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# Social Reproduction

*Marina Vishmidt and Zöe Sutherland*

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, there has been a resurgence of Marxist feminism, with many writers and activists engaged in assessing its theoretical and political adequacy for the present conjuncture. It is in this context that social reproduction theory has come to be a rallying point.<sup>1</sup> Central to this theory is the claim that the sustenance of life and human relationships, whether or not it is recognised as (waged) labour, is fully integral to capitalism as a mode of production. For many feminists, this process of sustenance is understood more specifically as the reproduction of labour-power. As those tasked with responsibility for this sustenance, in or out of the household, continue to be women, social reproduction theory lends gender, and gendered labour, a structural salience in reproducing the capitalist mode of production. This is in line with historic trends in Marxist feminism which analysed the structural role of social distinction such as gender or race in capitalism, rather than seeing it as a ‘superstructural’ (ideological or cultural) phenomenon.

While we would generally align our research within this political tendency, we also want to think critically about the concept of social reproduction—to analyse its

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<sup>1</sup> Social reproduction theory draws upon many historical feminist texts, but some of the key influences are the republished Lise Vogel's *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* [1983], Brill, Leiden, 2013 and Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*, PM Press, Oakland, 2012. Central to the recent literature is Tithi Bhattacharya, ed., *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, Pluto Press, London, 2017; and, most recently, Martha E. Gimenez's collection, *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist Feminist Essays*, Brill, Leiden, 2018. November 2015 saw the publication of a special issue of *Viewpoint* magazine on social reproduction: <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/11/02/issue-5-social-reproduction/>

conceptual clarity, and evaluate its ability to explain the process of devaluation of gendered labour within capitalist societies.

### **Social Reproduction**

But first, what is social reproduction? Why is it an important concept for feminists? As Rada Katsarova notes, social reproduction theory has multiple lineages, popularised in the 1960s-1980s through a range of critiques of orthodox Marxism—including Marxist, Italian autonomist, postcolonial and Third World feminisms, as well as debates around slavery, race and urban development.<sup>2</sup> But social reproduction is

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<sup>2</sup> Katsarova points out that 'within the history of feminist theory, it seems to be the case that these distinct registers have sometimes come to feed into each other and overlap, producing a range of meanings of social reproduction. And these distinct registers are often left unarticulated.' Rada Katsarova, 'Repression and Resistance on the Terrain of Social Reproduction: Historical Trajectories, Contemporary Openings', *Viewpoint*, issue 5.

already at stake as soon as the reproduction of capital is formulated. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx states:

Whatever the social form of the production process, it has to be continuous, it must periodically repeat the same phases. A society can no more cease to produce than it can to consume. When viewed, therefore, as a connected whole, and in the constant flux of its incessant renewal, every social process of production is, at the same time, a process of reproduction.<sup>3</sup>

And a few pages later:

Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus-value, but it also produces and reproduces the capital relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer.<sup>4</sup>

Here Marx is noting a continuity and unity between production and reproduction, considered from the viewpoint of the 'social totality' or total social capital, and its ability to maintain itself and expand.

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminists used formulations such as these to theorise the oppression of women in capitalist societies. Since Marx was using the concept of reproduction at a high level of abstraction—including production and consumption per se—feminists had to concretise it politically, as well as analytically. Hence, when Marxist feminists spoke about social reproduction, they meant something specific: the production and reproduction of labour-power. This formulation of social reproduction can be seen in the 1970s interventions of Italian Marxist feminists such as Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Leopoldina Fortunati, and Silvia Federici, and later in the

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume One, Ben Fowkes, trans, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1976, p 711.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p 724.

work of Lise Vogel.<sup>5</sup> At the very heart of the conditions of possibility of the reproduction of capitalism is labour-power, i.e. people with the potential to be waged workers. Due to the central role of labour-power in producing surplus value for capital, its reproduction is a necessary condition for capitalist accumulation.

A key insight of Marxist feminism has thus been that the vast wealth produced through capitalist accumulation has been possible only at the expense of the invisible and unpaid labour of over half of the population. Not only is it women who have largely reproduced labour-power, that is, maintained and cared for the past, present and future workforce, but these activities have been devalued within capitalist societies. Reproduction has not only been construed as unpaid work, it has also been made invisible as work through its naturalisation and privatisation. Likewise, women's positioning within such relations can have significant implications over a single lifespan, stretching far beyond the work itself: financial dependence, reduced opportunities and participation in the public sphere or in value-producing labour activities, greater levels of poverty in old age, increased vulnerability to domestic violence, and so on. By identifying these 'reproductive' tasks as 'labour', feminists of this period made visible the extent and structural importance of unpaid work done by women working both for a wage outside the home, and working without a wage inside the home, with the 'double shift' that traversed both. And at the same time, it demonstrated the centrality of this work to communist and socialist politics. If the labour of women—'reproductive workers'—was key to the vast wealth of capitalist accumulation, their political agency must equally be key to its revolutionary overthrow.<sup>6</sup> And as the capacity for childbearing was still often considered to be the minimal—for some, ineradicable—basis of women's oppression, feminist struggle of

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<sup>5</sup> See note 1; Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, FallingWall Press, Bristol, 1972. Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital*, Hilary Creek, trans, Autonomedia, New York, 1995 (originally published in Italian as *L'Arcano della Reproduzione: Casalinghe, Prostitute, Operai e Capitale*, Marsilio Editori, Venezia, 1981)

<sup>6</sup> This was one of the key arguments of the international Wages for Housework campaign. See Federici 2012, also Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972-77*, Käthe Roth, trans., Pluto Press and the University of British Columbia Press, London and Vancouver, 2018.

that time often focused on the refusal, minimisation, or else socialisation, of all other reproductive tasks. This was a stance that cut across the Marxist-feminist controversies about whether reproduction, then mainly discussed as ‘domestic labour’, was considered to be directly value-producing or simply as constituting the condition of possibility of the production of value.

In analyses that came to the fore in the 1970s–1980s known as the ‘domestic labour debate’, reproduction was often equated with a specific set of gendered tasks. As feminists sought to extend Marx’s category of ‘labour’ beyond the productive sphere, reproduction was often equated too simply with those specific tasks associated with the ‘reproductive sphere’ or private household. As Endnotes have argued, the consequence of this was that certain tasks came to be read as reproductive, some of which were not, in fact, confinable to unpaid work in the home.<sup>7</sup> Defining reproduction in terms of a preconceived set of gendered tasks thus had the consequence of naturalizing a historically and geographically specific division of social labour. And this historically specific character has become increasingly evident through recent re-structurings of capital to commodify more and more activities associated with reproduction.

In the attempt to concretise the place of gender within Marx’s analysis of capital as a social relation, feminists produced an understanding of social reproduction that was often quite specific, yet one whose meaning remained indeterminate. The concept of social reproduction captured just one dimension of Marx’s social totality—the reproduction of labour power, or ‘hidden abode’ in which the worker’s ‘instinct’ for self-preservation’ finds a social articulation.<sup>8</sup> Yet, even with this specification, the

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<sup>7</sup> Endnotes, ‘The Logic of Gender’, *Endnotes* 3, 2013, pp 56–91.

<sup>8</sup> In order to articulate the gendered character of reproduction, Joanna Brenner and Barbara Laslett further distinguished the reproduction of the ‘social’ from that of Marx’s totality, the ‘societal’. ref# ?? Similarly, for Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill, social reproduction was defined specifically by three sets of activities: “biological reproduction of the species”, “reproduction of the labour-force” and “reproduction of provisioning and caring needs”. Ref For ‘hidden abode of reproduction’, see K Weeks. For workers’ instinct see Marx vol 1. refs

indeterminacy inherent within the concept of social reproduction was not fully dissolved by anchoring reproduction to labour-power. Social reproduction can be stretched almost indefinitely, being made to signify not only something as capacious as the reproduction of a mode of production, or the capital-labour relation, but the reproduction of life per se.<sup>9</sup> As such, it becomes almost impossible to distinguish the former in any determinate sense, which can pose problems not just conceptually, but politically. As labour-power is a special commodity—composed of both the commodity and its bearer—it is difficult to distinguish where the worker-product ends and the person begins.<sup>10</sup> And what counts as the reproduction of labour-power is open to further specification, given what Marx called the ‘historical-moral element’, i.e. the historically and socially determined minimal conditions of the reproduction of labour-power in specific places and times for specific categories of people.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to this, many theorists of the ‘domestic labour debate’ were prone to falling back into the of patriarchy *and* capitalism as two semi-autonomous systems, even as they tried to offer a unifying theory. This was largely due the difficulty of developing an account which would imbricate the logic of capitalist exploitation of labour-power and class division with the logics of socially effective subordination through gender, much less race and other social hierarchies. To be able to grasp the process of the devaluation of certain forms of labour, the significance of reproduction needed to be thought from a more totalising viewpoint, situating it within its relation to capital accumulation—as well as the ‘social reproduction’ of gender as such.

### **Social Reproduction Theory Today: Intersectional or Ontological?**

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<sup>9</sup> This capacity for slippage and endless extension is further encouraged within theories that assume—consciously or subconsciously—some notion of the ‘total subsumption’ of life under capital. If the global triumph of capital over its previous antagonists in the last few decades has generalised capital’s domination to all spheres of social life, it confronts us as the sole basis of our very reproduction, making the link of social reproduction to the totality somewhat tautological.

<sup>10</sup> E.G. While ‘life’ may be oversaturated by the wage relation it cannot be completely subsumed by it?

<sup>11</sup> Although Marx was discussing the living standards of the waged worker, the symptomatic extension of this question to the ‘sphere’ of reproduction - which is to say, how those living standards were maintained, and by whom, apart from the single worker - would come to define the mapping of the gendered division of labour that became the main object of Marxist feminist theorizing in the latter half of the 20th century.

Contemporary social reproduction theory draws upon aspects of the work of thinkers such as Lise Vogel and Silvia Federici and attempts to develop an account that takes on board the criticisms of second-wave feminism while responding to the challenges of the call for a unitary theory. For example, while Marxist-feminism has been critical of 'intersectionality' for the lack of materialist rigor in its analysis, contemporary social reproduction theory is committed to theorising what can be termed a more materialist form of intersectionality. This is one that would anchor gender, but also racialisation, and other categories of subordination, within a thinking of 'totality', and also be able to generate a form of politics that would take the imbrication of all these into account, albeit not as independent variables or the contingent outcomes of interacting multiple systems of oppression.<sup>12</sup>

Yet social reproduction theory itself faces obstacles in theorising social relations through the abstract but totalising matrix of capitalist social form. While social reproduction theory is composed of relatively diverse voices, there is nonetheless a general tendency to posit the stratification, division and 'multiplication' of labour—what Ferguson calls the 'integrative ontology of labour'—as the keystone of this totality.<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of social-reproduction feminism is the conception of labour as broadly productive—creative not just of economic values, but of society (and thus of life) itself... This is not 'labour' as it has been understood in mainstream economics and vulgar Marxism. Rather, it is the 'practical human activity' that creates all the things, practices, people, relations and ideas

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<sup>12</sup> For many Marxist-feminists, Intersectionality conceives of gender, race and sexuality as fully coherent and autonomous—yet somehow comparable—locations of identity, which coincide contingently. For Sue Ferguson, while it can describe how specified social locations shape experience and identity, it cannot explain how they interact as part of a dynamic set of social relations in which processes, ideas and institutions reproduce and challenge these identities. References? Gimenez is critical of intersectionality because occludes capitalism e.g. 'classism' This is a common critique. Am sure we could find a handful more names if we wanted but we probably don't need to find that many.

<sup>13</sup> Sue Ferguson, 'Intersectionality and Social-Reproduction Feminisms: Towards an Integrative Ontology', *Historical Materialism*, vol 24, no 2, 2016, pp 38–60.

For 'multiplication of labour', see Brett Neilson and Sandro Mezzadra, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2013.

constituting the wider social totality—that which Marx and Engels identify as ‘the first premise of all human history’.<sup>14</sup>

For Sue Ferguson, social reproduction theory also aims to link this totality to experience, through an analysis of embodied subjects in a ‘socio-geographical spatialisation’.<sup>15</sup> Within such an expanded framework, it is thought that a more global picture of the diverse concrete positions of—especially, but not only—women might be theorised.

The concept of an ‘integrative ontology of labour’ would seem to answer the call for a ‘unitary theory’ noted by Cinzia Arruzza and others, one that would overcome the dualisms of previous Marxist-feminist programmes.<sup>16</sup> But in so doing, it runs the risk of erasing important distinctions and lines of causality, subsuming all kinds of activities, forces, and dynamics to the category of ‘labour’.<sup>17</sup> Crucially, the ‘workerist’ basis of social reproduction theory does not draw an analytic distinction between activities that might merely appear reproductive in their concrete characteristics and those that are socially validated by the wage. As a result, it risks assuming an affirmative stance towards the the labour associated with reproduction, valorising it politically simply *because* it is devalued.<sup>18</sup> This is often cast in feminised terms of

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<sup>14</sup> Ferguson, *ibid.*, p 14

<sup>15</sup> Ref? This isn't in the HM article.

<sup>16</sup> Cinzia Arruzza, ‘Remarks on Gender’, *Viewpoint* magazine, 2014, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2014/09/02/remarks-on-gender/>. See also Arruzza, ‘Functionalist, Determinist, Reductionist: Social Reproduction Feminism and its Critics’, *Science & Society*, vol. 80, 2016, pp. 9-30.

<sup>17</sup> Some of the most prominent recent work in the social reproduction debate aims to deal with this issue by theorising the historical mode of these activities as ‘reproductive’, that is to say, in capitalist societies, in specific eras and places. Yet the issue of indeterminacy in social reproduction theory has only secondarily been one of taking a ‘trans-historical’ view of reproductive tasks; it has rather been a vagueness about how reproduction is to be distinguished from production, and the tautological link that emerges between the devalued labour of feminised (and, at times, racialised) bodies and subjects and the designation of this labour as ‘reproductive’.

<sup>18</sup> The abstract character of an analysis that imputes resistant subjectivity to the most disregarded and oppressed social subjects can, we suggest, be linked to the abstraction of an analysis that can only recuperate the political significance of various kinds of activities under the rubric of labour. What these moves share is a reluctance to engage the historical and political or ideological mediations that enter into the composition of social forms.

nurturing and survival which occludes effective social divisions.<sup>19</sup> The recent currency of discourses of ‘care’, as they devolve to the often consumerist focus of ‘self-care’, is a case in point, putting a radical gloss on discredited liberal feminist idioms of empowerment. Social reproduction’s focus on an often undifferentiated notion of ‘labour’ can become problematic insofar as it can reinscribe gender and labour as positive values to be affirmed within a fundamentally violent and destructive system of the *reproduction* of capital. At the same time, the social reproduction approach has proven to be effective at expanding both the field of social struggle and the solidarities that can be practiced within it.

In light of these considerations, we should attend to the theoretical and political consequences of those theories of social reproduction that tend to bracket questions around global value chains, finance and politics in order to frame the *labour* of reproduction as their key term.<sup>20</sup> As a result of this, the social reproduction framework cannot escape its need to reinscribe the split between the productive and reproductive for analytical purposes, often leading indirectly to the political and ethical valorisation of the latter over the former, or directly translating the latter into the former.<sup>21</sup> This also perhaps obscures the messy unity between them today, resulting

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<sup>19</sup> This observation is not intended as a homogenizing criticism of all social reproduction theory; however, this is a tendency that can particularly be observed in the ‘applied’ uses of social reproduction in organizing milieus, wherein a vitalist continuum is often established between the human necessity and the recognition of devalued labours and activities, and the bodies or communities that perform them. Interesting political counterpoints to such tendencies exist; see Jasmine Gibson, ‘Fire This

Time: Notes on the Crisis of Reproduction’, LIES Journal, issue 2, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> **Bhattacharya 2017 does not seem to feature discussions of global value chains or otherwise situate social reproduction within systemic patterns of global accumulation, extraction and expulsion, unlike older work by e.g. Federici. While writers such as Nancy Fraser, Emma Dowling and Salar Mohandesi discuss the financialisation of social reproduction, most contemporary social reproduction theorists, following Vogel, by and large stick to the labour involved in the reproduction of labour-power.**

<sup>21</sup> This has been likened to the orthodox Marxist focus on the autonomy of use value vis-à-vis exchange value, rather than seeing use value as one side of the total form of value in capitalist society, and has warned how this move risks naturalising gendered forms of social labour. See Maya Gonzalez, ‘Two Debates, One Solution: Rethinking the Essential Categories of Social Reproduction Theory’, presentation at the 15th Annual Historical Materialism conference, 11 November 2018.

from the privatisation, commodification and financialisation of social reproduction. While the privatisation (as in the confinement of ‘housework’ to individual domestic units) and commodification (in the form of the waged labour of outsiders to those units, i.e. ‘the help’) of social reproduction are relatively ubiquitous in human societies and pre-date capitalism, it is financialisation which perhaps is more historically distinct and linked to the social divestment and financial extraction strategies driving today’s political economics.

### **Other Approaches to the Reproduction of the Social**

When it comes to conceptualising the full social density of e.g. race or gender, neither can be adequately explained as rank in the labour market.<sup>22</sup> Instead, we need to look at how race and gender, differentially, pose an ‘outside’ to the reproduction of capitalist class relations that enable them to function. This implies that value is not only an ‘economic’ term, but that it is—if we take up Marxian concepts of value analysis—a primarily social form that pervades all kinds of relations in a capitalist society, as the lived reality of the abstractions like money, competition and private property. It operates not only in perpetuating hierarchies in the workplace but in propping up these hierarchies, often brutally, in access to resources and infrastructure that affect life chances on every level.<sup>23</sup>

This ‘outside’ is taken up by Endnotes, who present a totalizing account of the persistence of gender and gendered labour in capital which does not produce an ontology of labour.<sup>24</sup> Contra the association of gender with certain kinds of unwaged, reproductive tasks, they use a value-form approach to concretise the definition of

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<sup>22</sup> See Chris Chen, ‘The Limit Point of Capitalist Equality’, *Endnotes* 3, 2013, pp 202-23.

<sup>23</sup> In this regard, we can also look at Roswitha Scholz’s work on ‘value dissociation’ and the need for an ‘outside to value’ in capitalist modernity and its ontologies of gender, race and humanity. See ‘Patriarchy and Commodity Society: Gender without the Body’ in *Marxism and the Critique of Value*, Neil Larsen, Mathias Nilges, Josh Robinson, and Nicholas Brown, eds., M-C-M’, Chicago and Alberta, pp 223-42.

<sup>24</sup> See *Logic of Gender*, op. cit.

gender in a way that can account for the shifting relation of different tasks to the process of capitalist accumulation over time. Defining gender as ‘the anchoring of a certain group of individuals in a specific *sphere of social activities*’ allows them to distinguish between activities that might merely appear reproductive in their concrete characteristics and those that are socially validated by the wage, a distinction that is itself the product of a specific historical and form-determined gendered configuration. This avoids the reduction of gender to a simple association with specific tasks, locations (the home), or bodies (feminised). As the collective convincingly argues, these reductions don’t explain why and how gender is produced and reproduced, and how this occurs over time, geographical space and even through differential positionings within the same location. Rather, their theory holds the tension between the interior and exterior via the category of the abject. It argues that gender *appears and is felt* as an external constraint precisely at the point at which capital expels some tasks that had become interiorised to its ‘exterior’, and drags us along with it in that abjection. As an example, most carework, unwaged and waged, physical and emotional, still devolves upon feminised subjects even after the predestination of ‘women’ for this kind of work has been ideologically discredited, and formal equality has been legislated in many places. To this extent, the authors locate the feminist fight in a rejection of those processes of (our) exteriorisation.<sup>25</sup>

Likewise, we could also look to some of the more materialist and feminist exegeses of Foucauldian biopolitics. The analysis of biopolitics was chronologically parallel to the development of the social reproduction framework as a project that sought to look at the ‘reproduction of the relations of production’ from a totalising standpoint, but also one that could take into account the production of gendered and racialised divisions of social labour and relations of power.<sup>26</sup> Reading social reproduction through biopolitics

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<sup>25</sup> Conversely, it could be suggested that, the psychoanalytic category of the ‘abject’ is too ambiguous to be suitable for this purpose.

<sup>26</sup> See especially Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: The Will to Knowledge*, Robert Hurley, trans, Penguin, London, 2008, and *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–1979*, Graham Burchell, trans, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008., For an interesting and little-known attempt to bridge Marx, Althusser and Foucault, see Francois Guery and Didier Deleule, *The Productive Body* [1972], Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro, trans, Zero Books, Winchester,

problematizes the terrain of social reproduction as a plenum of activities and tasks positively coded as reproducing life tendentially *in itself* and only contingently within and for the capital relation. In the paradigm of biopolitics life, and notions of 'life', cannot be separated from the mode of production and the subjects, docile and/ or entrepreneurial, suitable to it. It also implies a de-normalisation of the gendered dimension of social reproduction, as gender and sexuality, like the wage relation, is seen to be part and parcel of the system of production.

In light of these perspectives, we would suggest that it is crucial not to collapse social reproduction and the reproduction of capital into an ontology of labour, and that the analysis of the abstractions of value as well as the concrete situatedness of historical social formations is key in order not to end up with an affirmative account of gendered labour. In this regard, the reproduction of gender itself has to be put into question. If we are to put this gendering itself at stake, it is essential that we also address the question of why the family form has so persistently served as its basis—not just as an historical holdover from prior social formations but even through a capitalist epoch that constantly seems to threaten that form, and which we are told is essentially gender-blind. While this is not the place to develop such claims, we might reasonably at least venture a hypothesis: that the enduring centrality of gendering logics within capitalist accumulation may be inscribed in the capitalist form of value itself. Such a grounding for the reproduction of gender as such might provide some basis for overcoming the terms of the opposition between them. As Francesca Manning writes:

If we are truly committed to a rigorous and unifying theory of capital, we must *consider the possibility* that race and gender are as logically necessary as class is to this mode of production. We must follow this hypothesis as far as it takes us.

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2014. See also Pierre Macherey, 'The Productive Subject', Viewpoint Magazine, 2015, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productivesubject>, Marxist feminist influenced by Althusserian structuralism at one time or another include Michele Barrett, Martha Gimenez, Lise Vogel. For an innovative combination of Foucauldian analysis with feminist and black studies approaches, see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (Duke, forthcoming) and her earlier book, *Scenes of Subjection* (1997).

There has not yet been any good reason established as to why we should turn back from it.<sup>27</sup>

### Some Concluding Reflections

The centring of the category of labour, and its indefinite expansion, is a major source of indeterminacy in the social reproduction perspective. Conversely, defining reproduction too narrowly, in terms of a set of gendered tasks, runs the risk of naturalizing a historically and geographically specific division of social labour. The separation of reproductive labour as a political matrix from its position in the reproduction of capital is a common *telos* of the way political implications are drawn from social reproduction theory, and one which can generate unwelcome effects, such as the moralisation of care, particularly in times of social crisis, and the inadvertent confirmation of existing gender roles. Some examples of this can be found in voices that enunciate the feminist stakes of the ‘reproductive commons’, whose proposal to resolve the current crises of reproduction is the self-management of reproduction, staking all on the transvaluation of subsistence into practices of autonomy.<sup>28</sup>

However, Arruzza and Bhattacharya see the indeterminacy of the social reproduction perspective as a plus rather than a drawback.<sup>29</sup> This is from both an analytic standpoint, because a theory that is conceptually ambiguous is responsive to historical and social context and is less likely to harden into academicism and orthodoxy, and from a political one, enhancing the possibilities of coalitional politics, as evidenced in Arruzza and Bhattacharya’s roles in the organisation of the recent Global Women's Strikes. Additionally, approaches that take issue with this particular type of focus on reproductive labour have started to emerge, which engage with this

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<sup>27</sup> Francesca Manning, ‘Closing the Conceptual Gap: A Response to Cinzia Arruzza’s ‘Remarks on Gender’, *Viewpoint Magazine*, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Silvia Federici, ‘Feminism and the Politics of the Commons’, *The Commoner*, 2011, <http://commoner.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2011/01/federici-feminism-and-the-politics-of-commons.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Find Arruzza and Bhattacharya refs on this point.

indeterminacy. Some of these deal with the concept of social reproduction as a status mediated by legal forms and stratifications of personhood, or on the implicit normativity of social reproduction's focus on the family as a site of the production of use values that can be turned into the material bedrock of revolutionary subjectivity.<sup>30</sup>

Keeping this in mind, we aim not to raise a barrier between reproduction and production but to situate them in a continuum, while also seeing how it is that gendered, racialised, sexualised forms of exploitation and domination are the infrastructure of that continuum, logically and materially.<sup>31</sup> The hard question remains why it is that various forms of devalued labour continue to be naturalised onto certain kinds of bodies, despite the major fragmentations and shifts in the social structure presented by global migration, the (re-)commodification of domestic labour, and the increasing porousness of gender.

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<sup>30</sup> Gonzalez, forthcoming; Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*, Zone Books, New York, 2018; Angela Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia*, Minor Compositions, Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> However, we would suggest that the indeterminacy we have outlined as an ongoing problematic for social reproduction theory can be addressed with closer attention to the host of legal, financial and political determinations that shape the conditions of social reproduction. Gimenez queries the use of 'social reproduction' in Marxist feminist theory and suggests we should be talking about 'capitalist social reproduction' instead so it is clear we are talking about social reproduction insofar as it is determined by the capitalist mode of production, which makes it a historically delimited category rather than an indeterminate one. See 'From Social Reproduction to Capitalist Social Reproduction' in *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction: Marxist Feminist Essays*, op. cit, pp 278-308.