, social reproduction, feminist art, feminist art history, labours of love, Manual Labours, Now You Dan Go

**Introduction: On Loving One's Labour**

Following their presentations at the 2016 Association of Art Historians' Annual Conference panel 'Labours of Love, Works of Passion: The Social (Re)production of Art Workers from Industrialisation to Globalisation', panel convenors Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd invited the authors to contribute to a conversation on reproductive labour in the artworld. The three contributors approach the subject from different perspectives: Danielle is an art historian who adopts a historical materialist

approach to thinking about artistic production. A curator and researcher with a long-standing interest in the histories and current relevance of queer and feminist engagements with art, theory and activism, Helena is engaged with how those histories translate and transmit across time, place and context, and recently her research has focused on affective and caring labour within the curatorial and artistic field. Jenny works collaboratively with artists and academics to develop practice-based research projects and public exhibitions that investigate labour and its gendered division. Due to the article's concern with the conditions under which cultural and academic work occurs, the authors felt it was important that they make visible their labour involved in writing this text.

The discussion took place over the course of several Skype calls and collective online writing sessions in June and July 2016. The practice-based conversational format felt more appropriate than the traditional monologic approach to academic writing. Rather than presenting research as an individual pursuit, the conversation holds the potential to encourage and reveal its collaborative nature, juxtaposing insights gained from 'theory' and 'practice', and testing them one against the other. This format also prompted the authors to delve into all aspects of their lives, including their class backgrounds, familial expectations, and their work experiences in the art, academic and service sectors. The conversation is presented under four headings, which originated from a set of prompt questions that the authors established. The text begins with each contributor unpacking the term 'labours of love', before expanding into discussions about academic and curatorial work within the neoliberal context and as experienced by the participants. In the second section, the authors consider strategies of resistance to the neoliberal work condition through tactics of unlearning or dis-identification. The third section opens with Silvia Federici's concept of the 'double character of work' (which at once reproduces and valorises us as feminised subjects both for and against our integration into the labour market), sparking a discussion of feminist sociologist Emma Dowling's distinction between value and valorisation. The final section returns to questions of social reproduction and art, drawing upon the feminist critique of Marx, prompted by a consideration of the historical relationships (and divides) between Marxist and feminist art histories.

## **I What Comes Under 'Labours of Love.'**

**Helena Reckitt** Starting with our own experiences working in art, culture and education, I'd observe that the idea that people are motivated by love, rather than for material gain, is endemic to the curatorial field that I come out of and the curating master's programme that I teach on. It stems from art's association with the leisured, land- and property-owning classes, in which collecting and working with art were signs of class prestige rather than terrains of labour. Passionate work implies either pleasure or sacrifice, as the rewards are emotional, self-expressive or spiritual, rather than financial. The sacrifices that artists have historically made in their devotion to their art are now expected of everyone who works in the cultural sector. Applicants to the Goldsmiths MFA Curating programme, who are predominantly female and from European, North American and East Asian (but rarely Black British) backgrounds, regularly write of their love for art in vocational terms, and of their education as an investment in the self. 'How can I afford *not* to undertake my MA at the best possible institution, despite the debt I will incur?,' one candidate wrote this year.

**Jenny Richards** 'A labour of love' was a term I used in 2015 for an artist symposium in Edinburgh. Like the editors of this special issue, I was concerned with the implications of loving one's work and what this means for how we put ourselves to work when love is involved. (And, indeed, what implications does this performance have on our love lives?) The symposium title came from a 1975 essay by the feminist activist and theorist Silvia Federici, 'A Labour of Love',<sup>2</sup> Silvia Federici, 'Wages Against Housework', Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press, New York, 1975. In the essay she unpacks the idea that domestic work is not only an unpaid activity performed without question, as it has been naturalised as women's social role, but that it is an activity that, we are taught, must be enjoyed and executed with a smile. To render the labour of the home as a labour of love is a key component to establishing it as a type of activity that escapes categorisation as work, and thus society can continue to undervalue its character.

**Danielle Child** The phrase 'labours of love' always struck me as referring to things that you would do unpaid or for enjoyment. Since engaging with a Marxist feminist

consideration of the term in relation to artistic practice, it strikes me that 'labours of love' are the things that we (as women) are expected to do in order to keep the capitalist system moving forward (ie housework, reproducing and raising children, taking care of those who rely upon us etc). In terms of my own practice, as an academic and an art historian, research tends to be the thing that I consider a 'labour of love'. Although my contract includes a portion of 'research' hours, it is the thing that would suffer if I only devoted to it the allocated hours or, more realistically, the remaining working hours after teaching and administration.

**HR** Perhaps it reflects that unremunerated nature of much of what happens under the banner of research. We, after all, spoke at the annual Association of Art Historians conference 'Labours of Love' panel for no pay or expenses,<sup>33</sup> Both Helena and Jenny's conference fees were supported by the University of Edinburgh, following applications by the session conveners, as Helena's application for funding to Goldsmiths was turned down and Jenny does not work in academia. To offset costs, Helena and Jenny also both stayed with friends in Edinburgh and are today contributing to a journal article without being paid. Although we agreed to keep a log detailing the hours that we spent working on this text,<sup>44</sup> In the interests of transparency, we initially kept a log of the time that we spent working on this text. This work included hours of preparatory reading, two hours and thirty-three minutes of Skype calls, over 100 emails, and a collective writing session lasting two hours thirty minutes. However, as the subsequent process of editing and revising this text took place over the course of several months, often in brief bursts, the work of maintaining the log proved too demanding. The fact is that most of the labour that went into our contributions was accrued over many years of reading, writing and practice. The academic system would implode if we demanded payment for the actual hours that we put in.

**DC** That's very true, Helena! A lot of academic work is unpaid and yet in the UK we are increasingly exposed to the culture of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) – the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions – in which we are expected to produce more outputs which, ultimately, dictate or at least form a narrative for research funding in our institutions.

**JR** If the term ‘a labour of love’ was coined in 1975 to call out the mechanism for the exploitation of social reproduction, today we could add the term ‘affective remuneration’, which denotes the mass incorporation of this process beyond the realm of social reproduction, in which affect becomes a form of payback. We might not be paid for this article but we can include it in our REF submission (although I can't as I'm not in academia). Considering we all have personal experiences of this deceitful mechanism, this text is a great way to find ways to share and discuss the problem more. I collaborate with Sophie Hope on the project *Manual Labours* and we talk about this struggle a lot.<sup>55</sup> *Manual Labours* is a practice-based research project exploring physical and emotional relationships to work, initiated by Jenny Richards and Sophie Hope in 2012. The project reconsiders current time-based structures of work (when does work start and end?) and reasserts the significance of the physical (manual) aspect of immaterial, affective and emotional labour. Often working freelance, *Manual Labours* is another part of my work that I don't get paid for, yet Sophie can count it as research and part of her academic job. We tried to address this in the recent funding we received, in which Sophie's research ‘payment’ was offset with a cash payment to me. While we wanted to address this structurally, it did feel like an uncomfortable solution which relied upon inadequate capitalist valorisation to bring about some equity; because, of course, Sophie works way over the hours she is paid for as well!

**HR** Academia has started to resemble the artworld in its reliance on precarious labour. Many academics are employed on sessional contracts, and those with permanent jobs are often, like myself, hired part-time. Even those with permanent posts are encouraged to see themselves as so much dispensable, surplus labour. We are an extension of what Gregory Sholette calls ‘dark matter’, the ranks of ‘unsuccessful’ and aspirational artists without whose emotional and financial investments the artworld would collapse.<sup>66</sup> Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2011. Yet British universities expect academics, including part-timers, to submit all their research as outputs that can be counted towards the REF; that is, apart from those hired as ‘Teaching Fellows’, whose contracts do not recognise or provide time for them to carry out research, which they have to undertake in their own non-work time if they are to stand a chance of getting a lectureship contract that covers research. Thus

they carry out this 'free' research labour anyway. I have even heard anecdotal evidence of instances of Teaching Fellows' research being submitted for REF, despite their research hours not forming part of their contracted labour.<sup>77</sup> I am grateful to Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd for their insights into the role of Teaching Fellows. In addition to allowing little provision for research time, contracts don't recognise, and implicitly don't value, the emotional (or 'pastoral') labour that academics carry out, and which, in the UK, appears to have increased following university fee increases in 2010, which has led more students to report experiencing anxiety and stress.<sup>88</sup> A report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Researching Equity, Access and Partnership (REAP), from July 2015, listed 'greater financial and academic pressures on students' as among the factors that have contributed to the increase in student demand for support for mental health problems in English universities, which had risen from c 8,000 to 18,000 in the four years to 2012/2013. Unsurprisingly, most socially reproductive work is carried out by women and other feminised subjects who in turn employ other people, generally poor women, women of colour, and those from migrant backgrounds, to perform domestic and caring labour for them.

**DC** We are, of course, drawing on our own experiences within academia in the UK as an example of how neoliberal working models encourage and extract surplus labour from intellectual labourers here. Elsewhere, this experience is both divergent from (particularly in terms of wages) and comparable to (on an ideological level) those experienced in the UK. The similarities are perhaps evident in the recent return to thinking about the university as a factory (Gerald Raunig) and the coining of the term 'edu-factory' to affirm these associations.<sup>9</sup>

**JR** If we consider that 'loving your work' becomes an underlying mantra for all forms of work, maybe it can help us discuss part of the complexity in terms of the conditions we, and others, find ourselves working under today; what it is we are actually passionate about. *Manual Labour* traces transformations of labour processes through an exploration into physical and emotional relationships to work. It began from our own experiences of neglecting our bodies, leaving them at the door as computer-based working commenced. In 2014, we explored the connections between labour and love with workers across different sectors: artists, educators, call

centre workers and complaints administrators. Through workshops, love was exposed as a catch-all term that can hide a diverse array of work processes that are alienating, disenfranchising and motivated by values of status, and by cultural, social and economic obligation. We wanted to see if an argument can be made that if we have a passion for work, we are only fit for exploitation under a capitalist organisation of work that thrives on maximising productivity and minimising costs. Or is there something more complex at play in loving work? And if so, how might we problematise and strategise collectivity around these issues?<sup>10</sup>

**HR** The rise of zero-hour contracts in art and academia as well as throughout the labour market does not help. Although she does not focus on the cultural or academic sector per se, the journalist Dawn Foster writes evocatively of the psychological toll felt by people employed on zero-hour contracts:

Every colleague is competition. As a result you're constantly on edge, aware that the tiniest slip of the tongue or careless mistake could mean a fall from grace and attendant loss of income. In such circumstances, it's almost impossible to organise collectively. No one employed so precariously dare step out of line first, knowing the inevitable consequences. Such workplaces rarely recognise unions and actively discourage workers from joining or trying to form unions.<sup>11</sup>

**JR** This definitely resonates with findings in the current stage of *Manual Labours* called *The Complaining Body* which investigates workplace complaints.<sup>12</sup> *Manual Labours: The Complaining Body* is the second stage of the practice-based research project *Manual Labours*. *The Complaining Body* developed from a series of workshops with call centre workers in a London borough council, commuters on a train station platform, and university staff dealing with student complaints. It explores the physical and emotional effects of complaining, receiving complaints and not being able to complain in the context of work. For more, see [www.manuallabours.co.uk](http://www.manuallabours.co.uk). While we are familiar with freelance roles and precarious contracts in the art field, our research with those working in salaried positions, including staff at a London borough council, shared the same challenging conditions faced by freelancers. It appears that many of the traits of precarious work

– including the shift of responsibility onto the individual so that you effectively become your own boss, flexible work hours, and ‘hot desking’ – become shared working conditions for all. The common denominator is the breaking down of spaces, both verbal and physical, for collegial relationships and collective workplace complaining. Every colleague is a competitor, as Foster says, and the ideology that bad working conditions are ones you should be able to cope with makes it impossible to discuss challenges at work. Cultures such as ‘hot desking’ and ‘shift work’ also reduce any time you have together with colleagues and the chance for workplace solidarity.

**HR** This prevalent isolation and atomisation you are describing reminds me of how feminists previously discussed housework. It's so creepy, this culture of self-management and self-monitoring. The feminist economic sociologist Emma Dowling analyses it in terms of financialisation, where

we count up what we are, what we do and what we achieve in constant ratings and measurable outcomes that can, in turn, be routed through financial markets for the purposes of extracting surplus value.<sup>13</sup>

**DC** This is precisely the nature of the neoliberal political project post-Thatcher. The more we compartmentalise ourselves, the less likely we are to collectivise; individuals are less threatening to the dominant order than a collective.

**JR** Yet, as we discovered during our research into workplace complaints in *Manual Labours*, complaining nonetheless occurs. Individualised workers’ bodies endure, suffer and complain about their working conditions. Unable to be heard within the current system of online forms and automated phone services, their grievances manifest themselves as bodily complaints – sickness, depression, diarrhoea; physical responses that leak out of the body when the voice is consistently silenced.

**HR** To pick up on our discussion about how to build collectivity in a climate that encourages division, the contemporary art field seems to have inherited the assumption that curators work *for* rather than *with* artists. This sets up a hierarchy which privileges artistic labour, and sees curatorial labour in feminised terms as

flexible, responsive and supportive. In contrast to the long-standing complaint that curators do not care *enough* about the artists that they work with, and that their curatorial agendas ride roughshod over art and artists,<sup>14</sup> recent curatorial discussions have highlighted practices and ethics of curatorial care, often foregrounding the etymological roots of 'curating' in the Latin word for 'caring' (curare).<sup>15</sup> Yet even when they foreground curatorial care, these accounts generally overlook where much of that care is directed, and how, in today's increasingly privatised non-profit art sector, curators' caring and affective labour goes towards maintaining relationships with wealthy philanthropists, donors, and collectors.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, scant attention is paid to the need to extend care to those workers who struggle to sustain themselves in the art sector.

**JR** I'm not sure if the patriarchal hierarchy of the curator has been unhinged though – I still feel that the assumption that the curator is in the position of power, and the artists serve that position, is prevalent (and reflected in my reluctance to call myself a curator). In terms of 'curare', we used that reference in a recent collaborative text.<sup>17</sup> However, the distinction was in analysing the shift in curating as an idea of caring for the artist, to caring for the context the work is produced within – the community, the audience, the political commitment.

**HR** I have evoked 'curare' when writing about curating, too. I don't mean to be unnecessarily critical, and I value your efforts to extend care to the conditions under which curating occurs. Rather than pitting curators and artists against each other, it seems important to think them together in terms of solidarity.

**JR** It's a great point – you also mentioned earlier in our conversations – when we say care – who and what are we caring for? Like love, it has become a catch-all term for justifying or ethically motivating dubious practices in some cases!

**DC** This idea of the curator working for the artist reminds me of an anecdote I recently read from Pablo Helguera about how the curator was immediately on the phone to the gallery education department demanding children when Rirkrit Tiravanija wanted to create a piece in the gallery with children.<sup>18</sup> This also highlights another overlooked labour within the gallery – that of the museum educators, whose

jobs are increasingly precarious when faced with funding cuts to museums. As educators, all three of us know how much surplus that role entails. Notably, when Marx addresses unproductive labour in his analysis of capitalism, teachers are also included in his categorisation. Another 'labour of love'?

**HR** Institutionally, art educators have been treated as if they occupy the lowest ranks of curatorial and programming teams. This hierarchy no doubt stems from educators' primary contact with the 'unschooled' general public, and their association with reproductive, rather than productive, labour, which doesn't leave a tangible – or saleable – trace. That art education has historically been a female-dominated field, and thus devalued, can't be accidental, either!

## **II Unlearning to Love Your Labour: How to 'Dis-Identify' Rather Than 'Over-Identify' with Working Roles**

**HR** It's clear from our discussion that over-identifying with our work can have damaging consequences. Drawing on anti-work theory developed by feminist scholars like Kathi Weeks, which itself builds on social-reproduction thinkers like Federici and Leopoldina Fortunati, I wonder if dis-identifying with work roles could be a productive alternative tactic?<sup>19</sup>

**JR** Yes, exactly. I'm wondering how to begin dis-identification – maybe to start, it is important to confess to ourselves and each other some of the bad institutional behaviours we collectively share, in order to then be able to dis-identify from them? Reflecting on this might also expose how we have learnt and developed some of the reproductive skills for the jobs we carry out.

**ALL** Following this, and as part of the collective process of writing this paper, we held a collective brainstorming session to identify some of the bad habits we currently practice:

- Presenting the 'clean gallery' and the 'welcoming smile' and so mystifying the labour within cultural work

- Not distinguishing between work and life
- Constantly checking emails – whether at home or during ‘social’ events – as if we are constantly on the brink of missing something really important
- The academicisation of how we valorise the work we are doing; that and visitor figures feel like the only forms of value the art world clings on to, but what about space for collectivity/democratic conversation?
- Working seventy per cent over what we get paid for
- Doing projects even if the funding received is fifty per cent less than what we need
- Sacrificing our own maintenance for that of our job: not taking care of ourselves, not listening to when we've had enough, both physically and mentally
- Prioritising attendance at academic and artworld events over those with family members and friends
- Agreeing to things that, realistically, we don't have time for because it is ‘good’ for our ‘career’ – never saying ‘no’
- Agreeing to do things before we know if we will be paid
- Acting like we can afford things that we can't (maybe this is more a life thing...) but keeping quiet about the distinction between artist income and curatorial income
- Agreeing to let videos of talks that we have taken part in be posted online when permission was not sought in advance, or additional fees offered
- Facilitating unpaid internships at prestigious galleries and institutions (because students want the work experience) without pressurising those organisations to pay
- Doing far more lecture preparation than is allocated for the task
- Feeling guilty for reading something not related to our research

- Allowing colleagues to take on the tedious work of ordering office supplies or coordinating recycling, by letting them assume that we don't understand the administrative systems for doing so
- Posting personal images and stories on Facebook, where we contribute our free labour and instrumentalise social relationships for the benefit of social media corporations
- Writing about the importance of acknowledging the collective nature of knowledge production while presenting our work (exhibitions, articles) under our own names alone and not listing all those who have fed into the process
- Organising events or curating exhibitions that deal with artistic and cultural labour but which do not interrogate the conditions under which our, and our collaborators' labour, occurs

**JR** Where do we learn these bad habits? If I think back to the type of work I was engaged in since school – waitressing – it was highly gendered and flexible. The task of caring for demanding customers, or trying to please closed-mouthed ones; working as a team just to get through the twelve-hour shift, then realising that hierarchies reappear as soon as the intense period is over; and the costuming of myself to appear reliable so that I'd be offered further work. While Brian Holmes describes in his text of the same title 'the flexible personality' which outlines precisely this condition of contemporary labour, his analysis also allows you to see how this figure or 'ideal type' is born right from the word 'go' for many women.<sup>20</sup> In *Manual Labours* we often ask how many people have done unpaid internships and it is rare that men ever say yes to this question while myself and many other women have done. How do we change our expectations about the conditions we build for ourselves to work within? Helena, I remember you discussing your experience of growing up and the effect this had on your skills in reproductive work. How would you describe this and the connection to bad habits?

**HR** That's a big one! I grew up in a thoroughly neoliberal household. My art school-trained dad was an advertising executive and my mum, who left school at sixteen, ran an employment agency for secretarial staff in the media: classic feminised labour in a prototypical neoliberal industry. Rather than stressing academic achievement,

our parents encouraged my sister and me to cultivate our social skills and appearances, to be agreeable, popular – and thin! That the importance of agreeability was ingrained in me from a young age probably explains why I am so drawn to the affective withdrawal strategies that some feminists have developed. For women to refuse to be ‘nice’, attentive and supportive to their detriment feels radical, necessary – and hard! Shulamith Firestone, in *The Dialectics of Sex*, writes how she tried to train herself to stop smiling. Her proposal for a smile boycott, in which women abandoned their ‘pleasing’ smiles and only smiled when something genuinely pleased *them*, resonates with how Wages for Housework campaigners withdrew their domestic and affective labour in order to render it visible and demand its payment.<sup>21</sup>

**JR** Yes, in 2012 the airline Cathay Pacific threatened a smile strike in a struggle over working conditions too! Have you managed to put any of these forms of affective resistance into practice, Helena?

**HR** Resisting the ingrained feeling that it's my responsibility to ‘fix’ things, practically but especially emotionally, professionally as well as in my intimate relationships, is really tough. A programme that I organised with six feminist colleagues in 2015 called *Now You Can Go* explored feminist tactics of withdrawal and dis-identification.<sup>22</sup> We took our cue from practices within Italian feminism and from the collective ‘readymade’ artist Claire Fontaine's concept of the human strike, which proposes that strategically withholding affective labour can serve both to reveal and resist stereotypical behaviours, and enable as yet unknown subjectivities to emerge.<sup>23</sup> We looked at how the writer and feminist organiser Carla Lonzi withdrew from several roles throughout her life, in a process she termed ‘deculturation’: first, in the 1960s, as an art critic; then, in the 1970s, from feminist leadership; and eventually from her romantic partnership with the sculptor Pietro Consagra.<sup>24</sup> The book Lonzi published recording the conversation between herself and Consagra that documented their separation. Rejecting the idea that women act in complementary and supportive ways to men was central to Lonzi's concept of ‘deculturation’, which included resisting the presumption that the productive work involved in making art was more important than the reproductive work of maintaining life.

**DC** When employed in service work, such as bar work, I fought to reject gender-informed stereotypes; I avoided dressing up for the (male gaze of the) customer and refused to accept or 'play along' with customers' inappropriate or sexist comments. However, I've always been aware of my class identity – having a Yorkshire accent in an (largely middle-class) academic world – and I think my working-class upbringing installed a work ethic in me, which has mutated into its overworked form today. I always treated any work that I got as something I needed to do to get to where I wanted to be. So, for example, when I was on zero-hour contracts teaching as an Associate Lecturer, I knew I was working more hours than I was being paid for, but I told myself that I was doing it for my CV and that I needed to do this to get a permanent job, which I eventually secured. I'm not sure if that makes me a really bad role model for young academics?

**HR** I don't think we should berate ourselves for trying to survive in tough times. But we must develop new forms of supporting one another and speaking about the insidious demands that we face so that we recognise them as systemic issues and not individual problems.

**DC** Yes. I also think we can learn from the younger generation; there's a group of BA Interactive Arts students at Manchester School of Art, where I work, who have instigated a regular 'Slow Lunch'. Everyone in the school is invited to bring their lunch to a designated location to have a 'proper' lunch break with others.

**HR** I too am learning – or unlearning! – from younger people. At Goldsmiths this year [2016], rather than organising an exhibition during the MFA degree show, for which the college provides no funds and which does not count towards coursework, curating students are leaving the space empty apart from a poster that reads ‘Our Future Is Elsewhere’. Instead of putting their energies into a public outcome, they organised a rural retreat where they explored propositions for collectivity and the politics of mutual and self-care.

**JR** What a great response! Within *Manual Labours* we were looking for ways to care for the ‘uncomplaining body’ and to refuse or start to unlearn the performance of the happy, productive, healthy body which appears to have no need to complain at all. One small gesture we developed was to write collective complaint letters. A letter to the thing or person you can't complain to, about the thing you can't complain about, in order to acknowledge our marginalised complaints, and validate our yet to be articulated challenges and then to share them verbally, physically with other uncomplaining bodies.

**HR** That sounds like a terrific collective effort. Perhaps the more widespread adoption of anonymous group authorship would encourage workers to speak out when they experience exploitation and abuse, given that doing so as an individual can feel so risky in today's precarious climate, and in a context in which institutions often make employees sign confidentiality agreements.

**JR** Yes, the solidarity created through anonymity is a great tool for starting to speak out about these issues and recognise the bad habits. There are also more public ways. *Manual Labour* has been trying to develop a practice of dis-identification through commitments such as showing the budget during each exhibition or publication, so that the economics of the project aren't concealed from the ‘public face’ of the work.

**HR** In *Be Creative*, her book about employment in the cultural industries, Angela McRobbie discusses how the ideology of ‘passionate work’ has replaced romantic love for many people, especially women, and how this mindset can lead to dangerous levels of self-precarisation. To counter this tendency McRobbie invokes

Richard Sennett's book on craft, which seeks to replace 'art' with 'craft'.

Paraphrasing Sennett, she writes:

If the work is less important the worker can detach and invest less of a sense of self-value in its outcomes. He or she can perhaps 'clock off' at the end of the day and relax with the children at the weekend.<sup>26</sup>

While there are major problems with this idea that childcare is *not* a form of work – and McRobbie herself raises concerns with Sennett's romanticisation of craftwork – nonetheless I find this proposal to demote work and divest it of the mythologies of self-realisation helpful, given the prevalence of the 24/7 work ethic in the cultural sector.

**DC** Although I understand McRobbie's point, I find it really problematic to use the term 'craft' to devalue work. I think this is steeped in class- and gender-based prejudices about craft versus high art.<sup>27</sup> My research often considers the overlooked fabricators in artistic practice, whose labour is often hidden, for the sake of maintaining the appearance of a single author and the financial value associated with this mythology. Their 'skills' are associated with craft and valued less than the 'conceptual' labour of the artist. Furthermore, the handicraftsperson is also someone whose labour is considered unproductive by Marx. Even when employed by the artist, it is a service that is being purchased which does not immediately transmute into profit once the labour power is expended; it entails an expenditure of revenue rather than the production of capital. In selling a service, Marx writes, 'what is paid for is the performance of the service as such, and by its very nature the result cannot be guaranteed by those rendering the service'.<sup>28</sup> In this way, we might think of the unknown assistant or craftsperson as akin to those engaged in reproductive labour, whose labour is not acknowledged by the wider capitalist system nor those for whom they work. In using the term 'craft' to devalue work in our own minds, we might as well just consider it a labour of love!

**HR** How might dis-identification play out in your work, Dani?

**DC** Dis-identification is a really difficult question for me as being an academic is so engrained into my identity. I find it difficult to switch off. In recent years, I have

started to do non-work activities in which I cannot be attached to my phone. This is a very small step towards my learning to live without a stream of work-related information. But, it's hard because, as an art historian, I also distinguish between the majority of my employed labour – teaching/admin – and research, which I see as something I would do unpaid (and herein lies the problem). Is going to an art gallery for pleasure/interest not switching off from work?

**HR** Not all work is bad! And taking pleasure from your work is something to value, if not to imbue with the mythology of privilege.

### **III 'Not All Work Is Bad!': Modes of Valuation**

**JR** Federici discusses the double character of work through her analysis of domestic work: that it at once 'reproduces us and valorises us not only in view of our integration in the labour market but also against it'.<sup>29</sup> The feminist position, to seek to struggle for reclaiming work from its alienation and devaluation under capital, feels much more empowering in terms of the potential we have to reclaim and insist that all of our life activities are not reducible to profit and exploitation.

**DC** One of the problems that Emma Dowling has noted, in her text on affective remuneration (which we read in preparation for this discussion), is that socially reproductive work is increasingly valorised by neoliberalism, but not valued.<sup>30</sup> I find it fascinating that two modes of labour that were historically deemed unproductive (in the Marxian sense) – socially reproductive and artistic labour – are now key working models within Western neoliberal economies.

**JR** Absolutely, and it becomes more pressing to think about different ways we can value what is marginalised, undervalued work. How can we reorganise the categorisation of labour from within? As Dowling argues,

gaining control over the means of social reproduction increases the power people have to reproduce their livelihood without having to rely on the sale of their labour to do so.<sup>31</sup>

Dowling makes a distinction between the valorisation of labour and the valuation of labour. Valorisation denotes capital's methods of valuing labour, which we see through the wage; while valuation relates to how we as human beings conceptually struggle to value for ourselves the activity that we engage in. As the financialisation of work intensifies, it is increasingly difficult for people to see and qualify work that is not represented by monetary value.

**DC** And Dowling also warns us about the danger of adding a monetary value to socially reproductive labour. Once it has a financial value, it is, in effect, put to work for capital.

**JR** Thus, cultivating methods of valuation built out from the home is central to not only valuing this work for ourselves but for insisting on the valuation as a form of anti-capitalist struggle and as the basis for building solidarity and new social structures in society. As both Federici and Dowling note, key to this transformative process is the means, time and capacity for engaging in social reproductive work: a first hurdle that feels hard to overcome when considering the persistent diminishing of social spaces and free time. This issue was clear when feedback from local council workers, after a series of *Manual Labours'* workshops in 2015, described that the most important result was getting to know who their colleagues were.

**DC** Yes, I heard somewhere recently that Amazon 'fulfilment centre' workers are kept very separate – different timings for breaks, different buildings etc – which makes it incredibly difficult for the workers to come together collectively to organise, or, as you say, Jenny, even to complain. I like that Dowling introduces a third meaning of investment, to counter the traditional notion of financial investment and the more recent notion of 'social investment' (which is also becoming increasingly valorised as people calculate the wage equivalent of charity work, for example). This third type is 'affective or emotional investment' which is based on the idea of use value, which is often lost in the analysis of the commodity. As I said earlier, Marx – looking at industrial work – saw work as 'productive' only when it directly created profit. Labour that we might also value – housework, care work, artistic work – now needs to be looked at through a different frame or the terms need to be updated for contemporary capitalism. Maybe it's not about monetary value either – Dowling's argument precipitates the question, how else can we value this work?

## IV Art, Feminism and Social Reproduction Labour

**DC** The 'Labours of Love, Works of Passion' panel openly called for a reconsideration of labour or, perhaps an insertion, of (socially reproductive) labour to the writing of art history, and especially within accounts focused on earlier periods. I also feel quite strongly about this; I 'grew up' (as an art historian) in a department with a strong lineage of both Marxist and feminist art historical approaches. However, the question of labour within approaches to a feminist art history were largely lost to poststructuralist and psychoanalytic theory, which I know wasn't historically the case (Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock's two-volume *Work and the Image* has proven invaluable for an art historian engaged in questions about labour in art, as has Pollock and Fred Orton's *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed*).<sup>32</sup> So, as a working-class student, I chose to engage with Marxian approaches to the study of art history. Only now am I re-engaging with a Marxist feminism that addresses questions of labour through an economic lens, of which there is still important work to be done. Again, thinking about Helena's earlier comments on culture historically being for the privileged class, I'm wondering if this separation of labour from art is due to class.

**HR** The lack of attention paid to class in feminist art history and theory before about 2000 is a key focus of Angela Dimitrakaki's 2013 book *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative*.<sup>33</sup> She argues that the critical and artistic emphasis on semiotics and psychoanalysis led feminists to foreground debates on visibility and subjectivity above those around economics and work. So, for instance, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, 1973–1979, was discussed primarily via Lacanian theories about maternal subjectivity and not in materialist terms as an exploration and example of maternal labour.<sup>34</sup> To Dimitrakaki's analysis I would add that when feminist critical and curatorial reflections did highlight women's work, they generally involved reappraising craft and domestic traditions associated with the female realm, where issues of class were often not foregrounded. One aspect of feminised labour that did preoccupy second-wave feminist artists was that of maintaining female attractiveness. I'm thinking of artists like Eleanor Antin, Hannah Wilke, Martha Wilson, Suzy Lake, Lorraine O'Grady, and Sanja Iveković, and of projects that emerged from *Womanhouse*.<sup>35</sup> In the light of current awareness about the affective

labour involved in maintaining the branded self under networked capitalism, these practices feel ripe for re-evaluation.

**DC** Maintaining the self-image in the age of the 'selfie' is an interesting approach. I still feel, however, that there are works by women artists, identifying with feminism, that directly address productive and social-reproduction labour that haven't been thoroughly addressed in feminist art history, such as Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly's *Women and Work: A Document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973–75*, on which I spoke at the AAH conference, and which brings productive and unproductive labour side by side without any demarcation or hierarchical structure in its exhibition. I maintain that this work is atypical for this reason.

**JR** It feels like central to the politics and struggle within *Women and Work* was the solidarity it created and speculated on between workers from different fields (women art workers and women factory workers) and the distinction between paid and unpaid labour. Often, academic analysis and activism create research frames that don't allow for cross-field comparison (or solidarity).

**HR** Dimitrakaki discusses *Women and Work* as a rare example of feminist art of the era that foregrounds class and labour.

**DC** I think, perhaps, the lack of attention to class could be a victim of the 'divorce' (to use Cinzia Arruzza's term) of feminism and Marxism in the 1970s.<sup>36</sup>

**HR** Indeed. Arruzza highlights the limitations of feminist theorisations of gender as a class, which deny the material differences between women. Yet the reasons that prompted feminists to seek this divorce in the first place, stemming from the Marxist devaluation of gender and deferring the transformation of the sexual division of labour until 'after the revolution', remain powerful concerns. The need for a politics grounded in an ethics of care and politics of social reproduction has never been clearer.

**DC** In Marx's defence... in his analysis of the capitalist system, Marx was largely concerned with economic structures, following the money and the process in which money was created. So, anything that did not produce surplus labour that could be

turned into profit was of no interest to his analysis of industrial labour. Hence why labour in the home is excluded (or labelled as 'unproductive'). However, we also have to understand that 'unproductive' relates to the production of surplus value (which then transmutes into profit) and is not necessarily – in my reading, at least – a judgement call on the quality of the work. It is not 'useless work', but in Marx's theory of the commodity, value is not produced from use values alone. Of course, we all know that, in reality, the labour in the home is essential to supporting capitalism, and I think Federici made this very clear with the Wages for Housework campaign of the 1970s. I also think that Federici is right in asking for Marxist theory to rethink the question of 'reproduction' from a planetary perspective if it is to speak to the twenty-first century.<sup>37</sup>

**JR** I also think it's worth remembering that Marx's focus on waged labour was connected to his argument that the technological advancements of capital would fuel the revolution of the working class. Of course, developments in technology not only have produced more work but have found ways to exert further controls – ie the continual surveillance of workers via the iPhone, GDrive and Skype etc. In what we might call his oversight of reproductive work, we can now see a potential that reproductive labour and the home, rather than technology, offer the sites and processes to consider for generating anti-capitalist struggle, something bell hooks picks up on in her essay 'Homeplace (as a Site of Resistance)'.<sup>38</sup>

**DC** I completely agree that the increase in workplace or connective technologies have exerted a larger control over us as workers. For example, all three of us are now sat, presumably at home or in a non-traditional workplace, connected via the internet, working. I'm not convinced that this technology can be neutralised because of its inherent ties to the capitalist system. In reading Marx's 'Fragment on Machines', the Operaismo (Workerist) thinker Raniero Panzieri has argued that informational techniques tend to 'restore the charm of work' which obfuscates its hold over us.<sup>39</sup> While I disagree with Marx on the idea that social-reproduction labour does not contribute to capitalism, I do wonder if the 'apparent' freedom of this form of labour, like artistic labour, allows for it to more easily work against capitalism.

**JR** The 'apparent' freedom in artistic labour, I think, is more of a dangerous thought, and a perspective that plays into those precise structures that suppress us.

However, an openness, transparency and reflectivity on how we can work from our positions within these relations has informed some compelling practices and radical spaces like CASCO, Utrecht, and Cyklopen, Stockholm.

**HR** Speaking of CASCO, the question of how to unlearn bad habits informed their 'New Habits' project, undertaken with the artist Annette Krauss, which attempted to make visible the maintenance labour that they carried out at the institution so that they might change their behaviours and priorities.<sup>40</sup>

**DC** When I talk about the 'apparent' freedom from capitalism, I am doing so cynically. This is precisely why neoliberal labour models – ie affective and immaterial labour – no longer look like 'work': because they adopted the 'artist' as a model worker. This point is, of course, indebted to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's argument in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* in which they argue that the 'artist critique' post-1968 was adopted by capitalist ideologies, turning workers into apparently free-thinking, flexible employees, while capitalising on their labour.<sup>41</sup> I like Paolo Virno's response to the co-optation of these forms of labour. He argues that the intellect gained through work should be used for action rather than work.<sup>42</sup> I think this might be akin to what you're thinking, Jenny? The knowledge produced from work in the home could be put to work for political action.

## NOTES

1 'A Labour of Love', Collective Gallery, Edinburgh, part of *GENERATION: 25 Years of Contemporary Art in Scotland*, 2015. For more information see [www.collectivegallery.net/archive/2015-a-labour-of-love](http://www.collectivegallery.net/archive/2015-a-labour-of-love), accessed 7 May 2016

2 Silvia Federici, 'Wages Against Housework', Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press, New York, 1975

3 Both Helena and Jenny's conference fees were supported by the University of Edinburgh, following applications by the session conveners, as Helena's application for funding to Goldsmiths was turned down and Jenny does not work in academia. To offset costs, Helena and Jenny also both stayed with friends in Edinburgh.

4 In the interests of transparency, we initially kept a log of the time that we spent working on this text. This work included hours of preparatory reading, two hours and thirty-three minutes of Skype calls, over 100 emails, and a collective writing session lasting two hours thirty minutes. However, as the subsequent process of editing and revising this text took place over the course of several months, often in brief bursts, the work of maintaining the log proved too demanding.

5 *Manual Labours* is a practice-based research project exploring physical and emotional relationships to work, initiated by Jenny Richards and Sophie Hope in 2012. The project reconsiders current time-based structures of work (when does work start and end?) and reasserts the significance of the physical (manual) aspect of immaterial, affective and emotional labour. For more, see [www.manuallabours.co.uk](http://www.manuallabours.co.uk).

6 Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Pluto Press, London, 2011

7 I am grateful to Angela Dimitrakaki and Kirsten Lloyd for their insights into the role of Teaching Fellows.

8 A report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Researching Equity, Access and Partnership (REAP), from July 2015, listed 'greater financial and academic pressures on students' as among the factors that have contributed to the increase in student demand for support for mental health problems in English universities, which had risen from c 8,000 to 18,000 in the four years to 2012/2013. [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/Independentresearch/2015/Understanding,provision,for,students,with,mental,health,problems/HEFCE2015\\_mh.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/Independentresearch/2015/Understanding,provision,for,students,with,mental,health,problems/HEFCE2015_mh.pdf), accessed 27 July 2016.

9 Gerald Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity*, Aileen Derieg, trans, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles and The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2013

10 *Manual Labours* (Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards), 'Loving Work: Drawing Attention to Pleasure and Pain in the Body of the Cultural Worker', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol 18 no 2, April 2015, pp 117–141

11 Dawn Foster, *Lean Out*, Repeater Books, London, 2016, pp 39–40

12 *Manual Labours: The Complaining Body* is the second stage of the practice-based research project *Manual Labours. The Complaining Body* developed from a series of workshops with call centre workers in a London borough council, commuters on a train station platform, and university staff dealing with student complaints. It explores the physical and emotional effects of complaining, receiving complaints and not being able to complain in the context of work. For more, see [www.manuallabours.co.uk](http://www.manuallabours.co.uk).

13 Emma Dowling, 'Love's Labour's Cost: The Political Economy of Intimacy', VersoBooks.com, 2016, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2499-love-s-labour-s-cost-the-political-economy-of-intimacy> , accessed 13 July 2016

14 For discussions of how some of the artists in exhibitions curated by Harald Szeemann protested his dominance over them and their art see Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Relations in Motion: The Curatorial Condition in Visual Arts – and Its Possibilities for the Neighbouring Disciplines', *Frakcija* 55, 2010, pp 50–57, and Dorothee Richter 'Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Team-workers?', *On Curating* 19, 2013, pp 43–57. For a more recent critique of curatorial dominance, see Anton Vidokle, 'Art without Artists', *e-flux journal* 16, 2010, [www.e-flux.com/journal/art-without-artists](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-without-artists), accessed 13 July 2016.

15 See Kate Fowle, 'Who Cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator Today', in Stephen Rand and Heather Kouris, eds, *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*, apexart, New York, 2007, pp 10–19. Boris Groys suggests that artworks are sick, and that curators 'cure' them by giving them public vitality and visibility, in 'Politics of Installation', *e-flux journal* 2, 2009, [www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/02/68504/politics-of-installation/), accessed 13 July 2016.

16 I unpack some of the implications of curators directing their affective labour towards maintaining relationships with private philanthropists in 'Support Acts:

Curating, Caring and Social Reproduction', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol 5, no 1, 2016, pp 6–30.

17 Victoria Horne, Kirsten Lloyd, Jenny Richards, Catherine Spencer, 'Taking Care: Feminist Curatorial Pasts, Presents and Futures', *On Curating* 29, April 2016, 'Curating in Feminist Thought', Dorothee Richter, Elke Krasny and Lara Perry, eds, pp 116–128

18 In the spirit of acknowledging hidden labour, I have my doctoral student – Gemma Meek – to thank for drawing my attention to this anecdote. Cited in Helen Reed and Pablo Helguera, 'Bad Education Interview', *The Pedagogical Impulse*, no date, <http://thepedagogicalimpulse.com/a-bad-education-helen-reed-interviews-pablo-helguera/>, accessed 27 June 2016.

19 Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham, North Carolina, 2011; Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction – Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital* [1981], Autonomedia, Brooklyn, 1995

20 Brian Holmes, 'The Flexible Personality', in *European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies*, 2002, available at <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en>, accessed 5 May 2016

21 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectics of Sex*, Bantam Books, New York, 1970, p 90

22 The *Now You Can Go* planning team was Angelica Bolletinari, Giulia Casalini, Diana Georgiou, Laura Guy, Irene Revell, and Amy Tobin and myself, with the administrative assistance of Dimitra Gkitsa. See <http://nowyoucango.tumblr.com>.

23 See Claire Fontaine, *Human Strike Has Already Begun & Other Writings*, Mute, Berlin, 2013.

24 See Claire Fontaine, 'We Are All Clitoridian Women: Notes on Carla Lonzi's Legacy', *e-flux journal* 47, 2013, [www.e-flux.com/journal/we-are-all-clitoridianwomen-notes-on-carla-lonziil-legacy/](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/we-are-all-clitoridianwomen-notes-on-carla-lonziil-legacy/), accessed 13 July 2016.

25 Carla Lonzi, *Vai pure, dialogo con Pietro Consagra*, Scritti di Rivolta Femminile, Milano, 1980

26 For discussions of gender and craft, see Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, I B Tauris, London, 2010; Patricia Mainardi, *The Feminist Art Journal*, vol 2, no 1, 1973, pp 18–23; and Janis Jefferies's writings on gender and textiles.

27 Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2016, p 150

28 Karl Marx, 'Theories of Surplus Value', in David McLellan, ed, *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p 431

29 Silvia Federici, 'Revolution from Ground Zero: Revolution, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle', in *Revolution at Point Zero: Household, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, PM Press, Oakland, California and Autonomedia, New York, 2012, p 2

30 Emma Dowling, 'Valorised but Not Valued? Affective Remuneration, Social Reproduction and Feminist Politics beyond the Recovery', *British Politics*, vol 11, no 4, December 2016, pp 452–468

31 Ibid

32 Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock, eds, *Work and the Image, Volume One, Work Craft and Labour: Visual Representations in Changing Histories*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000; Valerie Mainz and Griselda Pollock, eds, *Work and the Image, Volume Two, Work in Modern Times: Visual Mediations and Social Processes*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000; Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed*, University of Manchester Press, Manchester, 1996

33 Angela Dimitrakaki, *Gender, ArtWork and the Global Imperative: A Materialist Feminist Critique*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2013

34 Ibid, p 115

35 *Womanhouse* (USA 1972) has been an iconic feminist art project; see <http://www.womanhouse.net/>, accessed 10 June 2017.

36 Cinzia Arruzza, *Dangerous Liaisons: The Marriages and Divorces of Marxism and Feminism*, Merlin Press, London, 2013

37 Silvia Federici, 'The Reproduction of Labour Power in the Global Economy and the Unfinished Feminist Revolution' [2008], in *Revolution at Point Zero*, PM Press, Oakland, California, 2012

38 bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, Turnaround, London, 1991

39 Raniero Panzieri, 'The Capitalist Use of Machinery: Marx versus the Objectivists', 1964, Libcom.org, <http://libcom.org/library/capalist-use-machinery-raniero-panzieri>, accessed 27 June 2016

40 See Annette Krauss and Casco Team, 'CASCO Case Study #2: Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)', 2014, CASCO, <http://cascoprojects.org/casco-case-study-2-sitefor-unlearning-art-organization-0>, accessed 13 July 2016.

41 Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Gregory Elliott, trans, Verso, London, 2005

42 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, Andrea Casson, trans, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles, New York, 2004

## Accompanying Images

Manual Labours, *The Complaining Body*, 2015, image courtesy: Manual Labours



Hamish MacPherson, *Breastbeating*, 2016, commissioned by Manual Labours, exhibited within *The Complaining Body* at The Showroom, London, 2016, image courtesy: the artist and Manual Labours



Claire Fontaine, *Untitled (Open)*, 2012, window mounted sign, argon and neon filled glass, transformer, cables and chains, image: courtesy the artists



'Don't Think You Have Any Rights: The Challenges of Italian Feminisms', featuring (left to right) Francesco Ventrella, Zach Blas, Maria Drakopoulou, Fulvia Carnevale of Claire Fontaine, and Giovanna Zapperi, The Showroom, London, as part of 'Now You Can Go', 12 December 2015, photo courtesy: Helena Reckitt



'Our Future Is Elsewhere', Goldsmiths MFA Curating Students, 2016, photo courtesy: Christian Luebbert

