



The Arcane of Reproduction

Housework,

Prostitution,

Labor and Capital

Leopoldina Fortunati

THE ARCANES OF REPRODUCTION

HOUSEWORK, PROSTITUTION,
LABOR AND CAPITAL

THE ARCANÉ
OF REPRODUCTION

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Labor and Capital

LEOPOLDINA FORTUNATI

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PART ONE

1

PRODUCTION & REPRODUCTION

THE APPARENT ANTITHESIS OF THE CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION

This analysis of reproduction begins by examining the transition from a precapitalist to a capitalist mode of production. Such an examination is crucial not only as a means of understanding the role/destiny of reproduction within the new mode of production, but also as a means of reaching a fuller understanding of the whole cycle of capitalist production. The transition itself is characterized by the fact that the *economic aim* of capitalism is radically different from that of preceding modes of production. In previous modes, the economic aim was the "production of use-values, i.e., the *reproduction* of the *individual* within the specific relation to the community in which he is its basis."¹ Under capitalism the aim becomes the production of exchange-values, i.e. the *creation of value for value*. Within capitalism, "production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production."² Hence "the goal of the economic system" is "the unhappiness of society,"³ and not the reproduction of the individual.

This distortion has certain clear consequences. Firstly it leads to the *commodity*, to *exchange-value*, taking precedence over *the-individual-as-use-value*, despite the fact that the individual is still the only source of the creation of value. For it is only by re-defining the individual as non-value, or rather as pure use-value, that capital can succeed in creating labor power as "a commodity," i.e. an exchange-value. But the "valuelessness" of free workers is not only a consequence of the new mode of production, it is also one of the preconditions, since capital cannot become a social relation other than in relation to the individuals who, divested of all value are thus forced to sell the only commodity they have, their labor power.

Secondly, under capitalism, *reproduction is separated off from production*; the former unity that existed between the production of use-values and the reproduction of individuals within precapitalist modes of production has disappeared, and now the general process of commodity production appears as being separate from, and even in direct opposition to, the process of reproduction. While the first appears as the *creation of value*, the second, reproduction, appears as the *creation of non-value*. Commodity production is thus posited as *the* fundamental point of capitalist production, and the laws that govern it as *the* laws that characterize capitalism itself. Reproduction now becomes posited as "natural" production.

Within *production*, work is wage labor, which is carried out in "the factory" and whose structure and organization give rise to a specific type of cooperation and division of labor, as well as to technological progress. Within *reproduction*, work is non-waged, it is carried out in "the home," its organization requires neither such cooperation nor the division of labor and technology only to a limited extent. In other words, reproduction would seem to be governed by very different laws from those governing production; it appears almost as the mirror image, a back-to-front photograph of production. This apparent difference between production and reproduction has been interpreted in a variety of ways. It has been seen as the result of a lack of development, or rather as being due to the continued existence of strong precapitalist vestiges within the sector of reproduction. The latter has even been seen as being a "mode of production" in itself, which would make it a non-capitalist "island" existing in the heart of capital. It has also been interpreted as "natural" production, which has, however, become increasingly organized within a framework that is compatible with capitalist production.

But what does the separation of production (value) from reproduction (non-value) really mean? Although reproduction appears as the creation of non-value, it clearly contributes to the creation of value as a crucial, integral part of the capitalist cycle, as will be shown later. Thus the real difference between production and reproduction is not that of value/non-value, but that while production both *is* and *appears as* the creation of value, reproduction *is* the creation of value but *appears otherwise*. Despite their seeming separation, the capitalist mode of production is based on the indissoluble connection that links reproduction with production, because the second is both a precondition and a condition of the existence of the first. Arguably, though, reproduction functions in a more complex way in all its aspects.

While production work is posited as being work involved in commodity production (wage work), reproduction work is posited as a natural force of social labor, which, while appearing as a personal service, is in fact *indirectly* waged labor engaged in the reproduction of labor power. Furthermore, while within production the exchange between worker and capital is two-sided in the sense

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that it appears formally as an exchange of *equivalents* between *equals*, but is in reality an exchange of *non-equivalents* between *unequals*, within reproduction the exchange takes place at three different levels. It, too, is an exchange of non-equivalents between unequals, but it does not appear even formally as an exchange that is organized in a capitalist way. Rather, it is an exchange that *appears* to take place between male workers and women, but in reality takes place between *capital* and women, with the male workers acting as intermediaries. While the subjects of this exchange appear to be on the one hand reproduction work and on the other the wage, in reality they are labor power and money which both function as capital.

This greater complexity within *reproduction* has not only meant that the sector has required a *higher and greater level* of ideological organization in order to make it function, but has also made it harder to define and demystify the real nature of exploitation within it.

But if at a real level reproduction is an integral part of the process of production — or rather, if the value separation between production and reproduction is not to mean that there is no production of surplus-value in either — how does capital function?

The capitalist mode of production is formally distinguished by its *dual* character: production/value, reproduction non/value. But at a practical level it functions throughout the entire cycle of production (including reproduction) as a creator of value. Thus, while at the formal level capital appears to function as and to have a dual character, at the practical level it has but one character. The apparent dual character is only the condition which allows it to function at the practical level with a single logic, using both production and reproduction in the process of valorization, and in the exploitation of both men and women in order to create value.

Only by starting from the hypothesis that capital has a dual character can one understand how capital functions. The duality value/non-value also affects the whole area of reproduction, beginning with the individual. Karl Marx discovered the dual character that work takes on within the process of commodity production; but the same duality can also be found within the process of reproduction, but in the latter instance, however, as a commodity and a natural force of social labor. *It is the positing of reproduction as non-value that enables both production and reproduction to function as the production of value.*

This duality allows the capitalist mode of production to function at a much higher level of productivity than could be attained in any of the preceding modes of production. It has been rendered so much more productive not only by the extension of the working day to the humanly possible limits, but also through reproduction being posited as "natural production," which has enabled *two* workers to be exploited with *one* wage, and the entire cost of reproduction to be unloaded onto the labor force. Thus it becomes clear that Marxian analysis

describes only one half of the process of production – the production of commodities – and cannot be extended *per se* to cover reproduction; and furthermore, that an analysis of the entire cycle of production cannot be made until reproduction has been analyzed too. This latter analysis can only be made if Marxian categories are not used dogmatically and if they are combined with feminist criticism.

A first hypothesis for the dual character of reproduction – apparent non-value functioning as a creator of value – is obviously connected to the fate of the individual during the transition from a *precapitalist* to a *capitalist* mode of production. While as a *slave* or *serf*, i.e. as the *property* of the master or the feudal lord, the individual had a certain value. But as a “free” worker under capitalism, the individual has *no* value: only his or her *labor power* has value. Thus the other side of the transition from pre-capitalist slavery to capitalist “freedom” is a total stripping of value. And it is because of this that the reproduction of the individual cannot be posited as an economic aim of capitalist production; neither can it enter into the sphere of those social relations that are directly governed by exchange-value. Indeed the inability to incorporate such an aim is both a precondition and a condition for the existence of capital and of “free labor” itself.

There can be no development of the social relations of production mediated by exchange-value if there is no corresponding development of the social relations of reproduction which are not mediated by the exchange with capital. Reproduction must be posited as being the opposite, the counterpart, of commodity production and must appear to be the production of individuals and thus, as the creation of non-value. More specifically, it must appear as a “natural process,” and the work of reproduction must seem to be a natural force of social labor that costs capital nothing.

However, there is a *commodity* contained *within* the individual: that *labor power* which as *capacity for production* has exchange-value. Thus individuals are value, even if they are so only when they exchange this commodity with capital. The temporal limitation of the “individual as value” derives from the fact that “for capital, the worker is not a condition of production, only labor is”,⁴ and the fact that capital “does not appropriate the worker, but his labor – not directly but mediated through exchange”.⁵ It is labor that, when it is in opposition to capital, has a value, a “*pure use-value*, which is offered as a commodity by its possessor himself in exchange for it, for its *exchange-value*.”⁶

The conflicting presence of value and non-value contained within individuals themselves obviously creates a specific and irresolvable contradiction. The individual as non-value is opposed to him/herself, by capital, as a commodity, labor-power, which is the capacity for commodity production, and hence as value, exchange-value. It is a juxtaposition that takes place between the individual in relation to his/her reproduction and the individual in relation to commodity production. As *subject/object in reproduction work* individuals have no value,

but they do have a specific value as *subjects of commodity production work*. Since, in capitalism, individuals exist as non-value only insofar as they are value and vice versa, they also exist as producers of commodities only insofar as they are pure use-value. The reproduction of individuals implies the reproduction of the labor-power contained within them.

This means that individuals are obliged by capital to reproduce themselves *only* as labor power, i.e., as *value*, which implies a creation of value, but that individuals *cannot* create value *for* themselves. Rather, they can only present themselves in relation to their *capacity to produce*, only as exchange-value and not as use-value. When selling their labor power on the capitalist market, individuals cannot offer it as the product of their work of reproduction, as value, because then *they themselves* would have value. In this instance "free labor" would then become a condition of production, and it is only *work*, and not the *worker* that can be a condition. Individuals can only offer their labor as pure use-value, which capital buys with the wage. In buying it, capital appropriates this use-value for its own self-valorization. And it appropriates it not mediated by a *direct exchange* between the individual and capital precisely because, as argued above, the individual can have no value. Instead it appropriates it *indirectly*, through the exchange between the individual-as-capacity-for-production and capital itself.

Thus individuals create value *for* capital, and capital's expropriation can take place because individuals expropriate themselves. But how does this happen? Individuals only formally own their labor power: labor power as capacity for production. But because they cannot sell this latter to capital as use-value, every time they sell it, they expropriate themselves of the product of their reproduction work, of the value of their labor power as capacity for production. Consequently, a condition of the existence of labor power as capacity for production, and hence of capital, is that labor power can have exchange-value only insofar as the individual reproduces it as non-value, and only insofar as the creation of value during the process of reproduction represents itself as the creation of non-value.

This, therefore, is reproduction's dual character within capitalism. With regard to the individual, it formally represents itself as the creation of non-value. In reality however, for capital, it is the creation of value; in other words, it is only by positing the process of reproduction as "natural" and reproduction work as a "natural force of social labor" that costs capital nothing, that capital can valorize itself. And only by creating this duality within the individual him/herself can capital de-valorize the individual.

This dual character of the capitalist individual is thus revealed by the co-existence within him/her of labor power as (1) the capacity to *produce commodities* and labor power as (2) the capacity to *reproduce individuals as labor power*. Thus, as even Marx realized, there is no necessarily direct correspondence

between labor power and the capacity to produce commodities. Instead labor power has two faces, which are separated by value; the first face confronts capital as a commodity (exchange-value), and the second face appears as a non-commodity, as a pure use-value (a "natural force of social labor").

So the duality of the capitalist mode of production also pervades labor power. It pervades labor power as the *capacity to reproduce*, too, because this latter appears on the one hand as (1) a "natural" force of social labor in relation to capital and appears on the other hand as (2) a commodity in relation to labor power as capacity for production — i.e. as exchange-value. Indeed, wearing its face of labor power as capacity-for-production, it can posit itself as a good, an exchange-value, *only insofar as* it represents itself to capital as non-value.

A condition of the existence of production based on exchange-value is, therefore, that the *exchange of objectified* labor (as exchange-value) with the *living* labor of reproduction of individuals as labor power (as use-value) does not take place in a mediated form, as it does between worker and capital. In other words, the objects of the former exchange (i.e. reproduction work and variable capital) cannot both represent themselves as exchange-values, because then labor power as capacity to reproduce individuals would have an exchange-value and would not appear as a "natural" force. Marx stresses that "the condition of exchange-value is its measurement by labor time and hence living labor — not its value — as measure of values."⁷

In this context, the subjective conditions of reproduction work are posited as separate from those of production work.

While, in pre-capitalist modes of production, the worker had the same relation to both the subjective conditions of the production of use-values and to those of the reproduction of individuals, this identity and coincidence breaks down under capitalism. The former oppose themselves to free workers as capital, and the latter as variable capital. Despite being in different forms, they do however oppose themselves to free workers in the same way.

Just as in the process of production "the side which appears as capital has to possess raw materials, instruments of labor, and the necessities of life so that the worker can live during production, before production is completed",⁸ so too, in the process of reproduction, that part which appears as variable capital must be able to buy raw materials, instruments of labor and the means of subsistence, in order that labor power can live during production, before production is completed. This means that capital valorizes itself simultaneously through both reproduction and production, two fronts for the two sides to its process of valorization. The two-sided nature of this latter process we will examine later, but it stems from the two-sided nature of the value of labor power which, as has been seen, presents itself as the creative subject on both these sides of production.

Thus *labor power is the most precious commodity for capital*, not only because it is *the only commodity capable of creating value during the process*

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of production, but also because it reproduces itself as value within the process of reproduction.

This separation of labor power into two functions – capacity for production and capacity for reproduction – has another aspect. It has a *sexual* connotation – the sexual division of labor – revealed by the fact that the capacity to *produce* has been primarily developed in the *male* worker, while the capacity to *reproduce* has been primarily developed in *female* workers.

On the one hand, the “freeing” of labor power under capital has meant for the male worker that the ownership of his labor power as capacity for production was accompanied by the expropriation of it as capacity for reproduction, i.e., by *his alienation from the subjective conditions of his own reproduction* as labor power.

On the other hand, such “freeing” has implied, for the female worker, the ownership of her capacity to reproduce, which goes hand in hand with that of production. She has been, however, typically obliged to sell the former first, and only afterwards the latter. There is thus a very clear difference between the fate of male and of female workers under capitalism. While for the former the ownership of his labor power brings with it a literal “liberation” from reproduction work, for the woman, ownership of her labor power as capacity for reproduction does *not* “free” her from production work.

For his own reproduction, the “free” male worker must on the one hand confront “the objective conditions of production as his non-property, as *alien property*, as *value for itself*, as capital.”⁹ On the other hand, he confronts the objective conditions of reproduction (labor power as capacity to reproduce individuals) as his non-property, as the property of others, though not as a value *in itself* (as a “natural force of social labor” it has no value) but as value *for himself*.

At the same time the “free” female worker, as capacity for commodity production, like the male worker, confronts the objective conditions of production as her non-property, as *alien property*, as *value for itself*, as capital.”¹⁰ She, however, is confronted by the objective conditions of reproduction itself, not as capital, but as to value as variable capital, as to the value of labor power as capacity for production.

From this it follows that while the “free” male worker must necessarily be opposed to the capacity for reproduction as to the property of others, the “free” female worker does not necessarily have to be opposed to labor power as capacity for production. This is because, as argued above, she is not expropriated from this capacity. As non-value she can be opposed to variable capital as to value, the value of her own and of other's capacity for production. In other words the female worker, in order to reproduce herself, can exchange her labor power *as capacity to reproduce* either for the male wage or, if she works in the production of commodities, for her own wage. But in reality this dual aspect is never posited as an *alternative* at a general level; instead it takes place contemporaneously.

The female proletarian must, in order to reproduce herself, exchange her capacity to reproduce *both* for her own wage and for the male wage at a mass level. "His" wage has rarely been able to allow "her" not to do a second job.

Women, including waged women, are obliged to enter into an exchange with male workers for two main reasons: firstly, because their usually lower wages do not permit them to reproduce themselves independently from men; and secondly, because women's opportunities of reproducing themselves are subordinated to the general conditions of this exchange. Which is to say that for the woman to have, for example, an emotional exchange with a man, she must be prepared to carry out domestic work for him, even if she is economically autonomous; the emotional factor forces her to make the unequal exchange in which she works for him.

Thus, the process of the "liberation" of labor power does not historically affect men and women in the same way. The process is much more complex than Marx suggested in his outline, when, even in his historical analysis, he limited his considerations to the issues of labor power as capacity to produce and hence to the issues of the *male* working class. It is a process which runs along the lines of sex, bringing with it different paths towards the liberation of the worker *according to gender*.

From feudal serf the male worker became wage worker, expropriated of all he owned except his labor power as its capacity to produce commodities, labor power which he was obliged to sell within the wage relationship.

The woman's fate was more complex; from feudal serf she became first of all an *indirectly* waged worker. She, too, was expropriated of the little property she owned — obviously less than the man — except for her labor power, which was, however, seen to have two faces, productive and reproductive. She too has been obliged to sell her labor power (both labor powers), since she is subjected to two work relations.

Thus her crucial step in the process of capitalist "liberation" was not from feudal serf (an "accessory to the land") to waged worker, but to the status of 'natural force of social labor.' Hence the woman's "liberation" under capital was far more limited than the man's. What is more, the fact of having undergone a discriminatory "liberation" with regard to her capacity to reproduce has heavily mortgaged her process of liberation with regard to her capacity to produce. So as not to labor this point, one need only consider the sort of work assigned to women and the discriminatory wages that come with it.

The complexity of reproduction is obviously reflected throughout the entire mode of capitalist production. Not only reproduction, but also every other aspect of production, is far more complex than Marx himself realized. Many Marxian categories must be reconsidered, including the concept of capital itself.

From this brief outline, two things follow:

- (1) within the capitalist mode of production, the *exchange of work with*

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work becomes not only an exchange of *waged work* and *capital*, but also an exchange of *variable capital* and *non-directly waged reproduction work*; and,

(2) the first exchange cannot take place without, and is fundamental to, the second, and vice versa.

The fundamental nature of both these relations holds true at a general level for both the male and the female "free" worker within capital. However, while the first exchange is based upon the expropriation of labor power as capacity to reproduce, the second exchange is based on the co-existence of the two forms of labor power. In other words, it is based upon the fact that the value of female labor power as capacity for production presents itself at the general level as insufficient because the woman as non-value can only confront exchange-value within her own sphere. (The "female" wage is posited as *auxiliary* to that of the "male"). On the other hand, it is based upon the fact that *capital* (as value in itself, as property of the objective conditions of production) *posits itself to the woman* (as labor power capable of producing commodities) *to a lesser degree than it posits itself to the man*.

The acquisition of female labor power as capacity for production is regulated by capital in such a way as to guarantee the primacy of the "free" male worker's demand for her labor power as capacity to reproduce. This *subordination* of female labor power's *productive* capacity to its *reproductive* capacity is very precisely determined by capital in order to oblige the woman to exchange her labor power (as capacity to reproduce), with variable capital that corresponds to the value of male labor power (his wage), and not with her own (when she has a wage herself).

Consequently, the female worker confronts the objective conditions of production in a two-sided way. She can either (a) confront capital directly, or (b) confront the variable capital that corresponds to the male wage, or (c) she can confront them both simultaneously. While she may or may not confront the former, she must necessarily confront the latter, which is to say that she can confront capital as both "natural force of social labor" and as exchange-value simultaneously, or exclusively as a "natural force," but never as exchange-value alone. And she can confront the variable capital that corresponds to the male wage as both use-value and exchange-value simultaneously, or exclusively as use-value, but never as exchange-value alone.

The *exchange of work for work* within the capitalist mode of production also has a dual character, and would seem to be far more complex than it appears to be within the Marxist tradition. While in relation to the process of production it takes place in terms of the exchange between objectified labor as capital and living work as use-value, in relation to the process of reproduction it takes place in terms of objectified work, as the exchange-value of labor power as capacity for production and living work as use-value.

The work relation, too, would seem to be more complex than it appears. As

has been said, workers under capital are “liberated” to both the waged work relation within the process of production and to the non-waged work relation within reproduction. In fact, “liberation” to the latter is posited as a precondition and condition of existence for the former liberation. The “liberation” of labor power, therefore, not only implies that the male and female worker, by becoming owners of their capacity of production, are formally free to sell it as a commodity to the capitalist, but also that they are formally free to posit themselves as subjects of the exchange between reproduction work and variable capital. Thus with capitalism male and female workers have not only won the “right” to sell their labor power, but also the “right” to marry, at the formal level. Or rather – looking beyond the facade – *the obligation to work goes hand in hand with the obligation to marry.*

This is to say that capital does not simply posit itself as a waged work relation but as a dual work relation: *waged* within *production* and *non-waged* within *reproduction*.

In fact there are two relations of production, each one a pre-condition of the other: the relation of the worker with the objective conditions of production work (the waged work relation), and the relation of the worker with the objective conditions of reproduction work (the non-waged work relation). In the first case the individual as capacity for production confronts capital. But in the second case, the individual as capacity for reproduction is confronted not by capital, but by the individual him/herself as labor power as capacity for production, i.e. as exchange-value. We will examine some of the consequences of this second condition.

NOTES

¹ *Grundrisse*, Notebook 5, p. 485.

² *Ibid.*, p. 488.

³ *Economic and Political Manuscripts*.

⁴ *Grundrisse*, Notebook 5, p. 497.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Notebook 2, p. 289.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Notebook 5, p. 515.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 504.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

2

THE KINGDOM OF NATURE

THE REPRODUCTION OF INDIVIDUALS AS LABOR POWER

The reproduction of individuals in capitalist society is characterized by a dual nature (see Chapter I). This chapter will examine the organization of reproduction: the subjects, labor processes, and points of production.

Under capitalism, reproduction is made up of many different sectors. The *family* and *prostitution* are the main sectors, the backbone of the entire process, and are the only sectors which will be examined in detail here. However other sectors can be mentioned: (a) house work that is waged because it is carried out in families other than the family of origin (servants, maids, etc.); (b) the social reproduction of labor power as instituted and organized by the state; and (c) the burgeoning services sector run both by private companies and by the state as entrepreneur.

Within the two main sectors, the fundamental labor processes are: (1) *the process of production and reproduction of labor power* and (2) *the specifically sexual reproduction of male labor power*. This is not to say that the family does not include the sexual reproduction of male labor power, but (despite often being posited as central) it is in fact only one of the many "jobs" that housework entails (since it covers the whole range of the reproduction of workers as well as the production and reproduction of new workers). Prostitution, however, is limited to this "job" alone and is described by it; "male" is specified because despite changes the "client" is, at the general level, still male.

The first process posits itself as fundamental and general because:

(1) It presents itself simultaneously as a process of *production* and of *reproduction*;

(2) It *produces* and *reproduces* labor power in both its two-fold *productive* and *reproductive* functions, i.e. it produces male and female labor power;

(3) It presents itself as the process of production of both the *material* and

immaterial use-values necessary for reproduction, for the individual as labor power in his/her individual consumption expresses both material and immaterial needs;

(4) It presents itself as a process which during the course of production is highly diversified (and hence as a process that is tied to a *specific cycle of production*), given that the labor power embodied in individuals presupposes that they will be reproduced throughout their lives and so require a reproductive process sufficiently diversified to meet the different needs of each phase of life.

The second process however — *the sexual reproduction of labor power* — is a *corollary* and *specific* process of reproduction. Prostitution is corollary because its function must be to support and complement housework, it must make up any deficit in domestic sexuality, and because its range and extent of work is much smaller than that of housework. Consequently it is a specific, limited process with regard to the sphere of operations for reproduction work carried out in it, both with regard to the range of work operations (sexual reproduction) and the particular labor power reproduced (the male worker).

However both processes, while seeming to conflict, are also interdependent. Together they make up a process of reproduction, and the existence of one both requires and is a condition of the existence of the other, and vice versa. In both, the woman is the fundamental *work subject* because it is primarily she who is obliged to sell her capacity to reproduce. This remains generally true despite the recent rise in male prostitution and the increased male involvement in housework. The rise in prostitution should above all be seen in the context of the increased demand for sexual reproduction, mainly from men but also, to lesser degree, from women. The rise in numbers of house-husbands, single fathers and men who live alone, etc., while it reflects an increasing isolation between the sexes, is also the reflection of women's growing refusal to unquestioningly provide domestic services, along with the state's attempt to off-load onto men the responsibility for the services women are no longer so willing to supply.

Despite this recent tendency however, the woman, as capacity for the production and reproduction of labor power, still remains the fundamental reproduction worker. But she is certainly not the only subject involved, however. The reproduction process includes other processes which posit themselves as secondary within the family. She is necessary, but not sufficient; the production and reproduction of labor power requires a plurality of relations of production that presuppose, and imply, a plurality of exchanges. These secondary exchanges include: (1) the relation of production between the male worker as husband and capital, mediated by the female houseworker; (2) that between male worker and female worker as "parents" and capital, mediated by the future workers as children; (3) that between the future workers as children and capital, mediated by the male worker and female houseworker as parents; and finally, (4) that between the future workers as siblings and capital, mediated by other siblings.

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Amongst all these relationships of production and their relative exchanges, that between female houseworker and capital remains fundamental, because the production of future workers – the bearing and raising of children – constitutes not only an integral part of the reproduction of both male and female houseworker, but also the internal dynamic of the relationship and the subsequent dynamic of its regulation. This dependence of procreation on reproduction means that capital has always tried, and is still trying, to subordinate the reproduction of the male worker and female houseworker to the production of future labor power, making it thus the central aim of reproduction in order to guarantee a continuing supply of new population.

However, such attempts have not always been successful, as the consistent fall in birth rate in Eastern Europe, the USA, Italy, and other countries has shown in recent decades. At the same time though, as new areas of class struggle and sabotage have emerged, capital has tried, often forcibly, to limit any numerical increases among the "dangerous classes," as witness programs of enforced sterilization and birth control in Third World areas and among immigrants, etc. This is not to say, however, that wherever and whenever it is possible, capital is not still trying to guarantee its supply of new labor power.

The relation of production between the female houseworker and capital, mediated by the male worker, is fundamental and necessary but not sufficient to encompass the entire process of production and reproduction of labor power. Other relations and their relative exchanges are needed. It is all of them together that constitute the *necessary nucleus* for the production and reproduction of labor power. This is because the value of labor power, like that of any other commodity, is determined by the time necessary to produce and reproduce it. Hence the total work time supplied by the work subjects in this nucleus constitutes the necessary work time for its reproduction. It is also a *sufficient nucleus* in the sense that this time, these relations, and these exchanges must suffice for labor power to reproduce itself. Anything that goes beyond this "sufficiency" becomes waste, a luxury the proletariat must not permit itself. It is not by chance that under capitalism, while at the formal level there appear to be many opportunities for individual relationships, in reality there exists a high level of isolation between individuals, who are obliged to produce surplus-value even in the moment in which they reproduce themselves.

This necessary and sufficient nucleus of the relations of production constitutes *the capitalist family* which is defined as the unit of production and reproduction of labor power wherein the multiple relations of production and reproduction of individuals take place. (Obviously this does not mean that such relationships cannot take place "outside" the family, but the entire organization of interpersonal relationships within capitalism emphasizes and privileges family relationships, so the family can be considered the capitalist form of relationships of reproduction between individuals.) Within capitalism, such relationships

(whether they be of family of birth, of marriage or of both), are posited as cardinal, as the keystone of the reproduction of individuals as labor power. However, the attempt to restrict interpersonal relationships to a family context has never proved entirely successful and is indeed functioning less and less well. Firstly because in recent years the family itself has undergone major structural modifications (often as a consequence of women's struggles), today there are many single parent families, lesbian or homosexual units, couples without children, mixed communes, co-habitation, etc. Secondly because the proletariat is, for many reasons, becoming less and less amenable to being enclosed within the family, cut off from the outside world. The growing tendency to seek relationships outside the "family" has forced it to become more elastic temporally, more mobile geographically, more extended and less confined to relatives or kin networks.

Despite this, capital is still trying to make the "family" function as the sufficient nucleus for the relations of reproduction whatever form the unit, emancipated or not, may now have. It does this by trying to ensure that all the relations of reproduction between individuals continue to basically represent the roles defined by the family unit, i.e. husband/wife, mother/child, etc., thus creating the illusion, if not the reality of "family". But given that these roles are nothing but the relations of non-directly waged production, they are simply a representation of how these different subjects involved in reproduction enter into mutual relations apparently as individuals connected by family bonds, but in reality as subjects of different relations of production.

Thus women, as stated, are always the necessary even if not the sufficient subjects of reproduction work, for men and children are also necessary, but they are secondary subjects because alone they are not capable of procreating labor power, only of reproducing it at a primarily non-material level, at least in this phase of capitalist development. However, to over-emphasize this, their secondary nature, would be wrong, as they are the necessary complement to the woman, and important for reproduction. For example the female child (unlike the male child usually) takes part in the material work of reproduction from quite early on, as increasingly do male workers, for in this phase of capital's development with relatively high levels of female employment outside the home, some redistribution of the material work of reproduction has taken place.

It was stated earlier that the sector of reproduction is characterized by the creation of value, but since it appears as the opposite, the creation of non-value, it must necessarily function in a more complex way than that of production. This requires elaboration. In production, the elements, which are commodities, appear as such, and the process of production is the process of commodity production; workers are labor power, therefore commodities, but they are also the working class; work is waged work; the exchange is an exchange organized capitalistically; the relation of production is the waged work relation. Thus it is not at this level that capital hides its voracity in the appropriation of value or the

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violence of its exploitation, but at the level of the capital worker relationship which is in reality a relationship based on the expropriation of surplus-value, taking place in an exchange which, while appearing to be one between equals, is in fact an exchange of non-equivalents between non-equals. Within reproduction the elements concerned, the family, prostitution, labor power, the exchanges, and their relations of production are not actually recognized as being agents or elements of capitalist production. Here the process of mystification occurred a long way back, so far back indeed that the content of the relations of production within reproduction do not seem to have ever represented an exchange between women and capital, but between her and the male worker. The relation is posited as the proletariat's "private life" appearing as a relationship which, since it does not seem to have originated in capital, does not require any investigation as to whether women are exploited within it or not. For capital this whole sphere of reproduction is a "natural" process, composed of "natural" elements and "natural" relations. But this is not the real character of reproduction, value is, and despite being hidden, value is the dominant characteristic.

Taking the elements of reproduction one by one, and first labor power. This has two aspects, on the one hand there is the capacity for the production and reproduction of labor power, and on the other, the capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor power. In accordance with the centrality and function of their respective processes of production, the first is posited as fundamental and general work capacity and the second as particular and secondary. They are united, but juxtaposed and interdependent, the former being a pre-condition and condition of the latter. Furthermore, labor power as capacity for reproduction assumes a dual character, appearing to capital as a natural force of social labor, while to labor power (as capacity for production) it represents its work as a commodity in order to function as labor power for capital. This holds true for both the labor power that produces and reproduces labor power and for that which sexually reproduces male labor power, the only difference being that while the first appears as a natural force of social labor, the second appears as an unnatural force of social labor. This difference in the way they represent themselves to capital reflects the different opportunities each has to represent its value in money terms or not. At the moment that the former, the production and reproduction of labor power, posits its work as a commodity to labor power as capacity for production, the exchange-value of its work cannot be represented in money terms. Such a representation would contradict its simultaneous representation as a natural force of social labor. However, at the moment in which the sexual reproduction of male labor power posits itself as a commodity to labor power as capacity for production, the exchange-value of its labor can represent itself in money terms without creating any contradiction with its representation as capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor power insofar as it is an "unnatural" force of social labor, unnatural because it is "criminal", and there-

fore does not formally exist as a commodity for capital.

Analogously, reproduction work – housework and prostitution – has a dual character. The former presents itself to capital as a natural force of social labor, hence as non-work, and posits itself to the worker as a personal service, thus not directly waged work. The latter is for capital an unnatural force of social labor, and for the worker is a personal service paid for by money, but not directly with a wage.

The free female worker, too, has a dual character. As labor power with capacity for production and reproduction, she herself appears to capital as a natural force of social labor, therefore as non-worker. To the worker she posits herself as housewife, but is however a non-directly waged house worker. On the contrary, as labor power in its capacity to sexually reproduce male labor power, women appear to capital as an unnatural force of social labor, and therefore as non-worker, but to capital she is a non-directly waged sex worker (a), and to the male worker, a prostitute. Thus in reality, within the realm of reproduction there are two main classes: the capitalists and that composed of two sections of the class, houseworkers and sexworkers. It is from this complex situation that many of the particular contradictions of women's condition under capitalism derive. According to bourgeois ideology women do not work in the proper sense, rather, they have a mission as wives and mothers, emancipated or not; for the free male worker, women are either housewives or prostitutes, that is, they offer a personal service, whether for "love" or not; for capital, they must (a) the term "sex worker" describes the work carried out, and must be used until such time as a better term is found. be a "natural" force of social labor in order to be non-directly waged house or sex workers.

This explains why women, trapped in this complexity of relations of production which the male worker doesn't often recognize and oppressed by an equally complex series of ideological restraints, have such difficulty in identifying themselves as a section of the class, and organizing themselves. Furthermore, their struggles against reproduction work have never been taken up in terms of a struggle against work, given the fact that it is always represented as non-work. Only when women's struggles have reached a far higher level, have had a greater impact, will it be possible to show just what their work is, so that they too, and their struggles will be seen as part of the wider class struggle.

The exchange between variable capital and reproduction work too has a dual face. On the one hand it posits itself as an exchange between variable capital and housework, and on the other as an exchange between variable capital and prostitution work. But variable capital itself also takes on a dual character: in relation to the worker it functions as income, while in relation to the houseworker or sex worker it functions as capital. Formally it corresponds to the value of the male worker's labor power; in reality it corresponds to the value of labor power in its dual productive/reproductive aspects. Marx said: "The wage form

extinguishes every trace of the division of labor into necessary labor and surplus labor, into paid labor and unpaid labor. All labor appears as paid labor" (I), which is a true statement if one is only considering the male worker's working day. This latter must be specified because otherwise the other effect of the wage form, that is, that it transforms the houseworker's and sex worker's working day into non-work, cannot be brought to light, and the real impact of the wage form cannot be described. Contrary to Marx's argument, it is not true that all work appears as waged work, only that carried out within the process of production appears as waged. That which is carried out within the process of reproduction appears as non-work, or rather, is posited as non-work, and is represented as personal services and functions as non-directly waged work.

The relations of both housework and prostitution work have dual faces, too. In the case of housework, the relation does not appear to be between the woman and capital, but between the housewife and the male worker, thus it appears as a relation which is intended to satisfy reciprocal individual consumption and not the work relation it is – a relation of production. In prostitution too, the relation does not appear to be between the woman and capital, but between the prostitute and the male worker. In this case too, prostitution appears to be a relation which is intended to satisfy reciprocal individual consumption and not the relation it is – again a relation of production. Thus both these relations posit themselves as non-directly waged relations of production which take place between woman – as houseworker or as sex-worker – and capital, through the mediation of the male worker.

Coming now to the problem of how the relations of reproduction function between individuals. If the individual has been reduced to a commodity, labor power, then logically, relationships between individuals can only exist as relations of production, and thus that they can only reproduce themselves and others as labor power. Given that this latter is a commodity, its reproduction must therefore be subject to the general laws governing commodity production which presupposes an exchange of commodities.

Given the existing separation between labor power as capacity for commodity production and labor power as capacity for reproduction, the separation, by value, between the processes of production and reproduction and the sexual separation between the respective work subjects, the fundamental exchange turns out to be that between woman and capital, mediated by the male worker.

The commodities exchanged are, on the one hand, variable capital and, on the other, housework and prostitution work, which latter, while appearing to the worker to be personal services are in reality the commodity labor power in relation to capital. The fact that the subject of this exchange can only be, on the one hand the male worker and on the other the female house- or sex-worker explains why under capitalism all individual relations are posited as being both heterosexual and adult. Only the adult male worker has the "freedom" to sell his

labor power as capacity for production and by selling it receive a wage. Similarly, only the adult female worker has the "freedom" to sell her labor power in both its capacities – for the production and reproduction of labor power and for the sexual reproduction of the male worker – capacities which she can sell in return for the means of subsistence, in the first case directly, and in the second, mediated, i.e. for money.

Thus, heterosexuality is more than just the product of ideological pressure, of many diverse controls, for heterosexuality is the concrete outcome of the capitalist organization of interpersonal relationships. It is the result of specific, precise material processes. The spread of open homosexuality and lesbianism in recent years does not therefore signify a sudden, simultaneous change in the sexual tastes of millions of people, rather it is a reflection of widespread revolt and refusal of the capitalist organization of interpersonal relationships. It represents a profound crisis within the organization of reproduction itself, threatening the existence of the most fundamental exchange, that between male worker and female houseworker.

This is not to say that a rise in homosexual relationships will automatically throw reproduction into crisis. Partly because the heterosexual model is so strong at the social level, that often homosexual relationships will take on its features and roles. It is also because capital is always trying to incorporate any variations and make them function within and for its own structures and needs. However, the scale and organization of homosexual struggles has undeniably forced the state (or states) to modify their repressive attitudes, which often included criminalization, and has served to change many of the material processes on which the capitalist organization of interpersonal relationships is founded.

In capitalist society all generations are affected by capitalist organization of individual sexual relationships. The opportunity to have such relationships has always been tied in to the possession of, or access to money or goods which provide the individual with a means of maintaining him/herself. Broadly, those who don't work have no right to sex, not only because the sexual politics of capitalism have always upheld the concept of "sex as a reward" for the workers, but also because capital has always tried to ensure that those capable of reproducing are also capable of maintaining any eventual children. Thus non-adults are formally denied the opportunity of having any unworped, open relationships. However, the struggles of children and youth have been so consistent and so radical that they raise the doubt that this vetoing of sexuality for non-adults has ever been very effective. Today capital is finding it increasingly difficult to impose its will on non-adults, with the exception perhaps of very young children.

With regard to relations of production, as has been argued, individual relationships are restricted to family relationships. Capital allows only the male worker to be reproduced, sexually at least, outside the family as well as inside. The family is the main location where the reproduction of individuals as labor

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power takes place. But how are they reproduced there? Some clues to the answer are already available. Within the family labor power is the product of more than one work subject, the woman who is fundamental and the others, the man and children, who are secondary. Labor power's production thus presupposes that multiple sections of work time have been expended in different ways and by different work subjects; that every family member is a reproducer; that labor power as capacity for reproduction even if only for non-material reproduction, is to be found in every individual; and that this capacity exists from birth to death, even though the nature of the work carried out changes constantly according to the individual's age or sex. It is, however, only the woman who can freely sell this capacity, men and children are obliged to exchange it within the family itself. For the man this is because it is one of the essential conditions which allows his exchanges both with capital and with the female houseworker to take place, from the moment in which his exchange depends on his ownership of the wage. For children, it is because as non-adults, they do not have the "freedom" to sell their own labor power. The various ways in which each family member is permitted to sell or not sell his/her reproductive capacity are designed so as to tie each one more firmly to the family as the main location for their reproduction.

Within the family, capital posits the reproduction of new labor powers as being "necessary" to the male worker and female houseworker for their own reproduction. "Necessary" because, paradoxically, it is the only way in which they can widen their circle of fundamental relationships or, indeed, have any relationship with non-adults. The need to have children cannot be explained solely in terms of lack of contraception or "illegality" of abortion. However, capital is once again losing its argument of necessity, as more and more women are opting out of bearing children or are limiting the number given the cost in both social and monetary terms nowadays.

It is this reduction of interpersonal relationships to relations of production (i.e. the family) that underlies the growing isolation of individuals within capitalism. The individual becomes isolated not only from outside society but also from other family members with whom he/she has a relation based on production and not on the individual him/herself. Thus while capital, at the formal level, offers each individual great freedom of choice over with whom to exchange within the relations of reproduction, it is illusory, because this "freedom" is matched by minimal real opportunity for individual relationships.

NOTE

¹ *Capital*, Volume 1, p. 680.

3

THE CAPITALIST FORM OF THE MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIP

The changes wrought by the transition from a pre-capitalist to a capitalist mode of production brought with them the re-organization of the entire sphere of production, including reproduction. Under capitalism the reproduction of individuals became the production of value despite appearing to be the production of non-value. So what happened to the male/female relationship?

Throughout the history of capitalism, the exchange between men and women has undergone massive changes, above all, as a consequence of the development of the sexual division of labor. Simultaneously, it has been transformed from being a *direct exchange of work for work*, in its immediate living form, to a formal relation of production between the sexes. This is not directly evident, because just as reproduction has a dual character, so too has the male/female relationship, which appears to be a personal relationship but is, in reality, a relation of production. The radical nature of the transformation is such that it would be more accurate to call it a leap, a clear break between its organization under capitalism and its former organization within previous modes of production.

In order to illustrate this, the impact that the capitalist re-organization of the sexual division of labor has had on the male/female relationship will be analyzed and compared with the sexual division of labor in pre-capitalist societies. We will use Friedrich Engels's definition of the three major forms of slavery which, according to him, distinguish the three major epochs of civilization. Only thus will it be possible to outline the materialist history of the male/female relationship.

Our hypothesis has two parts:

(1) The power differences which arose between waged man and non-waged woman under capitalism cannot be compared to the power differences of male/female relationships either under slavery or under feudal serfdom. The qualitative leap introduced by capital is reflected in the depth of the division between man and woman. The man became part of the waged-work relation, the capitalist relation *par excellence*, and was formally defined as the woman's master. The woman, at the formal level, came to be excluded from any direct relation with capital, and was defined as being in a relationship of service with the man. Given this situation, not only did the man's social power become much greater than the woman's, but the relationship between them, by definition, came to be based on conflicting, antagonistic interests. The division of power is clearly reflected by the power stratification and hierarchy within the proletariat.

Men and women have never been so irreconcilably divided as they are under capitalism — but never also, has the mode of production itself provided the potential means to destroy the power structure. Going beyond any historical judgement of what capitalism has represented, its continuing existence today means barbarism, not only because it represents the theft of non-waged work from women — who are obliged to live in isolation, semi-dependent on men — but also because it is the theft of non-waged work from the man. Women are forced to work for capital through the individuals they "love." Women's love is in the end the confirmation of both men's and their own negation as individuals. Nowadays, the only possible way of reproducing oneself or others, as individuals and not as commodities, is to dam this stream of capitalist "love" — a "love" which masks the macabre face of exploitation — and transform relationships between men and women, destroying men's mediatory role as the representatives of state and capital in relation to women. The only realistic program for sex equality is one for the non-exploitation of both.

(2) In pre-capitalist modes of production the relationship between male slaves/serfs and women was seen in terms of a direct exchange of living work for living work. Prostitution work had no place in such an exchange. So under capitalism the male/female relationship has a dual character: firstly, that between male worker and female houseworker, based on the exchange of objectified labor with the living labor of the production and reproduction of labor power; and secondly, that between male worker and sex worker, based on the exchange of objectified work with the living work of the sexual reproduction of male labor power.

Since the beginning of the history of the class organization of society, the sexual division of labor within the family — the division upon which the entire social division of labor rests — has implied:

the distribution, and indeed the *unequal* distribution, both qualitative and quantitative, of labor and its products, hence property: the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where

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wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property, but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labor power of others. Division of labor and private property are, moreover, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity.¹

In this context, the male/female relation does not base itself on an exchange carried out between them, but rather women are posited as the objects of exchanges between men.

Slavery evolved from a rudimentary and latent relation within the family, to become the first of "the three major forms of servitude that characterize the three major epochs of civilization."² During this evolution, it was discovered that – like women – individuals within the family, regardless of kinship ties, could become commodities, and thus become the objects of exchange. The "class" relation between men and women changed, as did slavery itself, which no longer appeared as a form of production characterized by the father figure's ownership of women and children, but became instead a relation of production in which a father figure (*pater familias*) owned individuals – men, women and children – who were not necessarily kin, and who became the objects of exchange. Consequently, stratification began to develop within the division of power between men and women, a stratification which corresponded to the articulations of the various relations that now existed between them. One such relation was that between the "free" woman – a latent slave within the family – and the *pater familias*; another was that between her and the male slave; and another, that between the female slave and the *pater familias* who owned her. Out of this there arose a "class struggle" between men and women, as well as one between the slaves of both sexes and their masters; masters, as owners, were usually male, but could also be "free" women, who as wives (or children) of the *pater familias* had the right to exploit their husbands' (or fathers') property.

The extension of slavery *beyond kinship* ties not only improved the functioning of this relation of production, but also rendered women, in a certain sense, *equal* to men, insofar as both were *slaves*. As both male and female slaves were commodities, the property of the master, the relation between them could not be a relation of production; the only relation of production they were subject to was that which they both, individually, had with the master. Since they both belonged to the master, everything they produced belonged to him/her, including the product of their reproduction, their children. However, despite the fact that they were "equally" commodities, at a social level, the sexual division of labor still involved an unequal distribution in the quality and quantity of the

work they carried out, though the product of that work always belonged to the master. The division of power between male and female slaves was thus curtailed by the basic "equality" of their condition. The master's power over them was so comprehensive, so direct, that the relation between them was subordinated to his will, and to the conditions imposed by him.

Under these conditions the exchange between male slave and female slave was one of *living labor* with *living labor*: neither had any right to own anything or anyone in which objectified labor was contained and with which they could buy other living work. Thus their exchange was one of *mutual co-operation* with the aim of *consumption* of their product in all areas – except for themselves and their children, all of whom belonged to the master.

Under *feudalism*, the man and woman, as serfs, were less equal, and the division of power between them deepened. Although living under the same conditions – as accessories to the land, and property of the feudal lord – they each had their own – different – relation of production with him. As Marx said, it was the male serf who was "not only the owner of the piece of land attached to his house, although admittedly he was merely a tribute-paying owner, but also a co-proprietor of the common land",³ while the female serf only held such rights when she became a widow (and even then she could only hold them in her son's name).

This greater inequality in the production relations to which male and female serfs were subject was reflected in the greater inequality of their condition in general. They were *unequal* both in the workdays they were compelled to give the master and in the work-time that belonged to them. Within serfdom, unlike in slavery, there was an unequal distribution of the product of their work – not in terms of property obviously, since all property belonged to the feudal lord, but in terms of the possession, i.e. of the *consumption* of the use-values of their products, which was distributed in accordance with sexual division. Thus their greater inequality in relation to the feudal lord was translated into greater inequality within *their* relationship, and the power difference – the rift between the sexes – grew wider. But like under slavery, the male/female relationship could never be a relation of production; both were "accessories to the land," so their only relation of production was with the feudal lord. Here again, their relationship was subordinated to the lord's will and agreement – although serfs usually had to pay for any "agreement" given. Their relationship – though still an exchange of living labors based on mutual working co-operation for reciprocal consumption of use-values – reflected the greater inequality of their condition with respect to the quantity and quality of work exchanged and use-values consumed.

With the advent of *capitalism*, all labor power was "freed." Unlike any preceding mode, the new mode of production *formally* established a *different* production relation with *men* from that which it established with *women*. The sexual division of labor developed to such a degree that the work subject of *reproduction* was separated off from that of *production*; the two processes became separated by

value. The man – as the primary work-subject within production, was obliged to enter the *waged-work* relation. The woman – as the primary work-subject within reproduction, was obliged to enter the *non-waged-work* relation.

Given that in capitalism the only recognized relation of production is that between male worker and capital, *the inequality of power between men and women in relation to capital is incomparably greater than it ever was between male and female slaves and serfs in relation to their masters or feudal lords*. The real magnitude of the difference becomes clear if one considers that, while slaves *reproduced themselves* as “work machines” (being work machines themselves), and serfs *reproduced themselves* as “accessories to the land” (which they in turn were), the woman, under capitalism, *reproduces the waged male worker*; yet *she is not waged* herself. She is instead a “natural force of social labor.” The “free” male waged worker thus corresponds to the “free” female non-waged houseworker, a profound formal difference which is reflected in the equally profound inequalities of their mutual relationships under capitalism, and their unequal status within the capitalist system, which arises at the point in which *capital transforms the male/female relationship from an exchange of living labor into a formal relation of production between them*.

This transformation involves many elements. The man is formally given the right/duty to establish a relation of production with the woman. Their relationship is, and formally posits itself as, a relation of production because their exchange appears as an exchange between objectified labor – exchange-value – with living labor. It is no longer an exchange of living labor for mutual consumption, neither is it based on the working co-operation of both; it is rather a specific relation of production in which the man formally exchanges his wage for the living labor of the woman. Thus, although this exchange *appears* formally to take place between the man and the woman, *in reality* it is the form that the relation of production between women and capital takes, which is a non-directly waged exchange.

The transformation to capitalism thus also implies a restructuring of the pattern of *consumption* within male/female relationships. While in precapitalist modes of production the relationship required no separation between the work subject and the subject of consumption – since both worked for each other and both consumed the product – now, under capitalism, because the man buys the woman’s labor power with his wage, such a separation is clearly necessary.

Furthermore, the subject who expropriates the product of the woman’s reproduction work also changes. In preceding modes, both men and women were directly expropriated of the product of their work of reproduction of individuals as exchange-value by the *master* or the *feudal lord*. Under capitalism, *only the woman* is formally expropriated of the product of her work of reproduction of individuals as labor power. However, capital does not directly expropriate her; *labor power* does, i.e. the very product of her work itself,

because it is a pre-condition and condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production that labor power must formally belong to the individual who contains it: the "free" worker.

Just as labor power becomes "free" under capitalism, so too the exchange between men and women is "freed." In preceding modes of production this exchange was subordinated to the will and approval of the master or feudal lord. Now it no longer depends upon a third party's consensus; it is "free," and "free" in another aspect too, in that the man and woman are – within certain limits – "free" to choose with whom they wish to exchange themselves.

These transformations effected by capital refer to the male/female relationship at the general level only. At a more specific level, the male/prostitute relationship has been just as radically modified, and the apparent continuity between precapitalist and capitalist prostitution work turns out to be illusory.

It has been argued that in precapitalist modes of production the exchange between men and women was one of living labor for living labor. This is true, but with one exception: the exchange between man and prostitute. The objects of this exchange were basically money and the living work of the sexual reproduction of individuals.

In this instance money appears as hoarded wealth, or riches, thus the exchange implies a type of relationship which involved men who had the right to own themselves, or to hold wealth – e.g. feudal lords, priests, etc. – (although it did not categorically exclude male serfs, as it is probable that prostitution work could also be paid for in kind).

Within capitalism, however, this type of relationship primarily involves the male worker. The money exchanged is no longer wealth but *variable capital*, the *wage*. Prostitution changes from being a profession to being non-directly waged work even though it is paid for with money. The fact that the prostitute works for the worker implies that the waged-work relation requires the parallel development of this specific form of male/female exchange. Capitalist development thus means the development of prostitution.

NOTES

¹ *The German Ideology*, pp. 52–53.

² *Origins of the Family*.

³ *Capital*, Ch. 27, Note 1, p. 877.

4

HOUSEWIVES, PROSTITUTES, AND WORKERS

THEIR EXCHANGES

Let's summarize the previous arguments. The capitalist male/female relationship is not one of individuals but rather a relation of production, an exchange which takes place between women and capital, mediated by men. It is a highly complex relationship, which operates through duality, a juxtaposing of its formal appearance and its real functioning. Its complexity is, obviously, reflected in its exchange, which has two faces. On the one hand it is an exchange between *variable capital* and *housework*, and on the other, an exchange between *variable capital* and *prostitution work*. And in its turn it takes on a dual character, appearing at the formal level as an exchange between the male worker's wage and the female worker's housework or prostitution work, while in reality it is the exchange between variable capital and housework, i.e. capital and the female worker, mediated by the male worker.

The dual character of the exchange of variable capital and reproduction work is a necessary condition for its existence because capital can only exchange itself indirectly with the labor power of *reproduction*, because such labor power must appear as a "natural force of social labor." It must have a mediator, and that mediator is the male worker, who thus confronts the houseworker and the sexworker as a form of capital, which is the real subject of the exchange. So capital makes the labor power of reproduction appear as personal services given to the male worker by female reproduction workers for whom such "services" are non-directly waged work.

The degree of complexity of the exchange between women and capital is

clear, and it is equally clear that such complexity is necessary for this exchange to function in a capitalist way. This implies that it is not only the *form*, but also the *act* itself of the exchange, as well as the essential conditions, that are very different at the formal level from those necessary in the exchange between male worker and capital. To be more precise, the exchange between *female houseworker* and capital is *even more* different from that between *male worker* and capital than is that between *sexworker* and capital, because since the latter is represented by a price, it has something at least in common with the wage relation. However, *all reproduction work is in reality non-waged work*, and this remains its most salient feature.

Contrary to a widely held belief, such diversity does *not* serve to demonstrate that these exchanges are *not* organized in a capitalist way, for they are; the diversity exists only at the formal level and not at the real level. As will be shown, they are *not* exchanges of *equivalents*. Just as capital, in the exchange with labor power as capacity for production, expropriates the work-time of the male worker without exchange, but through the form of the exchange, so too does it expropriate the work-time of the houseworker or prostitute even if indirectly, through the mediation of the male worker.

It should be noted here that just as the fundamental relation of reproduction is no longer *necessarily* the male/female relationship (that is, the one examined here as exemplary), but can be male/male, female/female, male/females, etc., so too can the fundamental exchange be articulated in various ways. There has been, and still is, mass struggle against the major inequalities of men's and women's situations, struggle which has taken place not only within the context of the male/female exchange relationship, but which has also expressed itself as *a refusal of the exchange itself*. The development of various alternative exchanges (lesbian, gay male, communal etc.), seems to offer potentially more equal opportunities for exchange, but at a social level, the male/female power relationship is so influential that in practice it is difficult to modify or escape from it, to create a more equal relationship between those exchanging. But even when there is *some* success, and *more* equality, there is *no less expropriation of surplus-value* on capital's part, there is only a *more equal distribution* of its exploitation of the labor power of reproduction. However, capital does not escape unscathed from any changes like these, which affect reproduction's overall functioning. For example, the specific redistribution of income that capital needs within the proletariat may break down if the male wage "marries" another male wage, instead of going to supplement the usually lower female wage, and to "buy" the female worker's housework labor power.

However, here the male/female relationship — still the most widespread form — is examined. The most obvious difference between the exchange between female houseworker and capital, mediated by the worker, and the exchange between male worker and capital, is that while the latter is posited at the formal

level as being an exchange of *equivalents*, the former, even at the formal level, does not appear as such. This is because the objects exchanged – variable capital and labor power as the capacity for the production and reproduction of labor power – are not both posited as being exchange-values: the labor power in question is posited as use-value, i.e. exchange non-value. This does not mean that such labor power has *no* exchange-value because the houseworker can posit housework as a unit of value and exchange-value, but only insofar as her labor power appears to capital as a “natural force of social labor,” thus only to the extent that capital does not exchange directly with her, i.e., confront her as the owner of the objective conditions of reproduction.

In other words, she can sell her housework to the male worker because he needs it for his personal consumption, for his reproduction as labor power. The male worker buys it, but is in reality buying her labor power in its capacity for the production and reproduction of labor power. Such an exchange-value cannot, however, appear at a formal – hence monetary – level, since this would mean that female labor power had exchange-value. But this value is defined by the quantity of work produced by the female houseworker, i.e., only by the labor time necessary to produce the female houseworker.

Hence the main object of this exchange – variable capital – appears as exchange-value, but only as particular type of exchange-value. As Marx says, variable capital is posited as:

a direct object of need, not exchange-value as such. He [the male worker] does obtain money, it is true, but only in its role as coin, i.e., only as a self-sustaining and vanishing mediation. What he obtains from the exchange is therefore not exchange-value, not wealth, but a means of subsistence, objects for the preservation of his life, the satisfaction of his need in general, physical, social etc. It is a specific equivalent in means of subsistence, in objectified labor measured by the cost of production of his labor.¹

But this only applies to the male worker. In relation to the female houseworker, variable capital functions, in reality, as capital. At the formal level, the exchange mediated by the male worker between capital and the female houseworker does not appear as an exchange of true exchange-values. On the one hand there is variable capital, which is an exchange-value although not posited as such, and on the other there is female labor power, a non-exchange-value, posited as exchange-value for the woman in the form of housework. However these cannot appear as true exchange-values because this exchange must not appear to be organized in a capitalist way, since at the formal level capital is not a subject of the exchange. At the real level though, it is an *exchange of*

exchange-values. At the *formal* level – not positing itself as an exchange of exchange-values – it is not an exchange of equivalents. Nonetheless, it is an exchange of exchange-values at the *real* level. Its non-capitalist *appearance* is a necessary condition for it to function for capitalism.

Given that at the real level there is an exchange of exchange-values, it remains to be seen whether at this level there is also an exchange of *equivalents*. The exchange is that the male worker exchanges a part of his wage that corresponds to the value of the means of subsistence of the female houseworker, and she exchanges the housework done for him. She receives either money or the direct means of subsistence, he receives a commodity whose price is equal to the money or the means of subsistence he buys for her. Each *seems* to receive an equivalent, but in reality they do not. He receives housework at the formal level only, for in reality he is buying female labor power. So in this way he “has acquired labor time – to the extent that it exceeds the labor time contained in labor capacity – in exchange *without equivalent*; [he] has appropriated alien labor time *without exchange* by means of the *form of exchange*.”²

However, the male worker does not appropriate this extra value for himself, even though it is he who receives it. Just as the aim of his exchange with capital is not exchange-value as such, but rather the satisfaction of his needs, so the aim of his exchange with the houseworker is the satisfaction of his needs and not the appropriation of the value created by her living labor. He does appropriate it, but *for* capital, not for himself. Capital expropriates it, for when it buys the male worker’s labor power as capacity for production, it also buys the value of the female labor power incorporated in it. Hence at the real level this is *not* an exchange of equivalents, because the male worker receives far more value from the female houseworker than he gives her.

Obviously, if the woman is a production worker and has a wage, the exchange between her and the man will alter, since she will have greater contractual power. If, as has happened recently, growing numbers of women enter waged work outside the home, and work there more consistently, the terms of the male/female exchange have to be re-defined. Her share of housework will fall and his (perhaps) will rise. But again, capital’s expropriation of the surplus labor of reproduction work does not change; rather it is spread more equally, and expropriated from two subjects instead of one; only the mode of expropriation changes. However it is unlikely that male housework will directly substitute for the short-fall in hers, since there is growing pressure for increased socialization of housework (service work, outside laundries, dining out, etc.) which serves to reduce the amount of material reproduction carried out in the home. Another aspect of the change is that women’s greater independence as owners of a wage has led them to demand more recompense, money or goods, in return for their often reduced housework.

The particular features – the peculiarities – of this exchange are reflected in

the act itself, that is, in the way in which male and female are posited as individuals who exchange. The female houseworker, unlike the male worker, is posited as non-value: she cannot obtain money for her work, she receives no wage in exchange. The legitimate holder and manager of the wage always remains "the one who earned it," i.e., the male worker. Variable capital always posits itself as a "product" (the male wage): something produced during the actual process of commodity production. It never appears formally as the object of the exchange between male worker and female houseworker. Given that "as measures, money only gives the equivalent its specific expression, makes it into an equivalent in form as well,"³ the fact that this exchange of housework with the wage does not take place in monetary terms has certain specific consequences.

While the "free" male worker — by exchanging his labor power for money, the general form of wealth — "becomes co-participant in general wealth up to the limit of his equivalent — a quantitative limit, which, of course, turns into a qualitative one, as in every exchange;"⁴ the house worker — by not exchanging her labor power for money — cannot formally retain any part of the variable capital that corresponds to the value of her means of subsistence. The fact that her labor power, her equivalent, has no limit because it has no price (monetary value), means logically that she cannot directly participate in the enjoyment of the general wealth. She has no right to hold the money which represents the value of her labor-power, she only has the right to consume that part of the wage that corresponds to her means of subsistence. Thus, while the male worker "is neither bound to particular objects, nor to a particular manner of satisfaction,"⁵ the houseworker is always "bound," as regards the quality of her consumption, to the consensus of the male worker. Since she cannot hold money, and only use the money held by others, it makes very little difference to her whether she receives her subsistence in money or in kind. (It does make *some* difference, of course, because money allows her a degree of freedom of choice about consumption that subsistence in its natural form does not.)

Add to this the fact that the equivalent the houseworker gives the male worker has no formal limit — because it has no price — and it is clear that:

(1) *the houseworker's consumption has a quantitative limit, which will always tend to fall in respect to the worker's consumption, and;*

(2) *her consumption also has a qualitative limit of its own, which does not directly reflect the quantitative limits on consumption, as it does in the case of the male worker.*

But this is a situation that is constantly changing. Since World War II, women have been pressing their demands for greater control over consumption within the family and demanding that the wage be handed over to them directly. Even as the wage was becoming the main area of strategic struggle between capital and the male worker, the management of the male wage became an equally strategic struggle directly between the female houseworker and the male

worker, and indirectly between the female houseworker and capital. This development was ideologically justified, made acceptable by women who argued that it was a way of rationalizing consumption. It has led to the male wage being managed in a new – and sometimes *anti-capitalist* – way. Women have tended to use it not to guarantee the reproduction of the working class, but instead, to determine a level of reproduction that has gone fairly consistently *against* the interests of capital. The criteria for consumption have become steadily less productive for capital, and have contributed to the breakdown of the hierarchy within family consumption and to the *breakdown of the stratification of power* within the class. Increasingly now, it is *women* who decide both which needs to prioritize and whose needs will be satisfied first; women thus determine the quality and quantity of consumption in relation to the wage. It is the woman who has reduced *savings* – formerly a class defense against future life crises – and instead practised a policy of *total wage consumption*, creating a situation of continuing wage struggle. Certainly, the male worker often still has the “last word” in many houses, because he still earns the wage, but his word is beginning to count for less.

Other factors too are intervening between the possession of money and the transformation of this money into goods. During the 1960s, when spending the wage, women tended to prioritize children’s needs. A decade later, family consumption patterns had begun to take a new turn. Firstly, women began to consume more themselves, on their own behalf. The fact of the growing numbers of women who were earning a wage no doubt contributed to this, since it gave them greater weight in decisions about the family’s consumption of the wage.

Secondly, the family began to consume more than it earned. During the 1960s women had begun to abandon the old criteria for spending the family wage, criteria of abstinence, saving and sacrifice. The 1970s marked the beginning of a new phase, still headed by women, in which management of the wage was characterized by over-spending, by large-scale borrowing. Credit cards, buy-now-pay-later schemes, etc. became a means of inflating the wage, “spending today what would be earned tomorrow.” These devices increasingly characterize the dynamics of consumption. This does not ignore the fact that capital, for many of its own motives, was itself also promoting “buy-now-pay-later” policies to combat falling real wages, inflation, unemployment, contracting markets and the like.

The formal non-equivalence of the objects of exchange between the male worker and the female houseworker has precise consequences for the male/female relationship. In the exchange between the male worker and capital, labor-power – as capacity for production – is sold by the “free” male worker, its “owner,” who meets the possessor of money in the market where they “enter into relations with each other on a footing of equality, as owners of commodities with the sole difference that one is a buyer, the other a seller; both are therefore

equal in the eyes of the law.”⁶ In the exchange between women and capital, mediated by men, female labor-power in the guise of housework is sold to the male worker as a commodity, but not *formally* as a commodity. Consequently, when the “free” woman meets the owner of money – in the form of the wage – in the market, they enter into relations as possessor of commodities, but without equal rights, therefore *not equal* in the eyes of the law.

Thus, male/female inequality, far from being a relic of barbarism, is inherent, inborn and necessary for the functioning of the capitalist mode of production. *Under capitalism, men and women cannot be exploited equally*; capitalist society is built upon the inequalities of power *between* and *within* the class. Unless the feminist struggle for equal rights becomes a class struggle, a struggle against capitalist domination, it will always remain an unrealizable program of utopian reform.

Non-freedom must be added to inequality. Certainly the male worker and female houseworker recognize each other “reciprocally as proprietors, as persons whose will penetrates their commodities;”⁷ they both alienate their property with a free will. But the houseworker’s freedom is the “free ownership” of non-value, while the male worker’s freedom is the “free ownership” of value. As Marx said, “free ownership” is merely formal for the male worker; “free ownership” is only formal for the female worker too, but the freedom is *even less* for her.

The essential conditions necessary for the exchange between the female houseworker and capital, mediated by the man, are different from those necessary for capital’s exchange in the market with labor-power as capacity for production. But, as was said before, this does not mean that the former is a non-capitalistically organized exchange. Rather it is an illustration of capital’s elasticity, its ability to adapt its laws when necessary in order to apply them to the sphere of reproduction. In this sphere capital finds itself faced with a commodity – labor-power – which has certain peculiar and specific characteristics. The only way that capital can organize this labor-power’s production is to define a specific organization of its process of production and the related exchanges. The continuity of the relation between the “free” worker and the possessor of money as capital is clear only because “one is a buyer, the other a seller; both are therefore equal in the eyes of the law...” For this relation to continue,

the owner of labor-power must always sell it for a limited period only, for if he were to sell it in a lump, once and for all, he would be selling himself, converting himself from a free man into a slave, from an owner of a commodity into a commodity. He must constantly treat his labor-power as his own property, his own commodity, and he can do this only by placing it at the disposal of the buyer, i.e., handing it over to the buyer for him to consume temporarily. In this way he manages both to alien-

ate (*veräußern*) his labor-power and to avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it.⁸

However, the continuity of the relation between the female houseworker and capital, mediated by the worker, does not require, at either the formal or the real level, that she should sell her labor-power *only and always for a limited period of time*. Not at the formal level – where the sale appears as the sale of housework that is, as a personal service – nor at the real level – where her labor-power is posited as non-value. So whether she sells it for a definite or an indefinite period of time has no effect on whether she as an individual can relate to her labor-power as her “property,” because it would be the ownership of non-value. In her case, quite the opposite is required. She sells her housework – or better, her labor-power – with *no limit of time*, which is to say that she sells it for *an indeterminate time both in relation to the single working day and to the span of her working days, which coincides with her natural life*. Both capital and the male worker need her to have a working life bound by natural limits, only for different reasons. Capital needs it because, given the dual character of her labor-power, the more she works as a houseworker, the more it can exploit her as a “natural force of social labor.” The male worker needs it because he must reproduce his own labor-power, and this requires a level of consumption of housework that has no temporal limit other than the limit of his earthly existence. Thus capital has no wish to even try to limit the amount of housework time the male worker has at his disposal, since its aim is the expropriation of the living labor of such work. Neither has the male worker any wish to limit his consumption, since his aim is to satisfy his needs. So an essential condition of this exchange between housework and the wage is that the female houseworker sells her labor-power “for better or worse,” for an indeterminate time period, which is the *exact opposite* of how time must be organized within the process of production.

This means, on the one hand, that the female houseworker can only repossess her labor-power, formally at least, if she breaks her relationship with the “free” male worker; and on the other hand, that while the male worker sells his labor-power to capital for a determinate time, after which he repossesses it, she puts no such limit on the work time she sells to him. Consequently, her time for consumption for her own reproduction has no determinate limit either, and cannot be separated from the work-time she spends on the reproduction of both male and future workers.

However, just as in production the worker/capital relationship is no longer as continuous as it once was – with periods of employment increasingly alternating with periods of voluntary or involuntary unemployment – so too, in reproduction, the male/female relationship is tending to have a determinate time limit. The rise in divorce, the increase in short-term co-habitation and communal living, etc. represent the decline of the old concept of “life-long” relationships.

The second condition for this exchange to take place – namely, that the owner of money as a wage finds housework in the market as a commodity – differs from that between production work and capital.

While the essential condition of the latter exchange “which allows the owner of money to find labor-power in the market as a commodity is this: that the possessor of labor-power, instead of being able to sell the commodities in which his labor-power has been objectified, must rather be compelled to offer for sale as a commodity that very labor-power which exists only in his living body,”⁹ in the exchange between housework and the wage, the situation is more complex.

Like the male worker, the female houseworker cannot sell commodities in which her labor-power is objectified, and must thus sell her labor-power itself as a commodity. But she has *two* choices formally open to her; she can either sell her labor-power to capital in its capacity for production, or she can sell it to the male worker as housework or prostitution work. In practice, though, she is nearly always forced to sell it in its capacity for the production and reproduction of labor-power *before* she may sell it to capital either as capacity for production or capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor-power. On the one hand, the male worker is obliged to buy housework, so the woman finds a safer market there to sell her labor-power than she does for prostitution work. On the other, as female production worker, she finds in capital a buyer that is willing to subordinate this exchange to that of the male worker, and which does so both by regulating the quantity of female labor it buys and by keeping the price low. Both factors force the woman to sell her housework in order to survive. Capital must do this in order to create the conditions wherein both the exchange between housework and variable capital and the exchange between capital and production work are seen as essential and reciprocally necessary.

To sum up, the second essential condition is that women are obliged, by the terms of the exchanges, to primarily sell their labor-power in its capacity for production and reproduction of labor-power.

Obviously, this whole argument must be understood as describing the general direction for the development of capital's answer to working-class struggles around the issue of the working day in big industry, those same struggles which began centuries ago in England and spread even as industry spread throughout capitalism. During that initial period of industrial accumulation, the proletarian woman was often wife and mother *and* prostitute. With the advent of big industry, women and children became the backbone of the working class. At times the factory – the workplace – became a center of prostitution, too. Female workers, forced to sell their sexual capacity to survive, were commonly considered to be “easy.” Capital has always demonstrated enormous flexibility and appetite in its exploitation of female labor-power. It has never hesitated to exploit women as prostitute, houseworker *and* production worker as and when it required, and often as all three simultaneously. In some periods it has exploited her only as

prostitute. However, it has always sought to posit the sale of female labor-power as capacity for production not as an *alternative* to but as a *complement* to its capacity for reproduction.

The exchange between reproduction work and variable capital has yet another connotation. Unlike what takes place in the exchange between capital and production work, where

in all cases the worker advances the use-value of his labor-power to the capitalist. He lets the buyer consume it before he receives the payment of the price; everywhere the worker gives credit to the capitalist,¹⁰

the houseworker does not give credit to the male worker for the use-value of her housework. She cannot. She sells her labor-power for an *indefinite* time and cannot therefore be paid, as the male worker is, after "it has been exercised for a period fixed by contract, for example, at the end of each week."¹¹

Furthermore, (1) since the housewife's/houseworker's consumption of her means of subsistence cannot be separated from the time of the formal alienation of her housework/labor-power; (2) since the conversion of variable capital (the wage) into the means of subsistence of the entire family, houseworker included, is part of housework; and (3) since she does not receive money in payment for her work, then the conversion of a part of variable capital into her means of subsistence cannot be separated either temporally or spatially from the conversion of variable capital into the means of subsistence of the entire family.

But she does give credit on the use-value of her labor-power. She, like the worker, gives credit to capital, but in a different way: while the worker gives credit directly, she does so indirectly. For example, a male production worker paid a weekly wage gives capital credit for a week on the use-value of his labor-power, capital pays him for work he has already done. The female worker, however, gives capital credit on the use-value of her labor-power as and when the male worker bargains the price of his labor-power. Because variable capital also includes the price/value of the female worker's labor-power. When capital buys the male worker's labor-power with the wage, the latter is not only giving credit on the use-value of *his* labor-power, he is also giving credit on the use-value of *hers*. Capital settles two credit debts when it pays the wage.

A further factor distinguishes the exchange between variable capital and female labor-power from that between production work and capital. This is not so much the opportunity of *choosing* to whom to sell oneself, but rather of *changing the subject* to whom to sell oneself. The "free" male worker must sell himself to capital, but not to a certain capitalist; he can, within certain limits, choose which capitalist he will sell himself to. The female houseworker too has a choice (again, within certain limits) over whom she will sell herself to; her only restriction is

that she must sell herself to variable capital, she does not have to sell herself to a specific male worker. Where male and female workers differ is that her chance to change, to choose again, is more limited. Her "contract" – the period for which she sells her labor-power – is unlimited, so her choice must be, at least in general, seen as a final choice. Her relationship with the male worker is thus less easily broken by either of them than is the male worker's with capital. But for her it is even harder to break it. She has less chance of obtaining non-domestic work, of obtaining an adequate wage; in short, she has less social power.

Finally, the male worker, when he sells his labor-power, sells the "disposition over his labor which is a specific one, a specific skill."¹² The capitalist buys only a specific capacity. The houseworker, however, sells only relatively specific work to the male worker. It is specific in that it is the production and reproduction of labor-power, but only relatively specific in that given the particular nature of housework, its consumption requires the woman to use her labor-power in an unlimited number of ways, and use an unlimited number of skills which are entirely different from each other from the qualitative point of view.

"From whore to pope there is a mass of such rabble!"¹³

Let us turn now to the exchange between prostitution work and the wage. Like the exchange between worker and capital this too seems, from the form it takes, to be posited as an exchange of equivalents.

The objects exchanged are, on the one hand, the wage, *i.e.*, exchange-value, and on the other, prostitution work, work that has a price and therefore appears, at the formal level, to be a commodity, an exchange-value. The male worker exchanges that part of his variable capital that corresponds to the value of the prostitution work he buys. The woman exchanges her labor-power and receives money; the male worker receives a commodity whose price is, for him, equal to the amount of money he paid for it. Each seems to receive an equivalent.

But in reality the male worker has received not prostitution work but female labor-power. Hence he has "acquired labor time – to the extent that it exceeds the labor time contained in labor capacity – in exchange without equivalent; (he) has appropriated alien labor time without exchange by means of the form of the exchange."¹⁴

Hence in a second moment of the exchange between sexual reproduction work and variable capital, the equivalent received by the male worker turns out *not* to be an equivalent. As within his exchange with capital, his aim in making the exchange is not exchange-value as such, but the satisfaction of his needs, so too, in his exchange with the prostitute, his aim is not the appropriation of the value created by her living labor but the satisfaction of his needs. Once again it is really capital that appropriates the value of the labor-power of the female sexual reproduction worker when she sexually reproduces male labor-power; and, as in the case of the houseworker, it appropriates it indirectly when it buys his labor-power with the wage. This exchange is not an exchange of equivalents at

the real level. Here, too, the male worker receives greater value than he has given the prostitute, and the surplus is appropriated by capital. While at the formal level this exchange is posited as an exchange of equivalents, its subjects, even at this formal level, are neither equal or equally "free." The male worker can legitimately sell his labor-power, and is free to exchange his money which he obtained through his work. The prostitute cannot sell her labor-power legitimately; she is often criminalized; she is thus free to sell her labor-power as a commodity only in as far as this "liberty" negates her personal freedom.

It is no coincidence that the buyer of sexual work, the client, is rarely prosecuted; only the seller, the prostitute, is. To her non-freedom must also be added inequality, for although posited as equivalent at the formal level, the objects of the exchange are not equal. The money the worker exchanges is legitimate; the prostitution work she exchanges is not legitimate, it is illegal. Although they are in a reciprocal relationship as owners of commodities, they do not have equal legal rights, and the exchange is another denial of freedom and equality within male/female relations. The houseworker has an unequal relationship with the male worker; the prostitute has an even more unequal relationship because she is criminalized by it.

The essential conditions of the male worker/prostitute exchange bear closer resemblance to those between production work and capital than do those of the exchange between houseworker and capital as mediated by the male worker.

In the former exchange, the prostitute is – despite the limitations put on her – like the male production worker: the "free" owner of the labor-power she uses in prostitution work. Her labor-power is hers to sell, and she sells it for a determinate time only, just like him. And the male worker's disposition of her labor-power is limited, as is the range of operations that she is required to provide.

With regard to the second essential condition for this exchange, the woman is again excluded from selling any other commodity than her labor-power as capacity for sexual reproduction of the male worker on the market. Thus, formally at least, she is prevented from selling it in either of its other two capacities as production work or as housework for the production and reproduction of labor-power.

On the one hand, the woman is formally prevented from selling herself as houseworker and as prostitute at the same time, given that one person cannot at the formal level exist as legal (houseworker) and illegal (prostitute) subject simultaneously. On the other hand, for the prostitute to sell her labor-power as its capacity for production would also be formally incompatible. But in practice she can and she does. Nowadays, for example, with the crisis of the family so rampant, housewives and others are becoming part-time prostitutes, as too are students, workers, teachers, secretaries, etc. The division in the female job-market between prostitute and non-prostitute is thus blurring. Entering and leaving the two markets has become far easier than in the past, and prostitution has risen above capital's optimum levels. The rise in prostitution, coupled with

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women's increased absenteeism from housework, is dangerously changing the face of the male worker's consumption, where his consumption of housework should not only be complementary but also fundamental to his consumption of prostitution work, and vice versa. In response, capital has intensified its efforts to regain its quantitative control over the supply of prostitution work. The wave of repression of prostitutes is in reality capital's attempt to re-establish the complementary aspects of the exchange, and to once more place prostitution work in a secondary position to housework in terms of the male worker's quantitative consumption of it.

This exchange has two further characteristics in common with that of the exchange between production work and capital. Firstly, just as "free" workers give credit to capital on the use-value of their labor-power – allowing capital to use it before paying for it – so too the prostitute gives the male worker credit on the use-value of her work/labor-power. Secondly, just as the worker has a choice (within certain limits) about to whom he sells his labor-power, so too, the prostitute has a choice (again within certain limits) with regard to whom she sells herself – although her choice is relatively more limited than his because of her negation as a "free" person. However, like the male worker, the prostitute can change the subject to whom she sells herself (within certain limits) because she, unlike the houseworker, sells her labor-power for a determinate time.

NOTES

- ¹ *Grundrisse*, Notebook 2, p. 284.
- ² *Ibid.*, Notebook 6, p. 674.
- ³ *Ibid.*, Notebook 2 p 246.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, Notebook 2 p 283
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 271.
- ⁷ *Grundrisse*, Notebook 2, p. 243.
- ⁸ *Capital*, Vol 1, p. 271.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 272, ch. 6.
- ¹⁰ *Capital* Vol. 1, Ch. 6, p. 278.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Grundrisse*, Notebook 2, p. 282.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, Notebook 2, p. 272.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Notebook 6, p. 674.

5

IN THE SPHERE OF CIRCULATION...

A. WHICH CIRCULATION?

Into which relation of *circulation* do the exchanges between the male worker and the female houseworker and the male worker and the prostitute re-enter? As the previous chapter showed, our hypothesis is that this dual exchange – like any other exchange of capital whose aim is production – re-enters *complex* circulation, even though, given its dual character, it appears at the formal level to re-enter only into *simple* circulation, *i.e.* for the purpose of consumption.

But to argue this is to argue that both housework and prostitution work posit themselves as personal services which are bought for the purpose of production. This contradicts Marx's argument about personal services. While not denying that personal services bought for the purposes of production exist, he places them within a particular historical context, that of the dissolution of pre-capitalist forms of production.

It is not by chance that Marx takes personal services into consideration analyzing the "various conditions (which) appear which have to have arisen, or have been given historically, for money to become capital and labor to become capital-positing, capital-creating, wage labor."¹ These conditions, he emphasizes, at first sight show a dual character: "on one side, dissolution of lower forms of living labor; (relations under slavery/servitude n.d.r.) on the other, dissolution of happier form of the same."²

The personal services of "free" laborers, Marx continues, can be bought either (1) for the purpose of *consumption*, and thus the exchange of objective work with living work re-enters the relation of simple circulation, or, (2) for the purpose of *production*, which is true in the case of the period of dissolution of bourgeois relations. But in the latter case:

[F]irstly, even if on a large scale, for the production of only *direct* use-value, not of *values*; and secondly, if a nobleman e.g. brings a free worker together with his serfs, even if he re-sells a part of the worker's product, and the free worker thus creates *value* for him, then this exchange takes place only for the superfluous [product] and only for the sake of superfluity, for *luxury consumption*; is thus at bottom only a veiled purchase of alien labor for immediate consumption or as use-value. Incidentally, wherever these free workers increase in number, and here this relation grows, there the old mode of production – commune, patriarchal, feudal etc. – is in the process of dissolution, and the element of real wage labor in preparation. But these free servants [Knechte] can also emerge, as e.g. in Poland etc. and vanish again, without a change in the mode of production taking place.³

Here, personal services are clearly analyzed as being the opposite of waged work, and in all cases, even when they are bought for the purpose of production, this turns out to be the production of immediate use-values and not that of values. However, outside of this particular historical context, Marx does not accept that under capitalism personal services can exist other than those bought for consumption, and so re-enter simple circulation.

In bourgeois society itself, all exchange of personal services for revenue – including labor for personal consumption, cooking, sewing, etc., garden work, etc., up to and including all of the unproductive classes, civil servants, physicians, lawyers, scholars etc. – belongs under this rubric, within this category. All menial servants etc. By means of their services – often coerced – all these workers, from the lowest to the highest, obtain for themselves a share of the surplus product, of the capitalist's *revenue*. But it does not occur to anyone to think that by means of the exchange of his revenue for such services, i.e. through private consumption, the capitalist posits himself as capitalist. Rather, he thereby spends the fruits of his capital. It does not change the nature of the relation that the proportions in which revenue is exchanged for this kind of living labor are themselves determined by the general laws of production.

As we have readily mentioned in the section on money, it is here rather the performer of the service who actually posits *value*; who transposes a use-value – a certain kind of labor, service, etc. into *value*, *money*. Hence in the Middle Ages, those who are ori-

ented towards the production and accumulation of money proceed partly not from the side of the consuming landed nobility, but quite the opposite, from the side of living labor; they accumulate and thus become capitalists, δυνάμει, for a later period. The emancipated serf becomes, in part, the capitalist.

It thus does not depend on the general relation, but rather on the natural, particular quality of the service performed, whether the recipient of payment receives it as day-wages, or as an honorarium, or as a sinecure — and whether he appears as superior or inferior in rank to the person paying for the service. However, with the presupposition of capital as the dominant power, all these relations become more or less *dishonored*. But this does not belong here yet — this demystification [*Entgötterung*] of personal services, regardless of the lofty character with which tradition may have poetically endowed them.⁴

But what are the types of work that Marx sees re-entering this complex? He lists a series that he sees as exchanging themselves and obtaining “a share of the surplus product, of the capitalist’s revenue,” which are thus “unproductive.”

It is clear that here he is not taking into account the exchange between objectified labor as variable capital with living work as housework or prostitution work, which is destined for the individual male worker’s consumption. He does not take it into account despite the fact that it is the most visible example of devaluation of labor-power taking place within the capitalist mode of production. Marx omits it because he does not consider the range and composition of worker’s consumption. Or rather, he does not realize that the individual male worker’s consumption is not a direct consumption of the wage, that the wage does not have an immediate use-value for the male worker and that the consumption of the wage’s use-value presupposes that some other work has taken place — either housework or prostitution.

Only work can transform the wage into the use-values required in the male worker’s reproduction; but even then the use-values are not directly or immediately consumable by him. More work is necessary to transform these use-values into use-values that are effectively usable, i.e. ready to be consumed.

Again, it is work that produces the non-material use-values needed for the male worker’s reproduction. In fact, it is work that produces and reproduces labor-power. Ownership of a wage does not necessarily mean that the male worker will automatically be able to reproduce his labor-power. Neither does it imply that he will be able to use his capacity for procreation and sexual reproduction. For procreation, only the woman ultimately has the capacity to procreate, for sexual reproduction, because this depends too upon someone other than himself. Therefore he must use his wage to buy the woman’s labor-power, both

in its capacity for production and reproduction of labor-power itself and in its capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor-power. He must acquire them both in the guise of personal services.

Thus Marx's vision of the individual worker's consumption was limited. He saw it as made up of three elements: (1) the wage, (2) direct consumption of the wage and (3) the production and reproduction of labor-power, which latter is carried out in a direct way. The individual male worker's consumption and reproduction thus seem to coincide, to take place simultaneously; so too does the subject of consumption and the subject of work.

Clearly, by not recognizing the reality of worker's consumption, Marx did not recognize the exchange that takes place between the male worker and the female houseworker or prostitution worker. Furthermore, when he does examine the instance when the male worker buys work, he does so superficially, and concludes that the male worker's consumption (inasmuch as it is part of his individual consumption) is the consumption of work which is posited as a personal service and hence is unproductive work. As he says:

The laborer himself can buy labor, that is commodities, which are provided in the form of services; and the expenditure of his wages on such services is an expenditure which in no way differs from the expenditure of his wages on any other commodities. The service which he buys may be more or less necessary, for example, the service of a physician, or of a priest, just as he may buy either bread or gin. As buyer — that is, as representative of money confronting commodity — the laborer is in absolutely the same category as the capitalist where the latter appears only a buyer, that is to say, where there is no more in the transaction than the conversion of money into the form of commodity.⁵

But this is an explanation which, although it is never stated, only takes the worker's point of view into account, and does not consider capital's viewpoint. Thus his conclusion is not that this is the consumption of unproductive work because it is unproductive for the worker, but because it is unproductive for capital.

It is therefore important to recognize the aim of this exchange, because the female houseworker and the prostitution worker clearly do not participate in the surplus product, in the capitalist's revenue, but in variable capital in its role as capital. Thus, housework and prostitution work do not belong among that work which Marx defined as being "unproductive," *i.e.*, work which exchanges with the capitalist's revenue.

Housework and prostitution work are two specific exchanges, two specific relations of circulation, where the consumption of the work is, as will be seen, *productive* for the capitalist, hence *unproductive* for the male worker. It is con-

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sumption which takes place within the limit of absolute necessity. The consumption of housework and prostitution work are posited as a "merely incidental part of the production process" in which the male worker

provides himself with means of subsistence in order to keep his labor-power in motion, just as coal and water are supplied to the steam engine, and oil to the wheel. His means of consumption are then merely the means of consumption of a means of production; his individual consumption is directly productive consumption.⁶

Let us distinguish between these two exchanges. With regard to the individual wage/consumption nexus of the worker, housework re-enters within the limits strictly necessary for reproduction and those indispensable for the production of labor-power. The consumption of prostitution work also re-enters within these limits (not because the male worker has greater sexual needs than the female worker, but because he is able to satisfy them to a greater extent than is permitted to a woman).

Now if, instead of the single capitalist and the single worker, the capitalist class and the working class are examined, and instead of solely the process of commodity production, the entire process of capitalist production – in full flow, and in all its social setting – is considered, it turns out that the consumption of housework and prostitution work is posited as condition of the constant maintenance and reproduction of the working class. Since "the maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital,"⁷ it follows that this consumption "is productive to the capitalist and to the state, since it is the production of a force which produces wealth for other people," and it "is unproductive from his [the individual worker's] own point of view, for it simply reproduces the needy individual."⁸

But in what way is such consumption a moment in the production and reproduction of capital? Is it only productive for capital because it reproduces capitalist relations, or also because it reproduces capital as value?

Marx argues for the former. He sees the process of reproduction only as a process of productive consumption and not as a process of production (or of productive work). He states this clearly:

[A]s regards the worker's consumption, this reproduces one thing, namely himself, as living labor capacity. Because this, his production, is itself a condition for capital, therefore the worker's consumption also appears as the reproduction not of capital directly, but of the relations under which alone it is capital. Living labor capacity belongs just as much among capital's con-

ditions of existence as do raw material and tools. Thus it reproduces itself doubly, in its own form, [and] in the worker's consumption, but only to the extent that it reproduces him as living labor capacity. Capital therefore calls this consumption productive consumption – productive not in so far as it reproduces the individual, but rather individuals as labor capacities.⁹

And he continues later:

In so far as capital is a relation and, specifically, a relation to living labor capacity, [to that extent] the worker's consumption reproduces this relation; or, capital reproduces itself doubly, as value through purchase of labor – as a possibility of beginning the realization process anew, of acting as capital anew – and as a relation through the worker's consumption, which reproduces him as labor capacity exchangeable for capital – wages as part of capital.¹⁰

However, unlike Marx's, the argument here is that because the worker's own individual consumption consumes housework and prostitution work it is also productive for capital inasmuch as it *reproduces capital as value*. When the male worker satisfies his needs he has to continually devalue and under-value his money. He must always, and only, reproduce himself as a mere labor-power. But there is a certain amount of the work-time of housework or prostitution work contained within this, his labor-power. Hence there is also a value contained in it, a value which even if it does not interest the worker – because it does not add to the exchange-value of his labor-power – *does* interest capital, because it raises the use-value of his labor-power, use-value being the element which creates value and which is the substance that multiplies value.

So here we disagree with Marx when he says that within the capitalist mode of production the personal services of "free" workers are bought for the purpose of consumption; or rather, we disagree that his thesis functions within the sphere of reproduction with respect to housework and/or prostitution work. These, while being represented as personal services, are in reality bought not only for the purpose of production, but for a production in which there is a consumption that is doubly productive for capital. Thus the development of the capitalist mode of production has tended to destroy the personal services of "free" workers utilized for the purpose of production, but it only does so within the sphere of commodity *production*. Within *reproduction*, capital has developed personal services as the *capitalist form* within which housework and prostitution work relations – non-directly waged work relations – are represented.

It is clear that at the formal level this dual exchange re-enters the relation of

simple circulation, inasmuch as the worker buys the personal services of the woman for his individual consumption. In effect they enter into a reciprocal exchange of use-values; he exchanges the wage, the means of subsistence, and she exchanges the house or prostitution work, which he consumes directly. The difference between the past work contained in the wage, and the present living work of housework and prostitution work, posits itself as a purely formal difference of work-times, sometimes past and sometimes present. And there is only a formal difference, mediated through the division of labor and exchange, between whether the woman directly produces her own means of subsistence, or whether she receives them indirectly from the male worker in reciprocal exchange for the material and non-material use-values she produces for him.

But such use-values require a certain amount of housework or prostitution work to produce them, and therefore have created not only a use-value but also a *value*. This value however, does not exist for the male worker, since he consumes the use-values produced by the woman and does not trade with them. Thus within this exchange he receives housework and/or prostitution work not as *work*, which is the creator of value, but as an *activity* which creates something useful, a use-value, which he consumes as such.

As is the case in simple relations, so too in the exchange between male worker and houseworker there does not appear to be an exchange of values; the woman does not receive money, she only receives immediate use-values. The fact that the male worker effectively pays money for the housework he receives does not mean that his money is transformed into capital. Let us take as an example any use-value that the male worker needs in order to reproduce himself, such as food (not food in general, but food already prepared for his immediate consumption). Given that his interest in this food is to eat it, it doesn't really matter to him whether it has been prepared by the female houseworker, or a domestic servant, or the male/female worker in a nearby cafe. Usually, he will have adopted the first alternative, and will exchange with the houseworker because this is the most "economical" choice for him in all senses: (1) the food costs less, within certain limits; (2) the houseworker cooks what, when and how he wants; and furthermore (3) she also guarantees him the whole range of material and non-material use-values he needs in order to reproduce himself. Therefore it "pays him" to exchange himself only with her.

However, in all these cases mentioned above, the male worker does not transform the money with which he pays for the food into capital, he only transforms it into food. He uses the money as simple means of circulation, converting it into a determinate use-value. This money does not function as capital for him, although in the first two cases it also buys the work done as a commodity, it only functions as money, as a means of circulation. On the other hand, none of these people – houseworker, domestic servant or cafe worker – is a productive worker in relation to the male worker, despite the fact that the work of

each one of them provides him with a product – cooked food – and provides them the price of their work – either money or the direct means of their subsistence. The male worker is not interested in whether the amount of work contained in their product is greater or less than the amount of work contained in the money or the means of subsistence they receive in exchange from him; he is only interested in the use-value: cooked food. Naturally, since he must buy this use-value by some means or another, he is always interested in paying as little as possible for it, paying only a normal price, since from the moment in which it becomes an expenditure for his consumption it represents a diminution and not an accretion of his money.

The same thing happens during the exchange between the male worker and the prostitute, wherein prostitution work is accepted not as a use-value for value, but as a particular use-value in itself, as value for use.

These two exchanges, between male worker and houseworker and between male worker and prostitute, do not seem to produce wealth. Quite to the contrary, they seem to consume it. For the male worker, the question is not whether work as such is contained within the material and non-material use-values produced by the female houseworker, work that is, that contains a certain work-time and hence a value, but rather that his needs are satisfied by them. The money with which he exchanges with the female houseworker and/or prostitute is not money that by buying either housework or prostitution work seeks to maintain or valorize itself as money.

Housework or prostitution work are accepted here within the worker's exchange as particular use-values in themselves, within which the form of value is posited in a purely ephemeral way. The longer this exchange continues, the more the male worker impoverishes himself. The exchange of money (as wage) with living work (as housework or prostitution work) can never make money effective as capital for the male worker, hence can never make this work waged-work in the economic sense. This is obvious: the male worker, when spending his wage, does not produce money. Furthermore, because it is money that mediates this exchange, determining the "price" is important not only for the male worker but also for the woman. This "price" – the price of housework or of prostitution work – is economically determined by the relationship between supply and demand. It is also determined by the cost of "producing" a houseworker or a prostitute. But this in no way affects or alters the substance of the relationship between houseworker or prostitute and male worker, since such a determination always remains a formal moment at the end of the exchange of simple use-values.

On the other hand, at the real level, the story is a totally different one. The dual exchange is an exchange in which the personal services of the woman are bought with the aim of producing a commodity, labor-power. It is an exchange in which the male worker functions as the means through which capital acquires labor in its capacity for the production and reproduction of labor-power and in

its capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor-power.

There is no doubt that this dual exchange must re-enter the relation of complex circulation. In fact it *re-enters indirectly into the relation of complex circulation, but only insofar as it re-enters directly into that of simple circulation at the formal level*. The result is that both housework and prostitution work – which appear to have had all value stripped from them by capital, since they are respectively posited as “natural” and “unnatural” forces of social labor, and yet do have a “value” for the worker, since it is he who exchange with them – do in reality valorize capital and de-valorize the male worker.

There is one related exchange that does clearly re-enter simple circulation; that between the prostitute and the pimp. This exchange is born out of the prostitute’s “need” for “protection” within the type of work she does. In carrying out her work the prostitute can have no guarantee of protection from the “civil rights” of bourgeois law, because by being a prostitute she is considered to be an illegal worker and is criminalized. By turning to the pimp and buying his protection work, she is in reality paying for his existence as an illegal worker as well. But even in her relationship with him she can hope for no civil rights, which is one of the reasons why the cost – both in terms of the violence she receives and the money she pays – are so high for the prostitution worker.

However, “protection” is not the only feature of this relationship. There is also the reproduction of the prostitute herself, a reproduction that is even more problematic than that of the female houseworker. Unlike the houseworker, the prostitute has no need to find herself a husband to work for and with whom to reproduce herself within a marriage-type relationship. She already works, and is probably better paid. But she does need someone who will exchange with her for both their reproduction. This someone, who is willing to reproduce her sexually and emotionally, cannot in general be a typical male worker. The latter needs a “wife,” a woman who will be a housewife and who will cover all or most of his reproduction needs; he needs this woman, and not a prostitute, because he lives in another environment and therefore has different reproduction needs.

Thus the person, typically a man, who can reproduce the prostitute and reproduce himself within a relationship with her, in addition to “protecting” her, must be a non-worker who is either already illegal, or willing to become so, and must also be someone who does not need a “wife.” But in exchange for what he gives her, he will probably demand a very high price, both because the type of good he has to offer is in low supply, and because the relation between him and the prostitute will inevitably assume many of the same features as that between male worker and female houseworker. Even though she pays him, he will suffer no social humiliation from the reversal of the norm.

The one possible positive aspect of prostitution work – that by having “a lot” of money in respect to most other women, she does not have to do housework for a man – is effectively destroyed through the problems that capital cre-

ates for her in her own reproduction. Here, the sexworker is required to atone for the fact that she pays a man, and their relation must never appear in its true light. Even though it is she who is the owner of money in the relationship, she, through the circumstances of her own reproduction, is forced to pay the pimp so much of it that in the end he appears to be the boss who makes her work for him and who gives her a low wage. In other words, he exacts such a high payment for his "work" that their relationship appears to be the reverse of what it really is, and on the surface seems to resemble the usual relationship between man and woman.

However there is yet another side to the "history" of the prostitute's reproduction. It also can and does take place within the context of worker's reproduction. Many working-class mothers, wives, and sisters have been prostitutes, and a considerable part of the proletarian family income has always, and even today still does, come from prostitution work. At the same time many husbands have pretended not to notice how their wage is being rounded up. Also many prostitutes do manage to escape the "trap" of the pimp or other pay-offs. With the recent emergence of the modern struggle for prostitute's rights there has been a marked and inexorable decline in the career opportunities for pimps. The prostitutes refusal of such a relationship is the outcome of many different subjective and objective factors, amongst which are:

(1) A less rigid separation between the marriage market and the prostitution market after the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s. A woman who has worked as a prostitute has less difficulty finding a man who will reproduce her even outside of the "illegal" environment.

(2) The spread of open lesbianism has meant that the prostitute need be less dependent on men for her sexual and emotional reproduction, and that she can reproduce herself without having to pay a prohibitive price.

(3) The increased mobility of the female labor force in general, as nowadays women can move from place to place and from one sector of production to another far more easily than they used to.

(4) The massive rise in the numbers of part-time prostitution workers.

(5) Women's greater organizational power and women's solidarity achieved as consequence of years of feminist struggle.

During the recent years of struggle – by all women, not only prostitutes – it has become clear that the *state* is the prime target to attack, not the pimp or the client, who are merely secondary objectives. The state is the biggest "pimp" of all. Through fines and imprisonment, it is always trying to reduce prostitutes' income to the average female level – low. The state is the true exploiter of both houseworkers and sexworkers, and all women should and must continue to unite internationally in struggle against the criminalization of prostitutes. It is every woman's struggle.

B. THE FEMALE LABOR MARKET

The female *labor market* posits another side of the question within the sphere of circulation. It has been shown in the previous argument that the exchanges examined re-enter the circulation of capital for the purpose of production, thus living work – housework and prostitution work – re-enter that section of the circulation of commodities represented by the labor market.

Saying this, however, is to say that in reality the labor market is very different from how it formally appears. It has a hidden life, which has only been brought to light in the wake of the recent debate on the underground economy (the black market) which has grown enormously of late, and has thrown up a series of clear contradictions. But even before this, the feminist movement had succeeded in showing that the structure of the labor market was in fact far more complex than it appeared because it also included a large hidden “underground” sector – housework and prostitution work. Thus the new analysis goes against Marx, who excluded prostitutes and relegated them to “the lowest sediment of the relative surplus population... vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes, in short the actual lumpenproletariat.”¹¹

It is enough simply to be aware of capital's sensitivity to, and timely interest in, the sexual, racial and generational composition of the labor force in order to realize and understand that the labor market is not the same as the *waged* labor market as is generally assumed, but also includes non-directly waged production and reproduction work. The real functioning of the labor market is therefore very complex, above all because it functions at various levels, namely: (1) an official level, waged work; (2) a semi-official level, housework; (3) an illegal level, prostitution work; and (4) an underground level, “black market” work. It is also complex because it incorporates a variety of sections, all of which are governed by different laws and are separated from each other in a more-or-less rigid, organized way within a specific hierarchy, which latter reflects the stratification of power within the class.

What is of interest here, in the context of circulation, is the female labor force. This does not mean examining just the female waged-labor market, but also, and importantly, that of *reproduction*, the sector generally ignored by economists, which is nevertheless one of the main pillars of the labor market itself. This labor market of reproduction, together with the male waged-labor market, are the two most fundamental sectors of the labor market. Divided on grounds of sex, the first posits itself as a primarily female labor market, and the second as primarily male. This separation obviously only functions within certain limits, because categorization by sex must remain sufficiently elastic to permit the use of female labor in production when it is needed.

Such female labor, although secondary, is often used on a large scale. Proof of the elasticity of categorization by sex lies in the large-scale female invasion of

the waged-labor market since the early 1970s in Italy. This invasion has, however, in reality been channelled into a female waged-labor market sector, which in its turn has been kept separate from that of male waged labor, and has been posited as both corollary to, and dependent upon, housework, as will be seen later.

The scale of the invasion (for example, in the USA more than fifty percent of the female labor force is active in production) has not however much altered the position of female waged labor within the hierarchy of the labor market. In general, the female waged labor sector has remained inferior to that of men both in terms of level of earnings and of the "quality" of work done. Thus it has remained corollary to and dependent upon the housework labor market, even though waged work has been used by women as a lever in their struggles against housework, in their attempts to unload it firstly upon their husbands/lovers and secondly onto the state itself.

The reproduction labor market can, in its turn, be divided into two sectors: housework and prostitution work. The former is fundamental and the second is corollary. These two sections are also separate by legality, which divides licit from illicit buying and selling. As was said earlier, this separation has in recent years become far more elastic despite capital's efforts to maintain a rigid separation, efforts which have failed to stop women moving more freely between the two markets and which have also failed to prevent the growth of prostitution to the level where it is becoming non-functional for the capitalist state.

These two important criteria for the division of the labor market by sex and by legality, their interdependence and their complementary function, are all necessary in order to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the working class for capital. Capital ensures that this maintenance and reproduction will continue, both by (1) its "order" to the male worker and the female houseworker to "marry the wage to the non-wage" (to build the working-class family), and by (2) its "order" to the male worker to exchange his wage with the prostitute in order to "preserve" the self-same working-class family. The word "order" is used here precisely because when Marx said "the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation,"¹² he was right only if it is accepted that from the beginning capital has organized this "instinct" into a capitalist relation.

In this context, the first area to investigate in depth is that of housework, and in particular, the family, which has a specific function both as the place where the "house" labor force is formed and as the place of permanence from which such labor enters the labor market and to which it returns after.

As regards the laws that govern the housework labor market it should be stated at once that, while within the waged-labor market the active labor force is backed by a reserve army of industrial labor, within the non-waged housework market there is no such reserve army. So in the case of reproduction the law is turned inside out. In the first case relative surplus population is both the conse-

quence of increased productivity of labor and a necessary "condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production."¹³ In the second case, full employment becomes, on the one hand, the necessary product of capitalist accumulation, and on the other, the lever of accumulation itself. Thus it too is a necessary condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production.

With housework, which is posited as a "natural force of social labor," capital is interested in ensuring that all women are houseworkers. Full employment within the housework market is possible because it is non-waged, hidden work. The economists' misplaced assumption – that the labor market is the *waged* labor market, and that the only commodity circulating is thus labor-power as capacity for production – has until now led them into placing houseworkers within the non-active population, or at best into considering them as part of the reserve army of industrial labor-power. This misplaced assumption has also led to economists establishing a series of definitions relating to the female labor market, all of which are based on the conception that this labor market coincides with the female waged-labor market. If, however, one begins by taking the opposite assumption, then all these definitions must be reformulated in reverse.

Firstly consider marriage, which posits itself as a "work contract" (and relation) between the non-directly waged female houseworker and the waged male worker. This is the fundamental work contract of the female labor force. Even though it is more often seen as a non-work contract by the man and woman who make it, in fact this latter misconception is necessary, since it can only function as a housework contract for as long as it appears as a non-work contract.

This explains the different negotiating practises in the two main markets. In the waged-labor market the exchange of buying and selling labor-power early on changed from being an exchange between two individuals – owners of commodities, isolated on the market – into an exchange between two social classes, each of which developed its own institution for collective bargaining. In the housework market, however, the protagonists of the exchange were and still are the subjects of the exchange, isolated on the market as two single individuals.

In other words, the lack of collective bargaining within the housework market arises from the fact that (1) either marriage posits itself as a work relation that is not formally subject to collective bargaining between two large social groups, or (2) it cannot exist as a non-directly waged housework relation. This obviously has had different consequences within the various work relations. While competition between male workers has tended to disappear, between female houseworkers it has continued to exist to a considerable degree. Which means that while the waged-labor market is "free" only at a formal level, the non-directly waged housework market is "more free" at both the formal and the real level.

The argument around competition is, however, far more complex. If it is true that competition does not exist between male worker and male worker in the

waged-labor market, it is equally true that it does exist between the active industrial labor force and the reserve army which

during periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active army of workers; during periods of over-production and feverish activity it puts a curb on their pretensions. The relative surplus population is therefore the background against which the law of demand and supply of labor does its work.¹⁴

On the other hand, in housework's labor market, if it is true that there is competition between one houseworker and another, and also true that there is no reserve army of houseworkers, the law of demand and supply for house work operates against a background of a tendency towards full employment, which mitigates and balances out the competition that rises from the lack of a collective contract for housework. But it is not really important here to carry on and discover whether there is more competition between males or females within the class. It is sufficient to recognize that the male proletariat and the female proletariat have different histories of organization and have followed different paths of struggle to reach collective or individual agreements to meet their needs.

Another consequence of the "nature" of marriage is that while it cannot become subject to a collective contract, neither can it become subject to a private contract, because surplus-value must be produced. Capital alone must be able to regulate and control marriage, and it secures total control in the only way that it can: through the state, whose authority is final in establishing the conditions of marriage. Although today the state still intervenes in marriage, it is having less success because of new factors such as: (1) private agreements between individuals regarding their practice in marriage; (2) the growing refusal of formal marriage and other solutions being found within male/female relationships etc. It goes without saying that if marriage is the fundamental work relation for the female labor force, then *divorce* is breaking it, and corresponds therefore to resignation or termination from the process of production and reproduction of labor-power.

The concepts of the level of female employment and occupational mobility can also be predestined. Economists maintain that the rate of female employment is expressed by the relation between the number of women of working age and the number actually employed... in the production process, of course. The counter-definition maintains that the female employment rate is expressed by the relationship between the number of women of marriageable age and those actually married. In this context, the age at which a woman may legally marry becomes the age at which she becomes eligible for employment; the average age at which she marries becomes the average age at which she begins to be part of the female housework labor force. Correspondingly, the rate of occupational

mobility is given by the relation between the number of women divorced and the number who remarry.

Mobility, which is a growing phenomenon within the housework labor force, has many contradictory aspects. On the one hand, divorce upsets one of the fundamental conditions of the exchange between variable capital and housework in that it removes the guarantee of the duration of the exchange. In other words it goes against the idea that housework labor-power cannot be mobile, that it cannot interrupt the work continuum. In this sense, divorce – by upsetting both the exchange between variable capital and housework and the relation between the male worker and the female houseworker – proves to be a negative element for capital. This negative aspect is strengthened by the fact that the breaking of one housework relation in order to move into another or different relation represents a gross wastage, in absolute terms, of the productivity of the entire nuclear family.

On the other hand, divorce also has a positive aspect. When the relation of production between a man and a woman is no longer functioning, its productivity has already fallen and is likely to remain low for some time. Thus, the opportunity for divorce – which opens up the possibility for both to remarry – represents the sole means of re-raising the levels of productivity of the female houseworker and the family involved. Until the 1960s in the USA and until the 1970s in Italy, divorce was more often than not the prelude to another marriage, often a more successful one because of the greater expertise.

In the last decade however, the “negative” aspects of divorce seem to have grown faster than the “positive” aspects, i.e., it has been used in the working class's interest more than in the capitalist's. Divorce has tended to become the destruction of marriage rather than a mending “in extremis,” and has often marked a full stop in a marriage career, because less and less women are remarrying after divorce. But today the female houseworker's mobility often precedes divorce; many women do not marry in the first place, and thus their sexual and emotional reproduction takes place outside of any statistical registers or state controls.

Two other economic concepts – under-employment and unemployment – can also be redefined from the perspective of reproduction. A woman of marriageable age who is neither wife nor mother, or who for some reason does not become fully a part of the housework labor-force, is under-employed. In other words, she carries out housework in a more limited way than her potential work capacity would allow. Hence single mothers – who do not reproduce a husband/male worker – are under-employed; so is a married woman with no children, who reproduces only a husband; and so also is the divorced, separated or widowed woman who has not remarried. The woman who is of marriageable age but remains single is, however, “non-employed”: she reproduces neither husband nor children. (“Unemployed” cannot really be used here, because every woman living under capitalism who does not live on unearned income, must always

reproduce at least her own labor-power.)

This redefinition of some current terminology used in relation to the female labor market serves now to explain more clearly the precise consequences of the law of full employment which regulates the housework labor market. Some of the consequences follow.

(1) The rate of female employment must be kept as high as possible, which is to say that the number of women of marriageable age who make up the female census population must broadly be the same as the number of women actually married or in marriage-type relationships.

(2) The rate of occupational mobility, similarly, must also be as high as possible. The functioning of the capitalist mode of production both involves and requires all women to be married or to remarry after divorce; in capital's eyes, every woman should now and always have a man and children to work for.

(3) There must always be the lowest possible number of female houseworkers either under or non-employed, because women in this condition are not functioning properly within the capitalist system of accumulation and are, moreover, an obstacle to it. This explains why such women are frequently the target of criticism or ridicule within capitalist society; what usually appears as a moral or ideological condemnation is in fact a criticism of their low levels of housework productivity.

(4) The period of working, the woman's work time, must be as "full" as possible; it has no contractual limits outside of her own natural life span.

Because of the specific characteristics of the exchange between the male worker and female houseworker, once employed the woman never retires. Not only must she continue to reproduce the male worker during his retirement, but she must also remain a mother to her children and to her children's children.

Full employment also means that the apprenticeship for the job must have already been completed before the work relation is begun, and it too must have been "full." From infancy onwards, the future female houseworker must begin to learn her skills from her mother, and — at least partiall — to carry them out. Partially because, unlike the waged-work apprenticeship, the future female houseworker's instruction and practice in work is partial with regard to the quantity and content of the work she will eventually have to supply. She only learns the more necessary housework tasks. The rest of the information is either ideological or restricted information. This is because the division of housework must privatize and individualize knowledge about sexuality and maternity until there is no longer a need to keep it secret, and also because the future houseworker must not know how great is the work load that marriage brings.

But a working continuum like this means that a woman starts work as a child laborer and never ceases even in old age. Such a working continuum is itself a condition of the existence of the housework market. It is a condition which does not exist within the waged-labor market, where neither child labor —

which exists despite being formally regulated by law – nor post-retirement work are conditions of existence for the market.

From what has been said about the female labor market, it must have become clear that *women's struggles around marriage, divorce, non-marriage, single motherhood, refusal to bear children, etc. are all struggles which attack the mechanism of capitalist accumulation.*

This must be emphasized for the benefit of those who talk about changes of "habit," of "custom," and the like. Those "cultural" critics might understand very little about the true nature and impact of such actions, which must be seen and interpreted within the process of class struggle, as a form of struggle which directly attacks the process of production of surplus-value.

With regard to the market for prostitution work, there is too little evidence. There is a lack of information apart from official declarations which, as is well known, are worth very little, so any argument based on them would be unsound. But without going into details of the specific functioning of the prostitution market, some broad ideas can be argued. Both the active and the reserve army of prostitution work are not only involved in illegal relations but these relations are unique because: (1) they do not appear to be relations at all; and (2) the state can neither discover how extensive they are nor control them in any real way. It is the demand for them itself – its expansion and contraction – which is uncontrollable by the state.

It is this latter characteristic which has always made law enforcement in this sector so difficult. And it can only get more and more difficult as growing numbers of women enter the sector, often casually, and as the market moves away from control by pimps, and hence even further away from any possibility of state control. This "illegal" use of prostitution by women does not only tend to take it further out of the control of capital, but has also affected the organization of such work.

One consequence affects the income of the sexworker, which – being freer of payments to pimps and other pay-offs – has risen. The number of women involved has also risen and there has been an increase of part-time working by many. As the old adage says, "the more you're paid, the less you have to work." The reproduction of the prostitute has also been affected. She is less likely now than before to have to depend on another illegal worker, and to pay him, for her reproduction. The absence of the pimp has also meant that entry, permanence and exit from the market have become easier, since the woman has only herself to consider.

In the past, women were often forced to enter the prostitution market not only by needs, but also if they had transgressed the sexual or marriage mores of the time. This tends to be less true today. Many women enter the market by their own decision, inasmuch as anyone can ever really "decide" in a capitalist society. They make this decision because prostitution offers higher pay than most

other female jobs, and the level of "industrial" accidents and disease are sometimes lower. The same holds true for the conditions of exit from the market; these too have become easier. The "stigma" on prostitution is reduced now; so too is the element of slavery inherent in it, in part as a result of the struggles of women during the 1970s and 1980s. Thus women may leave the market, or change their job, more freely.

The fact remains, however, that the *subjects* of the exchange – of the buying and selling of labor-power as capacity for sexual reproduction of male labor-power – are still the *protagonists* of the exchange itself. Thus, like housework, prostitution work has no collective bargaining agreements. But competition is in fact limited, despite the fact that it should logically be at its highest (since individual agreements are accompanied by pressure from the reserve army). It is limited because, in general, supply rarely exceeds demand.

Since one recent organized cycle of struggles by European prostitutes – in Lyons, France from 1975 on, or Pordenone, Italy from 1983 on – prostitutes have been consistently trying to open up a dialogue with the state around various issues: pensions, fines, child custody, criminalization, etc. This has brought out into the open the problem of collective bargaining. These continuing struggles have often been accused of being a distorted trade unionism by those who think that either such work should be totally abolished, or who, from the other side of the fence, think it can never be made subject to contract at a general level.

In reality however, these struggles have succeeded in posing problems full of clear contradictions for the state. Any collective bargaining by prostitutes, any agreements regarding prostitution work, could only re-enter the framework of capitalist relations with great difficulty. In so doing, they would destroy many assets and institutions of the state/capital itself.

Finally, with regard to the conditions of permanence, it has become clear that the prostitution market – unlike the female waged-labor market – is not subordinated to the marriage relation; it is both complementary and opposed to it. As prostitute, the woman ceases to be primarily a houseworker. She is firstly a sexworker, who is not allowed to be wife and mother at the same time, and only then a houseworker. Prostitution is the only female job which is not determined by her existence as a houseworker. This is important, because from the start women's social condition as houseworker has always determined the conditions of prostitution itself. For example, in any waged work, the cycle of housework has always determined the entry, exit and permanence of women in that market. It is the opposite in prostitution, where the cycle of the work itself impedes the development of the housework cycle. The capitalist division of sexual work does not only mean that the prostitute's work is different from that of the houseworker, it also means that the former is effectively prevented from being both at the same time. This is one reason why the right of prostitutes to have and keep children was one of the main issues of their struggles in the 1970s and 1980s.

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These struggles of the 1970s have left behind a massive series of changes in the conditions of permanence within the prostitution market. On the one hand, many of today's prostitutes are also housewives and vice versa, to such a degree that passing between the housework and sexwork market – between one productive sector and another – has become very elastic. This elasticity has also come about in consequence of women making more cash-oriented as opposed to goods-oriented agreements with men. Women are tending to ask for more than "love" in their relationships with men. Furthermore chastity – saving of sex – has little meaning today from the working-class perspective; many women now have the power to contract with men without restricting their sexual conduct.

On the other hand, elements of prostitution within the marriage relationship have come out of the ideological abyss. To discover that all women are "prostitutes" is to discover just how this "many-headed monster" really functions within the social body.

Within the waged-labor market there is a separation between female work and male work. This separation is the result of the former's work being subordinated to the housework labor market. The two sections thus develop different, if not directly opposed, elements. The conditions of entry, exit and permanence for women in the non-housework market are different from those of male workers in the waged-labor market.

If one looks at the timing of women's entry into the waged-labor market, and the length of her waged-working life, it is immediately evident that their rate of activity rises precisely in those periods of women's lives when the level of housework has not yet risen so high that other work is incompatible with her "prime" work role. Correspondingly, such activity falls in periods when maximum housework productivity is required from her, as for example when there are young children, etc. It then rises again, at least in some countries, when the children, almost grown, require less work from her.

This was the true pattern up until the last decade, since which a new tendency has emerged in the dynamic of female waged-work, namely, that *the cycle of housework no longer has the weight to markedly affect the curve in the rate of female non-housework employment*. Today women often return to work almost immediately after the birth of their children. This is partly because children are becoming more "expensive," hence their wage is necessary.

(Italy presents an extreme case. Here capital has been able to establish an exceptionally long and intense houseworking day. Marriage and the addition of children have tended not to represent simply an interruption in the woman's non-housework working life, but a definitive full stop, at least officially.)

The oscillations in the rate of female employment show clearly how female labor-power takes up non-housework temporarily, and functions as an additional supply of waged-labor. A women's entry into waged work before marriage may be either to supplement the income of the original family, or for her

own maintenance, or it can be an attempt to flee for as long as possible from her "fate" as houseworker. Not only when, but for how long, women will stay in the non-housework market is determined by the entire process of female production (which always remains primarily housework). When she leaves the wage market — unlike the male worker, who usually retires or is made redundant — she will probably go by "sacking herself" and entering into the most productive phase of her life. Women rarely retire from the waged-labor market because they have reached pensionable age; their working life takes place outside of waged-work production.

Looking at the conditions of entry, exit and permanence of women in the waged-labor market, and at the factors which lie behind these conditions, reinforces the necessity of formulating a basis for the political interpretation of the vicissitudes of female labor-power, one that is very different from that upon which such interpretations have been operating until now.

One illustration of this is apparent if one tries to examine the struggles around women's "dismissal" from waged work. The real problem that emerges is not the fact of leaving the market — which is basically determined by the cycle of housework — but identifying the real subject, capital or the woman, who decides when and how she will go. Where does the initiative come from, the worker, or the boss? How does this relate to the level of women's struggles over redundancy?

Women who leave non-housework do not become unemployed. They return to full-time housework, the same work that they were doing part-time — or more accurately, in less time — before and after waged work, on weekends and during holidays. They become involved in their prime place of work: the house. They have little time or space to struggle against redundancy. Thus housework and the house are a means of splitting working women, between those who leave and those who stay and struggle to retain their wage work. Being dismissed from waged work is often presented to women as only an anticipation of the time in which they would have left anyway. The woman merely takes up her fundamental work role earlier, and her struggle against leaving may seem neither rational nor convenient for her, in addition to being a risk since she might lose. What is more, it begins at the wrong end of her exploitation; it is more likely to be lost, so she has less motivation.

Today the position and reaction of women faced with dismissal is changing. Capital is beginning to "force" women to maintain a waged-work relation even when she has small children, and the "interests" of women with regard to retaining their waged-work are being redefined. Consequently women are moving onto the attack. Even if often in an unorganized way, they are struggling to redefine their conditions of permanence within the waged-labor market, not only in terms of hours of work, but also in terms of wage — and, moreover, *wage for their entire working day*. Female absenteeism, higher than that of males, is just one passive form of this struggle, underlining her dual job, and adding

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weight to the demand for a wage and a reduction of overall hours.

Another characteristic of the female waged-labor market is the high level of mobility within it, due to the discontinuity of their houseworking lives. The high turnover of women — who come mainly from the housework sector and not from other waged jobs — has been and still is in capital's favor. For one thing, it has meant that there is always a supply of fresh new labor available, and for another, it serves to break any organizational continuity, weakening any potential contractual power women may try to develop. Finally, women return to the housework sector disciplined for production in the family by the classic industrial discipline.

The third and final characteristic considered here, which distinguishes the male waged-labor market from the female, is the wage level. Wages are lower for women. Equal work rarely means equal pay, despite the legislation that now exists in many countries, and the lip service given to the issue. Floods of statistics have gushed forth to prove that women are paid less all over the world. But no one has ever seriously looked at the different conditions under which male and female labor-power offers itself on the waged-labor market. Without making such an investigation, one is limited to saying that while the male worker appears as a "free" worker, the female worker appears as a "less free" worker in that for her, selling her labor-power in the waged-labor market is always subordinated to selling her labor-power as capacity for the production and reproduction of labor-power — which latter must be given precedence even though it does not appear as a commodity. Obviously, these different points of departure in the sale of labor-power must lead to equally diverse capacities and opportunities to make wage agreements. This goes a long way towards explaining women's "willingness" to accept non-housework jobs at lower wages than men.

NOTES

¹ *Grundrisse*, Notebook 5, p. 463.

² *Ibid.*, p. 464.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 468-469.

⁵ *Theories of Surplus Value*, p. 410-411.

⁶ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 717.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 718.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 719.

⁹ *Grundrisse*, Notebook 6, p. 676.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 676-677.

¹¹ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 797.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 718.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 784.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 792.

6

THE SECRET WORKSHOP

HOUSEWORK AS A PROCESS OF VALORIZATION

The entire process of reproduction is not going to be studied here, but rather only the most fundamental part, the process of production and reproduction of labor-power, whose cycle is present in every cycle of production. This part has been chosen, firstly, to make the argument less unwieldy and, secondly, because analysis of the most fundamental part of the process provides a concrete point of reference for all the other work processes within reproduction.

What image does the process of production and reproduction of labor-power conjure up? As has already been said, it presents itself as a photograph printed back to front, as mirror image of the process of commodity production. While within reproduction labor-power as capacity for production is produced, in production labor-power is consumed. While in the latter the male worker is a means of work, in the former he is the object of work, and his means of subsistence are the means of work for the woman. The two processes are opposites: in production, the exchange-value of labor-power as capacity for production is produced and its use-value consumed; in reproduction, the use-value of labor-power is produced and its-exchange-value is consumed.

But the workshop where the process of production and reproduction of labor-power takes place is not simply a producing workshop. It is also the place where the male worker's individual consumption process is carried out. The male worker's labor-power is consumed during the process of commodity production, and it is reproduced in the workshop by his own consumption. Within the housework process another, different, labor-power is consumed – that of the female houseworker. We must examine this double consumption of labor-power.

When Marx says that "the process of consumption of labor-power is at the same time the production process of commodities and of surplus-value,"¹ he is clearly referring to the productive consumption of labor-power that takes place within the sphere of production, and *not* to the *double* consumption which takes place within the sphere of reproduction.

Our argument here, however, is that the process of consumption of labor-power is the production process of commodities and of surplus-value not only when it takes place within production but when it takes place within reproduction too. Therefore, the double consumption within reproduction is also doubly productive. In terms of the individual male worker's consumption, it is productive because it produces and reproduces the individual as a commodity. In terms of the consumption of housework labor-power, it is productive because the process of its consumption is simultaneously a process of production of commodities and surplus-value.

In this process, the following features may be discerned.

(1) As has been seen, the worker does not consume the means of subsistence directly, since housework lies between the male worker and his individual consumption. As a result, variable capital represents the sum of the values of the means of subsistence of labor-power, which is understood to be the capacity of commodity production and the capacity of production and reproduction of labor-power. The only individual consumption that is direct is that of the female houseworker herself, for it does not fundamentally require the consumption of another's labor-power for her to consume her means of subsistence.

(2) Housework is an activity carried out with the aim of producing and reproducing labor-power. This is its aim and its product.

(3) Housework — like any other work — "uses up its material elements, its objects and its instruments. It consumes them, and is therefore a process of consumption."²

As has already been described in detail, the male worker's individual consumption presupposes this productive consumption, and is distinguished by it, inasmuch as such productive consumption consumes his products as the means of subsistence of housework. Individual consumption in general, rather, consumes them as the means of subsistence of the individual. What is more, the product of the individual male worker's consumption — i.e., the consumer himself — is different from the result of productive consumption. This latter is not the female houseworker as a living individual either, but it is the labor-power of the male worker and of future workers. These labor-powers are the commodity produced by this particular work process. Further exploration of this process of production will show not only how the male worker, by consuming, produces, but also how he is reproduced. Surplus-value's fairy tales will be revealed for what they really are.

The functioning of this work process is marked by certain characteristics that distinguish it from the process of production. The latter's characteristics arise, Marx claims, from the fact that "the worker works under the control of the capitalist to whom his labor belongs,"³ and also that "the product is the property of the capitalist and not of the worker, its immediate producer."⁴ In the work process being examined here, the female houseworker neither works under the

control of the capitalist, nor is her product the property of the capitalist. But this difference in no way alters the fact of the capitalist nature of the process. It is simply a characteristic, a feature, of this work process.

With regard to "control," capitalists cannot make the female houseworker work under their direct command. They must use the male worker as a mediator to control the houseworker. If they did not do so, it would be impossible to posit housework as a "natural force of social labor." As for "ownership of the product," again capitalists cannot claim direct ownership of the product produced — i.e., of the labor-powers. But neither can the female houseworker — the direct producer of this labor-power — claim ownership. She only owns that part of her product that exists in her own living self, *her* labor-power. Nor can the male worker — the mediator — claim ownership, because a condition of capital's existence is that every worker is a "free" worker who posits him/herself as the direct owner of his/her labor-power. So even if this process takes place consuming things he has bought with his wage, his product, the male worker can still only claim ownership of his own labor-power alone.

Because widespread analytical confusion about this process is one of the causes of political confusion about house work and the condition of women, it is necessary to trace the development of this production process. As in every process of production, here too one part of the initial money, which in this case is variable capital, is converted into the means of production, that is into raw materials, means of work and auxiliary materials, and another part is converted into labor-power which here is the female houseworker's labor-power. To make the analysis clearer, the production of labor-power (procreation and maternity) is taken as separate from the reproduction of labor which is concerned with already existing labor-powers. This is not an arbitrary division because it deals with two distinct processes, even if the first cannot exist separately from the second.

Let us start with the production of labor-power, which has two distinct phases: procreation and the time of gestation. The first cannot exist without involving the woman's sexual work, i.e., reproduction work. (It could be noted here that the existence of sperm banks does not affect the argument.) The raw materials of this reproduction work are the male sperm and the woman's entire body, which simultaneously functions as a means of work. The means of subsistence that she consumes during gestation, including services, are the auxiliary materials in the process of production of labor-power and also represent a part of the means of subsistence of the woman herself.

Such means of production have two features. (1) Where they coincide, they are consumed by the woman as both productive consumption and as individual consumption. (2) Some of the objective factors — or rather, the means of production — are contained within the body of the woman herself, within which also exist personal factors, her labor-power.

Gestation is the female worker's consumption of the means of production. It

ends with birth – when the product, the new labor-power, is produced. “Labor has become bound up in its object: labor has been objectified, the object has been worked on.”⁵ Thus labor-power is always “raw material,” for at birth the individual already contains nine months of his/her mother’s work, and it is not an object of labor as Marx seems to think when he says, “labor-power itself is above all else, the material of nature transformed into a human organism.”⁶

It is clear that the capitalist mode of production did not transform the process of the production of individuals by introducing new means of work. What it did do, however, was to transform the *mode* in which such work was carried out. It did so mainly by transforming the relationship between the woman and her body, which, within this process, is the means of production.

Capital has not expropriated the woman from the ownership of her body. But it has expropriated her possibility to control it, or more specifically, to control her uterus. This intervention has been quite direct at times, with anti-contraception laws and laws for and against abortion. *It has transformed the woman’s body with its natural capacities to produce individuals into a machine for producing labor-powers.*

It is this great technological innovation introduced by capital – the “mechanization” of the woman’s body – that is under consideration here. *A woman no longer uses her body, her body is a means of work and uses her.* Her body not only becomes estranged from her, but, insofar as it is subject to the orders of others, it also becomes her enemy: it consumes her living processes.

Within the process of reproduction of labor-power, two clear features can be discerned. (1) The process of commodity production does not take place in a direct way. Rather, it has two distinct phases separated from each other by the moment of consumption. (2) Both material and non-material use-values are produced within it.

Let us examine the first feature. It is taken for granted that between production and the product – labor-power – another brief phase intervenes. This phase is the consumption of the use-values produced for their reproduction by the individuals who contain the labor-power. This consumption is presumed to take place because of the characteristics of the commodity – labor-power – which is produced. These characteristics are two: (1) the fact that labor-power is not a thing, an object, but a capacity, or more precisely, the capacity to work; (2) this capacity does not exist outside of the individual who contains it.

These characteristics have a specific consequence. Both the consumption and the production of labor-power take place indirectly. As regards consumption, there is no question that once the capitalist has bought it, he will not be consuming it directly within the process of production; the capitalist simply obliges the male worker to supply it. *Work is the activity by means of which the worker allows this capacity – labor-power – to be consumed, by supplying it.* Capital’s consumption of labor-power cannot be direct consumption, in the way that the

consumption of raw materials, auxiliary materials, and means of work are for the worker, because these workers must consume their own labor-power by working. When Marx describes the process of production, he talks of the consumption of labor-power *tout court*, because to describe precisely how it is consumed would be superfluous in the context of his argument. The end result of the production process – the consumption of labor-power – is clear enough. However, for the purpose of the argument here it is useful to re-examine this consumption because the concomitant passage within the housework process does not show so clearly exactly where the product – labor-power – comes from.

Within the housework process, the female houseworker cannot directly reproduce the male worker's labor-power. As has been said, labor-power is not a thing, but a capacity which exists within the male worker himself. Thus this worker, who has consumed his labor-power within the process of commodity production, is the same worker who must carry out the activity of consuming the use-values produced by the female houseworker, use-values that he needs for his own reproduction. Between the female houseworker (who manifests her own labor-power) and the product of her work – the labor-powers of the male worker, of future workers, and her own labor-power – there remains the individual consumption of each of these individuals. Which is to say that only in her own case – where the producer coincides with the consumer – can she directly produce labor-power in its final form.

The failure to correctly analyze this process has led to many errors and misunderstandings about the housework process. Often, the conclusion has been drawn that this process does not represent direct commodity production, but is just the production of use-values. In this interpretation, the moment of consumption has been seen as the moment which only took place when the process itself had ended. Consequently, labor-power (as use-value for value) is not seen as the product of the housework process, but solely as the product of the individual male worker's consumption. In this way, the process has been analyzed in *precapitalist* terms.

Another common and erroneous conclusion is to see reproduction as having characteristics that are so different from those that distinguish production that it does not even re-enter the capitalist mode of production. This view does not assume that reproduction has therefore remained at a precapitalist level, but instead argues that it is another mode of production in itself, *not a capitalist mode*, thus confusing the specific characteristics of the process of reproduction – which derive from the specific characteristics of the commodity produced – with a mode that has remained outside of the capitalist mode of production.

The inconsistencies these conclusions lead to will become clearer later. For the moment a brief refutation will suffice. During the process of production the male worker consumes his labor-power and creates value. Then, during reproduction, he transfers this value into the product – labor-power – by consuming

the use-values produced by the female houseworker. Thus he transfers the value he created into the product of the housework process.

But what happens when one defines the male worker's consumption as a moment in the housework process? As has been seen, the commodities into which variable capital can be converted have no direct use-value in the production of labor-power, because they cannot be consumed directly. Since "use-values are only realized (*verwirklicht*) in use or in consumption,"⁷ they can have no direct use-value for the male worker. Thus one part of variable capital can be converted into exchange-values because another part of it – the female houseworker's labor-power – converts itself into "exchange-value" capable of transforming these commodities into real or actual use-values that are directly consumable.

This latter makes it possible to convert one part of variable capital into exchange-values which have no direct use-value for the male worker in that, before becoming direct use-values for him, they have direct use-value as a means of production within the housework process. Realizing that the reproduction of labor-power takes place in an indirect way implies accepting the assumption that it takes place in two phases: firstly, the transformation of the means of production of housework into use-values which are directly consumable by the male worker; and secondly, the transformation of the latter into labor-power.

The second part of this assumption implies that there is also non-material production within the housework process. The fact that housework is not solely bed-making, cleaning, washing, ironing etc. has already been argued *ad nauseam*. This is work that, within certain obvious limits, not only makes the satisfaction of material needs possible, but is also work directly related to the satisfaction of non-material needs. Housework has to be organized around material *and* non-material functions because the male worker, as labor-power, needs both.

Non-material use-values are those goods produced within the housework process which have no material basis: affection, sexuality, companionship, "love," and the like. These goods satisfy the individual's non-material needs, which are as important for his/her reproduction as is a grilled steak or an ironed shirt. But these non-material use-values are not commodities which have real or true exchange-values; they have no "free" market. They are intermediate moments within the process of commodity (labor-power) production, they are use-values for value.

Until now, when speaking of non-material use-values, the "use" aspect has been stressed and detached from the process of commodity production. Non-material use-values have been seen "idealistically," as the objects of a reciprocal exchange between the male worker and the female houseworker, carried out for the satisfaction of their respective needs. Consequently their actual use – that is to say, their consumption by the individual – has not been seen in the light of age, sex, racial or stratification differences, but simply as the result of past events, the fruit of historical determination within the society. The fact

that men are usually more egotistical in "love" relationships is generally taken as a given, explained either as selfishness or, by more progressive thinkers, as an element of the male/female power relation which would naturally be reflected in a "love" relationship.

But surely the differences between individuals' consumption of non-material use-values have a far more concrete basis. For example, within a couple relationship the adult male can consume, while the adult woman must primarily produce. The man is egotistical because he "consumes" love, and the woman is "generous" because she produces it. She produces it as part of the housework process in order to produce a commodity, labor-power. At first sight it may seem strange, or shocking that love, sex and affection can have so few real, natural elements left in them, however they do not transform themselves mechanically and automatically because of the relations of production of society. The emotions that we work (if we're women) or we consume (if we're men) are denaturalized, not only in their form but in their substance, their substance is a commodity.

Since the beginning of capitalism such relationships have been directly and fundamentally subject to the laws of value production. Only when this commoditization is recognized can the motives lying behind capital's continuous strategic and tactical efforts to keep tight control over reproduction be understood. The continual reproduction of the working class, which is essential for capital, depends on these relationships, so too does its productivity, its work discipline and adaptation to a whole complex of living conditions. Oceans of literature, mainly aimed at mothers, have been written about un-wanted, un-loved children who "consequently" become "maladjusted," do not adapt to their social situation and are thus miniature rebels against the social system. Equally large torrents of words have been poured forth in the debate on the relationship between productivity in factory, house, and sexual reproduction etc., productivity of both male and female workers. Most of these arguments are moralistic in tone and tend to blame the mother/wife for both maladjustment in children and for lack of enthusiasm for work on the part of the husband, and chiding her for not doing her family duties, for not giving in to moral imperatives. In other words women's struggles against, and refusal of, housework are not recognized as struggle, instead her low productivity is turned into a moral question and mystified by terminology.

Today, non-material reproduction is the part of reproduction that is most in crisis because it is the least controllable by capital.

Women's refusal of housework has produced non-satisfaction and frustration of non-material needs to an extent that proletarian living conditions have worsened in a more serious way than any economic crisis of capitalism could have caused. The gravity of this crisis of non-material commodities can be understood if one takes into account the fact that nowadays the sphere of non-material needs, already large, is growing even larger in relation to the size of

that of material needs; thus the crisis and the contradictions of non-material reproduction are doubly felt, as they reflect upon material reproduction. In the former sphere women are posited as work subjects and men as subjects of consumption. It has always been the sphere in which women have had, and do have, the greatest opportunities for struggle and subversion, because it is very difficult for either capital or the male worker to control the amount of non-material housework they carry out. Conversely, it has always been easier, and is becoming even more so, for capital to control the amount of material housework women do. During the 1970s there was a marked drop in non-material housework productivity, in love, in sexuality, which has had even greater impact than one would expect with the rise in the number of male/female relationships which take place only at the non-material level, growing numbers of women are refusing to live with the man they "love", thus resolving many of the problems posed by the house work division of labor, at the material level, and leaving only the non-material contradictions to resolve. It is a strategically important struggle for women.

But the cycle of struggles in the 1970s has already thrown many state policies into profound crisis in the area of non-material reproduction. Today, the state can no longer respond in terms of repression or permissiveness, that is, it can no longer intervene so easily in the form that adult female housework and male/child consumption take. Instead it must confront the problem that there is a real contraction, very likely permanent and getting worse, in the productivity of housework labor offered by women. But it is not only the state's problem, it is also women's, how to organize what is now largely spontaneous individual action, into an effective whole. With more and more women refusing to be housework subjects, demanding that they be allowed to consume, that their needs should be satisfied, there is a real possibility of effective struggle that would free everyone, not just women, from the iron laws of the production of surplus-value.

What type of production of use-values is the non-material use-value production talked of here? According to Marx there are two types of non-material production: the first is that which "results in commodities, use-values, which have a form different from and independent of producers and consumers." The second is that where "the production cannot be separated from the act of producing, as is physicians, priests, etc."... "Here too the capitalist mode of production is met with only to a small extent, and from the nature of the case can only be applied in a few spheres."⁹ And he concludes saying "all these manifestations of capitalist production in this sphere are so insignificant compared with the totality of production that they can be left entirely out of account."⁹

Clearly, the non-material production which takes place inside the process of reproduction belongs in the second form described by Marx. This is enough to contradict Marx. In other words, the development of housework production, and within it, the final development of its non-material part, shows how far

this second type of production has developed itself. But Marx has been proved mistaken on other points within the history of the capitalist mode of production. Contrary to what he said, non-material production which is not separable from the act of producing has grown enormously, as has the total of all production both within the entire process of reproduction and that of production. In the latter case the growth of the service sector and of information industries are good examples, and in the former, prostitution, although this was no doubt already widespread in Marx's day.

What are the means of production within that part of the house work process related to the reproduction of labor-power? In the first phase, it is useful to distinguish material use-value production from non-material. In the former the raw or primary materials are the food, clothing and furniture etc. of the house itself. The means of work are washing machines, refrigerators etc. Auxiliary materials are principally electricity, gas, water etc. The woman uses the means of work to carry out her work on the food, clothes etc.. Within the latter, non-material production, the raw materials and the means of work are incorporated within the female houseworker herself, within the individual. This implies that her non-material needs must not and cannot exist except as needs to satisfy the non-material needs of the male worker and her children. It also implies that she, apart from being labor-power is also a mere machine in the continuous cycle of non-material production. In this sense the female house worker is capital's greatest technological invention.

Thus, lipstick, powder, make-up in general are part of the process of non-material production, because they are added to the woman's body to effect a material change; even her clothing could be said to take on an auxiliary function. During this first phase of the work process — as has been argued previously — the female houseworker, by working, transforms these means of production of housework into material and non-material use-values which have direct use-value and are therefore directly consumable by the male worker, future workers and she herself. However, while the consumption of material products can be, and is, separated from the moment of their production, that of non-material products is not, thus their production and consumption must take place contemporaneously. This implies that, unlike in material production, that part of the housework process which is concerned with non-material production is characterized by the fact that individual consumption by the male worker is not a moment in itself within the work process.

How are these use-values put together within the housework process? They have come to be considered as its intermediate and not as its final product. This is at odds with those who define housework as a simple process of use-value production, which suggests that use-values are the final product. The intermediate product, which is the result of the first phase, becomes the point of departure for the second. In this latter use-values function both as raw materials and as

auxiliary material simultaneously; while the instruments of work are, paradoxically, provided by the male worker and future workers as well as the female house worker. They are the machine by means of which the female houseworker produces labor-power. This is capital's second great technological innovation, one which explains why the raw materials and auxiliary materials of this process of production can coincide. Given that it is the individual, within whom exists the labor-power as capacity to reproduce, who is the machine of this work process, there is little point in distinguishing the raw materials from the auxiliary materials, because both are consumed by the male worker and both at the same time are the principal substance of the product, his/her labor-power.

One distinguishing feature of this machine is that in general it consumes raw and auxiliary materials directly, which except in one particular case, does not automatically mean that there is subsequent work done by the female houseworker. The particular case in question is that in which she must reproduce the labor-power of an individual who is not self-sufficient in consumption, i.e., she must also supply work so that the use-values she has produced can be consumed by another and check that this consumption takes place regularly. One example of this is feeding a child. The mother, or her substitute, as well as preparing the food must also put it into the child's mouth, at least until the child reaches a certain age, after which she only has to ensure that the food is eaten regularly and not at whim. A control which children often fight against.

The non-self sufficient individual is a case apart. For it is through the male worker's direct consumption, of the means of housework, i.e. of the use-values produced by the female houseworker, that his labor-power, the final product of this work process is produced. This means effectively that: a) the male worker's individual consumption posits itself as an indirect consumption by the female houseworker, of the indispensable means of housework, i.e. the individual himself. It is also to say that individual consumption takes place wholly within the process of reproduction; and b) that labor-power itself is the direct result of the male worker's individual consumption, however, that such consumption, while being a moment of the process of reproduction, is also the final product of the process.

Thus, the housework process is not a process of production of use-values because as has been seen, these are the products of its first phase instead of it being a process of commodity production, of labor-power as use-value for value. Furthermore, despite being a process of commodity production it still does not represent a mode of production in itself, it is, as will be shown, the capitalist way of producing individuals who can only be reproduced as labor-power.

So housework is a process of commodity production. As commodity production it must also be a process of value creation. It produces labor-power, but this alone is not sufficient to prove that it can be defined as a capitalist process of production. Labor-power is a "unique" commodity, for even though it contains both use-value and value within it like any other commodity, its use-value is

produced and consumed separately from its exchange-value; its use-value is produced within the process of reproduction and consumed within the process of production, its exchange-value is produced within the process of production and consumed within that of reproduction.

Therefore, in order to be the "main" commodity within the process of production, it has to be denied its existence as a commodity within the process of its reproduction. Consequently even the process that produces the commodity labor-power is unique, since the commodity is produced as a use-value and not as an exchange-value. Reproduction is thus made to appear as a natural process of production, and not a capitalist process, since it seems impossible that the value of use-value can be expressed and measured, therefore its process of production seems not to be a process of valorization. But this is what will be argued here – that the process of production of labor-power, like that of any other commodity, is the unity of the work process and of the process of value formation.

But is it the use-value of labor-power that is produced, or a simple use-value only? It appears to be the latter, but the process has its own logic within capital. While all other use-values are produced as the "substratum", the "sediment" of exchange-value, labor-power is a use-value which is produced as the depository of its own use-value. It is this that interests capital, because it is only by use, by consuming this labor-power that the process of value creation within production begins. But as Marx said, "a thing can be a use-value without being a value," and "a thing can be useful, and a product of human labor, without being a commodity."¹⁰ But there are two contradictions. (1) In labor-power's case, it is not only a useful thing, not only the product of human labor, but also something which has a use-value for others – capital – a social use-value. Thus housework, which contains labor-power even though it is posited as a natural force of social labor, cannot be considered as simple human labor, but must instead be seen as abstract labor. If it were not so the situation would be absurd. labor-power, the product of housework, would be a use-value and not a commodity within reproduction, only to become a commodity, an exchange-value, and not a use-value when it entered the sphere of production. Therefore in reproduction it would have no value, and in production it would have exchange-value. (2) If within the process of reproduction the value of labor-power must be measured in terms of use-value and not of exchange-value like all other commodities, it means that its value cannot be expressed. It cannot be expressed either in terms of other goods, use-value cannot be a measure of value, or in terms of other labor-powers because the value of labor-power cannot be expressed in labor-power. A labor-power that is equal to a labor-power is not an expression of value, indeed such expression would be to say that a labor-power is nothing more than a determinate quantity of the object of use. The simplest expression of value of a commodity is the value relation between "that of one commodity to another commodity of a different kind (it does not matter which one). Hence

the relation between the values of two commodities supplies us with the simplest expression of the value of a single Commodity."¹¹

Is it therefore possible or conceivable that this commodity, which is so valuable to capital, is produced in a way that the quantity of its value, upon which the "production of value within the production process depends, is not measurable? It seems unlikely, and as will become clear, within reproduction labor-power is produced as a commodity, a unity of use-value and value, and from this labor-power is produced not only its use-value but its value, which latter is a different concept from either use-value or exchange-value. As Marx says, "a use-value, or useful article, therefore, has value only because abstract human labor is objectified (vergegenständlicht) or materialized in it."¹² And he also says:

"when... we said in the customary manner that a commodity is both a use-value and an exchange-value, this was, strictly speaking, wrong. A commodity is a use-value or object of utility, and a "value". It appears as the twofold thing it really is as soon as its value possesses its own particular form of manifestation, which is distinct from its natural form. This form of manifestation is exchange-value, and the commodity never has this form when looked at in isolation, but only when it is in a value-relation or an exchange relation with a second commodity of a different kind. Once we know this, our manner of speaking does no harm; it serves rather as an abbreviation."¹³

Only by starting from this definition, which clarifies how value and exchange-value are not the same concept, and furthermore how confusing them can create gross misunderstandings, can one begin to express the value of labor-power. Indeed Marx's propensity to abbreviate seems hazardous here. When examining the relative form of value he was in conflict with S. Bailey, and most other economists of like mind, precisely because they had all confused the form of value and value. If this distinction between the two concepts, of value and of exchange-value, is not made, it becomes impossible to define labor-power. What justifies recourse to "value" here in order to express the value of labor-power is that, as Marx agreed, "the expression of the value of a commodity, arises from the nature of commodity-value, as opposed to value and its magnitude arising from their mode of expression as exchange-value."¹⁴ And again, "it is not the exchange of commodities which regulates the magnitude of their values, but rather the reverse, the magnitude of the value of commodities which regulates the proportion in which they exchange."¹⁵

From this examination of Marx's argument it emerges that value and exchange-value are not only two different concepts, but also that exchange-value arises from the nature of commodity value and not vice versa; and it is the amount of commodity value that regulates the latter's exchange relations and not the other way around. It only remains now to specify what exactly is meant

by the value of labor-power. This is posited as value for use inasmuch as capital is not interested in the exchange-value of labor-power, only in its use-value. That is, it is interested in the widespread, intense consumption of labor-power itself, because the creation of value within the process of production depends on such consumption. Since the extent of this consumption in its turn depends on the amount of the use-value of labor-power that is produced within the process of reproduction, it follows that the quantity of value created by labor-power depends on the extent of the value of the labor-power itself. Rather, while the use-values of other commodities cannot constitute the measure of their value — and in fact, in relation to them one calculates necessary work-time to find their exchange-value — in the case of labor-power it is, however, its own use-value that constitutes the measure or extent of its value.

The value of labor-power is therefore, like that of any other commodity, found in relation to the fact that abstract human labor is objectified within it. Thus value is the materialization, the objectivization of the abstract human labor incorporated into labor-power during its process of reproduction when it gives life to its own existence as a commodity. If this is taken as true, it becomes possible to compare labor-power with every other commodity, despite the fact that it is produced for its use-value and not for its exchange-value, and its value can therefore be expressed.

But there now comes the problem of how to measure the extent of this value. A pertinent and necessary question. "A given quantity of any commodity contains a definite quantity of human labor. Therefore the form of value must not only express value in general, but also quantitatively determined value, i.e. the magnitude of value."¹⁶ If the value of labor-power expresses itself qualitatively through its ability to exchange and be exchanged with other commodities, then it expresses itself quantitatively through the exchangeability of a determinate quantity of a commodity with a determinate quantity of labor-power. The magnitude of its value, as for every other commodity, is measured "by means of the quantity of the 'value forming substance,' the labor, contained in the article", that is by the work contained in it. This quantity of work is, in its turn" measured by its duration." But because "the labor that forms the substance of value is equal human labor, the expenditure of identical human labor-power," i.e. "it has the characteristics of a socially average unit of labor-power and acts as such i.e. only needs, in order to produce a commodity, the labor time which is necessary on average, or in other words is socially necessary." And "what exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is therefore the amount of labor socially necessary, or the labor-time socially necessary for its production."¹⁷ This size corresponds to the magnitude of the (use) value of labor-power itself within which its exchange-value is included. This latter, while corresponding to the necessary labor time supplied by the male worker in order to produce his means of subsistence within the process of production, also functions as a

means of production within the process of reproduction and is therefore incorporated into the final product of this work process, i.e. into labor-power. The magnitude of the (use) value of labor-power itself is thus determined by the value produced by the female houseworker, which valorizes the exchange-value of labor-power within the process of reproduction.

But in monetary terms, this only represents exchange-value and not use-value. This is because the process of production and that of reproduction are complete in themselves even if they are indissolubly connected. Separated by the line of value, they constitute two distinct moments in the extraction of surplus-value. The exchange-value and (use) value of the labor-power produced; the first within the process of commodity production and the second within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power functions within the other process as a precondition and condition of its existence. Thus throughout its entire cycle capital makes huge money savings for itself and expropriates the maximum, a massive amount of surplus labor. The rift between the two sides of the valorization process, production and reproduction, requires the product of one to make a "double somersault" into the other and vice versa, which works to both the male worker's and the female house worker's disadvantage. The fact that variable capital, as well as representing what workers have earned also functions as capital within reproduction means that capital only has to pay once for reproduction, a payment which takes place within the other sphere production.

At the same time, the fact that labor-power, which is the female houseworker's product, is then consumed within the process of production signifies that capital, while exploiting the male worker also exploits the female houseworker. The "double somersault" mentioned above is made possible by the fact that capital posits the process of reproduction as a natural process of social labor in contrast with that of production, yet makes it too function as a process of valorization.

As a natural force of social labor, housework seems to be posited as non-waged work, and as such appears as surplus labor, i.e. extra work that capital manages to extort by paying for necessary work within the process of production. However, since housework, which is controlled by variable capital that functions as capital, creates a process of valorization which is complete in itself (for the fact that variable capital comes from the process of production means nothing in this context), housework in reality divides itself into necessary labor and surplus labor to a greater degree than production work does. Consequently, the magnitude of the value of labor-power here is measured by the amount of housework time socially necessary to produce and reproduce it.

However the fact that the magnitude of the value of labor-power is not fully represented by its exchange-value is not surprising because the value of a commodity is expressed in an independent manner throughout by its representation as exchange-value. Furthermore, given that "the form of direct and universal exchangeability, in other words the universal equivalent form, has now by

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social custom finally become entwined with the specific natural form of the commodity gold,"¹⁸ that is, "the general form of value come(s) to be transformed into the money form,"¹⁹ one should not be surprised that the magnitude of value is not completely expressed by its monetary representation; that the price form allows for the possibility of an incongruence between magnitude of value and price, that is for the size of value and its monetary expression:

"With the transformation of the magnitude of value into the price this necessary relation appears as the exchange-ratio between a single commodity and the money commodity which exists outside it. This relation, however, may express both the magnitude of value of the commodity and the greater or lesser quantity of money for which it can be sold under the given circumstances. The possibility, therefore, of a quantitative incongruity between price and magnitude of value, i.e. the possibility that the price may diverge from the magnitude of value, is inherent in the price form itself. This is not a defect, but, on the contrary, it makes this form the adequate one for a mode of production whose laws can only assert themselves as blindly operating averages between constant irregularities."²⁰

This provokes him into saying later on that "hard cash lurks within the ideal measure of value,"²¹ and "the leap taken by value from the body of the commodity into the body of the gold is the commodity's salto mortale, as I have called it elsewhere. If the leap falls short, it is not the commodity which is defrauded but rather its owner."²² In the case of the wage, that is in the case of the monetary representation of the value of labor-power, this somersault triples, and always ends to the disadvantage of the owner of the labor-power, both because it is in the form, as the price of labor-power, that this quantitative incongruence between exchange-value and the magnitude of value is found and also because, as has been seen, the separation of the process of reproduction from that of production through value, means that the reproduction of labor-power takes place on one wage which pays two separate workers. And in this instance it is twice as relevant to end with Marx's words "everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds."²³

It has been useful, indeed crucial to show and clarify the ability of labor-power to react or combine, the "valence" of the labor-power that is produced in the process of reproduction. While examining the value of labor-power it has become clear that the process of reproduction is fully entitled to be called a process of commodity production. Now, it is necessary to understand how this value is produced.

The capitalist wants two things from the housework process. Firstly, it wants the male worker to reproduce himself as labor-power, i.e. produce a use-value – labor-power – that has an exchange-value. A commodity that the worker can sell. Secondly, the capitalist requires that the production of this commodity takes place in such a way that the magnitude of its value is greater than the sum of the values of the commodities used to produce it, i.e. it is higher than its exchange-value. To accomplish this capital forces the male worker to exchange part of "his" variable capital with the woman, so that it can obtain the use-value of her labor-power in its capacity for the production and reproduction of labor-power. But the cost of maintaining this female houseworker and the outlay of her labor-power are two separate things. The value contained within the commodities necessary to reproduce the woman – value contained within the exchange-value of labor-power as capacity for production – is much less than the value produced by the female houseworker. The first magnitude expresses itself in its exchange-value, and the second in its (use) value. Thus the exchange-value of labor-power as capacity for production and its valorization within the process of reproduction, are two different magnitudes, a difference which the capitalist aims to create. At the end of the housework process, the product has a value which is much greater than its exchange-value. A value difference which is even greater when the woman produces new labor-powers.

Now, since the male worker is not interested in the use-value of his labor-power but only in its exchange-value, when he sells it on the market he agrees the exchange-value (its price) with the capitalist who is buying this labor-power for its (use) value. The value is therefore far greater than labor-power's exchange-value inasmuch as, as well as the socially necessary labor time supplied by the male worker himself within the process of production, it also contains the socially necessary housework labor time required to produce the labor-power itself. Thus money is transformed into capital because the capitalist buys below cost. After having bought the male worker's labor-power, the capitalist consumes it within the process of production in order to extract surplus-value. Here, the transformation of money into capital takes place because capitalists receive more than they spend.

In both these instances, the transformation of money into capital takes place both within and not within the sphere of circulation. As Marx stressed, transformation takes place through the mediation of circulation, because in this case the conditions depend upon the male worker buying the female houseworker's labor-power on the labor market. It does not take place within circulation because it does not start until the process of valorization in the sphere of reproduction is finished. The sphere of circulation of this particular commodity, of labor-power, exists before and after a process of valorization. The transformation of money into capital takes place through the mediation of the sphere of circulation, with the dual conditions that the male worker buys the female

houseworker's labor-power and the capitalist buys the male worker's labor-power. This is the same as saying that the formation of capital must be explained by a difference in the production of value, that is by the production of surplus-value taking place in both production processes.

The housework process is inspired by the same dynamic as the other process, only the actors and actresses, the extras and the scenes change. Here, the capital that sets the scene is variable capital, money which is not in itself true capital, or at least appears not to be. In reality, while for the male worker this capital represents a means of circulation, it really functions as a means of production and, more precisely, as the value of the initial capital paid in advance within the production process. However, here it is the male worker who pays in advance, not capital. This is the same money that he has been paid, and which now pays the female houseworker; which is only possible because the two processes of production are complete in themselves. The only disadvantages that are felt or arise from this complex cycle of production are in the relationship between the male worker and the female houseworker, capital quite simply saves a barrel of money.

Like capital within the process of production, variable capital, within the process of reproduction, transforms itself into diverse forms. One part of it converts into the means of production, such as raw materials, the means of work etc., another part converts into labor-power as capacity to produce and reproduce labor-power. Here too, the means of production and labor-power carry out a different function or role in relation to the value formation of the product. While the former cannot possibly add more value to labor-power than they already contain independently of the housework process the female houseworker's labor-power maintains and adds value. This surplus-value constitutes the excess of the value of the female houseworker's labor-power.

The two "parts" of variable capital can now be defined. The part that converts into the means of production can be called the constant part of variable capital, because it does not change the magnitude of its value; the part that is converted through the female houseworker's labor-power, because within the production process labor-power changes its value by producing surplus-value, can be called the variable part of variable capital. Thus the two parts of variable capital are distinguishable within the work process by objective and subjective factors and can, within the valorization process be identified as the constant part and the variable part of variable capital.

The variable part of variable capital is the part that corresponds to the value of the female houseworker's means of subsistence; her labor-power is consumed within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power. However pinpointing the constant part is more difficult, one must return to the distinction made between the production and reproduction of labor-power within the analysis of the functioning of the housework process.

In relation to production of labor-power, the constant part refers only to the

auxiliary materials, from the moment in which the raw materials and means of work are given as pre-conditions and conditions of this capital's existence. But because the auxiliary materials are also, at least in part, the means of subsistence of the female houseworker herself, the constant part of variable capital in reality only corresponds to that part of the auxiliary materials which is not also her means of subsistence.

In relation to reproduction of labor-power, the constant part of variable capital must be separated into two phases. The first in the sphere of production of material use-values, where it corresponds to the values of the raw materials, means of work and auxiliary materials whose production is necessary for the entire worker's family, as well as for the female houseworker. On the other hand, within the sphere of production of non-material use-values it is impossible to isolate any specific constant part of variable capital inasmuch as the value of the auxiliary materials re-enters within the value of the female houseworker's means of subsistence and the raw materials and means of work co-incide with the female houseworker herself, who, as a pre-condition of capital's existence can have no value herself. So, in the second phase no specific constant part of variable capital can be isolated insofar as the raw materials and the auxiliary materials are the outcome of the first phase and the means of work is the male worker himself, who likewise, as a precondition and condition of capital's existence can have no value himself.

By defining the constant part and the variable part of variable capital, it is possible to understand how, in this process also, the value of the product is not equal to capital's advance payment. This "surplus" of the product's value is the surplus of value of the male worker's labor-power over the volume of the factors of the product consumed – means of production and female houseworker's labor-power – and constitutes the hidden surplus-value produced in this process. One speaks of hidden surplus-value because in effect, neither the male worker nor capital have ever had any interest in discovering it. The male worker has no interest because this surplus-value which is produced does not seem to concern him since his interest is in the exchange-value of his labor-power and not its use-value. The only relevant thing for him is that at the end of this process his wage has been consumed. Capital has no interest because when seeking to create surplus-value it has never had much concern over whether the apparent facts of the process match up to the realities. But this surplus-value does exist, because the value paid in advance – variable capital – valorizes itself and generates surplus-value. In what sense? Here again the image of the back-to-front photograph appears. The production of surplus-value within the process of reproduction cannot take place except in a process that is the reverse of that which takes place in production. Here, money does not transform itself directly into capital in amounts greater than exchange-value, that would be to the male worker's advantage and not to capital's, instead it transforms itself into a greater amount of value as use-

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value for value. At the end of this valorization process the value of the commodity produced, labor-power, co-incides in terms of exchange-value with the sum of the values of the elements used in its production. But the magnitude of this value changes because it becomes greater than the sum of these elements used to produce it, in other words it becomes greater than the value of the capital paid in advance, i.e., greater than the exchange-value of labor-power itself.

In conclusion: the process of reproduction is on a par with the process of production insofar as it is the unity of the work process and the process of value creation, it is a process of commodity production. And, insofar as it is a unity of the work process and the valorization process it is a capitalist process of production, the capitalist form of the reproduction of individuals.

NOTES

- ¹ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 279.
- ² *Ibid.*, Vol.2, p. 290.
- ³ *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p. 292.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 291.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 323, n. 2.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.
- ⁸ *Theories of Surplus Value*, p. 410-411.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 411.
- ¹⁰ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 131.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 139.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 156.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 144.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 129.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 163.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 196.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 200-201.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

7

ON THE THEORY OF SURPLUS-VALUE

THE MAP OF EXPLOITATION CORRECTED & RE-DRAWN

Given that the process of production and reproduction of labor-power is a process of value formation and that the valorization process takes place in reality on two distinct but closely connected planes, the concept of necessary work must now be examined. For Marx, the concept of necessary work was inextricably connected to that of wage and the value of labor-power. In Volume One of *Capital* at least, these themes are identified at the same point as that where he posits the wage and the value of labor-power as an equation of value, and where the value of labor-power itself co-incides with, is the same as its exchange-value.

In the previous chapters it has been shown that this equation does not function, because while the wage itself corresponds to the exchange-value of labor-power, the value of this labor-power – in terms of use-value – is in fact much greater. Which is to say that the entire range of necessary work required to reproduce labor-power is much greater than this equation assumes. Furthermore it is not, as Marx said, connected to a single work subject – the male worker – but to two work subjects – the male worker and the female houseworker – who work in two distinct processes of production and value formation. “The entire range of necessary work” means here the range of necessary work carried out in part in the process of production and in part in the process of reproduction. This range is however, not a unity, because the two segments which must add up to become not only necessary but also sufficient for the reproduction of labor-power, are supplied through two valorization processes which are complete in themselves.

Not only did Marx not understand the entirety of the range of necessary work and thus the entire range of capitalist exploitation, he also did not clearly define the relationship between necessary work and the reproduction of labor-

power in relation to the different phases of capitalism's historical development. Here however the analysis will be limited to the period of big industry, that is the period which corresponds to the development of the capitalist system itself, the period which Marx studied most comprehensively.

At some points when he is talking for example about the introduction of machines into the capitalist mode of production, Marx seems to have clearly outlined the passage from one relation between necessary labor and the reproduction of the working family to another relation between necessary labor and the reproduction of a single labor-power. He argues that the coming of large-scale industry provoked a reversal in the previously existing relations between on the one hand necessary labor, the wage and the value of labor-power, and on the other, labor-power. While during the period of manufacturing this relation clearly referred to the labor-power of the entire working family and not to the single labor-power, under large scale industry it changed. With the destruction of the working family founded upon one wage, one relation of waged work; necessary work, the wage and the value of labor-power tended to be connected to the single labor-power. The waged male head of the family became the 'slave master'. As Marx said, before the coming of the machine,

"The value of labor-power was determined, not only by the labor time necessary to maintain the individual adult worker, but also by that necessary to maintain his family. Machinery, by throwing every member of that family onto the labor-market, spreads the value of the man's labor-power over his whole family. It thus depreciates it."¹

And he continues later:

"Machinery also revolutionizes, and quite fundamentally, the agency through which the capital-relation is formally mediated, i.e. the contract between the worker and the capitalist. Taking the exchange of commodities as our basis, our first assumption was that the capitalist and the worker confronted each other as free persons, as independent owners of commodities, the one possessing money and the means of production, the other labor-power. But now the capitalist buys children and young persons. Previously the worker sold his own labor-power, which he disposed of as a free agent, formally speaking. Now he sells wife and children. He has become a slave dealer."²

Elsewhere on the contrary, but still within the analysis of the passage to large-scale industry, Marx oscillates between trying to connect these concepts to either the single labor-power or to the working family, and it is not by chance that he said that "the sum of means of subsistence necessary for the production of labor-power must include the means necessary for the worker's replacements,

i.e. his children, in order that this race of peculiar commodity-owners may perpetuate its presence on the market."³ On the one hand, the lack of clarity within Marxian theory reflects the lack of a systematic, organic approach to the definition of the context, conditions and mechanisms of the reproduction of labor-power as the working class. It is therefore not surprising that the working family is seen only as the backdrop against which the wage moves and where the commodity labor-power is "restored," with the consequence that the theme of reproduction is taken up solely in terms of family maintenance by the male worker, thus necessary labor is calculated only with respect to the male worker's working day. On the other hand this lack of clarity of analysis also reflects the objective difficulties of analysis which arise from the sheer complexity of the relations between necessary labor, the wage and the value of labor-power on one side, and the single labor-power or working class family on the other. Furthermore, if all these family members, including the women and children, are involved in a wage work relation and every one of them supplies the labor necessary for the reproduction of their own labor-power within the factory, the housework socially necessary for the production and formation of future workers supplied by its various members remains to be taken into account. Thus, necessary labor, the wage and the value of labor-power as defined by Marx, express, at most, only the average socially necessary labor for the mere reproduction of a single labor-power, and are not sufficient for the reproduction and preservation of the working class. In this phase, the real relation which exists between necessary labor, the wage and the value of labor-power on one hand and labor-power itself on the other is that which defines itself as nearest to the value of the single labor-power.

However, the Marxian treatment of this argument is not only marked by its analytical lack of clarity but also by its blindness towards the new, incipient phase of the capitalist mode of production which was already appearing by the second half of the nineteenth century. Marx did not grasp the import of the profound crisis and the awkward situation into which the capital of large-scale industry would be thrown by the destruction of the working family and the ensuing cycle of struggles, on the part of women, children and men, which would emerge and erode the mechanisms of the reproduction of labor-power, or rather, of the working class.

This cycle of struggles completely overturned the relation between necessary labor, the wage and the value of labor-power with the single labor-power. The value of labor-power once more tended generally to represent the value of the labor-power of the entire working class family and not that of the single labor-power. The male worker's necessary labor time once again tended to represent at most only the value of the "means of subsistence" for this whole working family, with the consequence that this necessary time, other than being necessary for the male worker himself, and therefore for capital too, also became "necessary"

for the female houseworker inasmuch as it was the basis of her existence. To argue this is the same as arguing that the male worker's necessary labor remains as necessary but becomes insufficient for the production and reproduction of labor-power, which, as has been argued, is of interest to capital only for its use-value and not for its exchange-value and must always be produced and reproduced at a (use) value greater than its exchange-value.

The modern working family is the result of the overturning of this relation, which has seen the male adult worker progressively re-transformed from slave merchant into waged head of family. Which has seen in other words, the re-affirmation of the relation between necessary work, the wage and the value of labor-power and the working family. Obviously, this metamorphosis does not imply a return to the former situation, a step backwards by capital, for in this new context the wage assumes a new function, that of mediating the relations of production of the non-directly waged workers and above all of the non-directly waged (female) workers with capital. The male worker becomes the instrument through which capital manages to expropriate housework, using the form of exchange between itself and labor-power as capacity for production, but without an exchange between itself and labor-power as capacity for reproduction. The wage is no longer an expression of the power of coercion which ties capital to the working class, but has also become the expression of capitalist control and disciplining of non-directly waged work, above all of housework. It has become the means of covering up the exploitation of the female houseworker.

The development of reproduction "took-off" in this phase, hence the emergence of the female labor force as non-directly waged house workers not only brought the value equation between the wage and the value of labor-power under discussion, but also redefined the relation between necessary labor and the reproduction of the female working class with respect to the complex cycle of capital. It is true that today one working day spent in the factory by the male worker is enough to produce the value of the means of subsistence for the whole working family, but it is even more true that another working day spent in the house by the female houseworker is also necessary to transform these means of subsistence into the labor-power of the entire working family.

Also this latter working day can be divided into two sections: necessary labor time and surplus labor time. Necessary housework labor time can be taken as being that part of the female houseworkers working day in which the variable value of the variable capital paid in advance is restored and necessary housework is the labor spent in it in its turn, surplus housework labor time can be taken as being that part of the working day in which the female houseworker produces surplus-value and surplus housework is the labor spent in it. However, distinguishing these two sections within the house work working day is not as easy as determining them for the male worker. In housework the working day tends to be the same as the duration of the day itself and also includes the

female houseworker's consumption time. This implies a work time that is not easily separable from the time in which she works to reproduce the entire working family. Notwithstanding this difficulty, it is possible to recognize and separate out these two sections within the working day, thus it is also possible to calculate the length of the time of surplus labor that capital steals from the female houseworker during this process of valorization.

So the necessary work time supplied by the male worker is now insufficient to preserve and reproduce the working class. But this insufficiency cannot be compensated for solely by lengthening work-time in the factory, although this would imply raising the exchange-value of his labor-power. Neither is incorporating the value of the directly consumable means of subsistence into the exchange-value of labor-power a solution, because in this case too, it would become incredibly high and thus inconvenient for capital. Capital needs to call upon "other" necessary labor which makes the male worker's necessary labor sufficient and which does not raise the exchange-value of labor-power. This "other" necessary labor time is that supplied by the female houseworker to transform exchange-values into directly consumable use-values.

In order to understand the concept of necessary labor time as supplied within the entire cycle of capitalist production, it is crucial to understand the consequences of the emergence of a female houseworking class. Necessary labor time must be connected to the real value of the labor-power of the entire working class family, to a value that is therefore the fruit not only of the necessary labor supplied by the male worker but also of that supplied by the female houseworker. While this may seem to be double-counting, in reality it is not because the process of production and that of reproduction are two separate sides of the valorization process that are complete in themselves. Consequently, the necessary labor time supplied by the male worker already contains the labor time necessary for producing the means of subsistence of the female houseworker too, and does not "count" within the reproduction process. Within the latter, the female houseworker must, with her work, re-earn that part of variable capital which corresponds to her means of subsistence.

The housework working day is all non-waged work time in respect to the whole cycle of capital, but in relation to the male worker it posits itself as the mere lengthening of the necessary labor time he supplies within the process of production and in this sense it is all necessary labor time for him. Necessary for him for his survival, beyond the fact that such work time passes over into the labor time necessary for the female houseworker to re-integrate the variable value of variable capital paid in advance. But, while the male worker uses such labor as use-value for use, the need of surplus housework labor derives from the necessity of its existence itself for capital which uses housework as use-value for value, its greed for all surplus labor, including housework, stems from the character of its own production.

Given that the housework working day is made up of necessary labor time and surplus labor time, precisely how much does capital exploit female housework labor-power? Or rather, what is the rate of surplus-value produced? In this process too, the proportional magnitude of surplus-value produced, i.e. the proportion in which the variable part of variable capital is valorized, is clearly determined by the relationship of surplus-value with the variable part of variable capital, which can be expressed by the formula

$$\frac{p'}{v'}$$

The rate of surplus-value p' is the relative valorization of the variable part of variable capital, i.e., the relative magnitude of surplus-value.

Now, given that the value of the variable part of variable capital is equal to the exchange-value of the female houseworker's labor-power acquired by capital, and given that it determines the necessary part of the housework working day, it follows that surplus-value is in the same relation to the variable part of variable capital as is surplus housework labor to necessary housework labor. Which is to say that the rate of surplus-value in this process of production is:

$$\frac{p'}{v'} = \frac{\text{Surplus housework}}{\text{Necessary housework}}$$

Obviously the existence of a specific production of surplus-value in this process brings with it a specific exploitation of the female houseworker by capital. Indeed, the rate of surplus-value just outlined represents the exact expression of the rate of exploitation.

Within reproduction women are not only oppressed but also exploited, by capital of course. But the male worker is not entirely innocent or blameless, he too exploits, but does so for the satisfaction of his needs and not in order to extract surplus-value. The male worker's exploitation is only the form by means of which capital actuates its exploitation. Thus it becomes clear just how variable capital stretches itself to the limit in order to be able to correspond to the value of the "means of subsistence" of the entire working class family and does so in a situation in which all the members of the working family from female houseworker on, are exploited. However, the situation itself is such as to hide this exploitation, except in the case of the male worker, in the shadow of the single wage given to the male worker in exchange for his work within the process of production. This "singleness" of the wage has meant that a) the left has been able to legitimize its claim that there is only one exploitation, that of the male worker within production, and b) that capital has been able to use the male wage as a means of controlling and disciplining the non-directly waged, the women and children. Both these have allowed capital to make huge savings

on variable capital and have weakened the potential power of worker's struggles. The working class has thus consistently defeated itself by not seeing, or rather refusing to see, the full extent of the cycle of surplus labor, i.e. of exploitation.

It is worth pausing here for a moment in order to examine the political consequences of the male left's confusion of the wage with the relations of waged work, and how it has affected their strategies. It has always been assumed that where there is no wage there is no capitalist exploitation and therefore that the non-waged are not exploited. housework, because it is not directly waged has never even been considered as work, at least not until the feminist movement began to examine and reveal the level of exploitation of women by capital. Under the pressure of the feminist struggles and those of other non-directly waged groups, some sections of the male left were forced to realize and acknowledge that non-directly waged work not only existed but also that the struggles against it were at least as relevant as those of the directly waged working class.

Although in many cases the "new" consciousness of the male left is rather haphazard, a bit of a botch job rather than a real assimilation, it is gaining ground, but the power of the "mystified" is such that it impedes any attempt to discover where and how surplus labor exists within non-directly waged work relations. However one can say today that the wage work relation includes the relation between waged and "non-waged", between waged worker and non-waged worker, and one can also say that as well as mystifying the relation of exploitation between wage worker and capital, the wage also mystifies and hides the capitalist relation of exploitation between non-directly waged worker and capital.

During the years of struggle the feminist movement launched a widespread debate and gained organizational experience around these themes which have marked a turning point in the struggle against surplus labor. The organization of struggles around the reduction of the houseworking day, the demand for money from the state, and for a direct power relation between women and capital, has marked a final jump in the development of strategies for the struggle against the exploitation of women in all situations and also against the supplying of surplus labor within the house.

Within this picture of the process of reproduction, which is also a picture of capitalist exploitation, the questions of the duration and intensity of housework have become two very important issues because they are not only related to the male worker, to his need to extract from the woman the products which are used for his reproduction, but also are related to the production of surplus-value itself. The surplus-value produced here within housework is incorporated into the value of the male worker's labor-power, valorizing it in terms of (use) value. While the surplus-value produced within the process of production is used as capital or rather is re-transformed into capital, the surplus-value produced within house work cannot be directly transformed into capital thus cannot directly give rise to the accumulation of capital, it can only be used to create surplus-

value within the process of production, or rather, it can only be transmitted into the process of production where it can be re-transformed into surplus-value. Thus, the production of surplus-value within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power posits itself as a condition of the existence of the production of surplus-value within the process of commodity production. It is precisely this "hiding" of surplus housework behind exchange-value that has led to talk of hidden surplus-value p' in the preceding pages. Capital must succeed in hiding housework because while the surplus-value produced within the process of production is produced in order to be sold by the capitalist as part of all the exchange-value produced, the surplus-value housework produces is produced in order to be consumed by the capitalist but without however being bought in terms of exchange-value. It is this role inversion on the part of the capitalist, the fact that he/she appears as buyer despite being in reality a seller, that has led to a parallel inversion within the terms of the valorization of the commodity produced – labor-power. This inversion is necessary because otherwise the capitalist as buyer would have to pay a higher price for the labor-power bought and would lose his/her advantage over the worker in this exchange.

In conclusion, this surplus-value, p' , does not only represent the valorization of the value of the labor-power of the female houseworker, v' , but also expresses the value of the male worker's labor-power, v . Now, taking v^a , the total value of the male worker's labor-power when the process of reproduction has ended, or rather, when the male worker sells it to the capitalist, the result is that $v^a = v + p'$. The relation between p' and v represents the proportion in which the value of the male worker's labor-power is valorized, i.e. the rate of valorization of the male worker's labor-power is given by the formula:

$$\frac{p'}{v} = \frac{\text{Surplus housework}}{\text{Necessary labor}}$$

But given that this valorization takes place in the shadow of exchange-value, when buying the male worker's labor-power capital finds it has a double advantage. By buying his labor-power at its exchange-value capital has at its disposal not only the use-value of the latter but also that of the female houseworker's labor-power. It has these labor-powers at its disposal in two different ways, because while it has "direct" use of the former, it only has indirect use of the latter, that is, while it has the use-value of living work from the former, it has only the use-value of "dead" work from the latter. But as has been said, it is precisely this arrangement that allows capital to use the use-value of the female houseworker's labor-power indirectly and thus appropriate the maximum possible amount of surplus labor. Capital appropriates this maximum when it buys the male worker's labor-power at its exchange-value, i.e. when it buys it for

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considerably less than it is worth, given that with just one exchange, between itself and the male worker, capital appropriates the surplus labor of both him and the female houseworker.

Thus the surplus-value produced within the housework process passes over to the capitalist leaving no visible trace, and capital gains twice over. Exchanging the wage with the (use) value of the male worker's labor-power capital finds itself with a "free" providential bonus. But the development of the process of reproduction does not only represent the development of a new side of the process of valorization but also, by breaking even more decisively the value equation between variable capital and the value of labor-power, it obviously brings back into the discussion the value equation:

$$\frac{P}{v} = \frac{\text{Surplus labor}}{\text{Necessary labor}}$$

which is the rate of surplus-value and thus also of the degree of exploitation of labor-power within the process of production. But here it is brought back under discussion not only in relation to the process of production, but rather in relation to the entire cycle capitalist production.

For the male worker everything takes place as before; the surplus-value he produces seems to be in the same relation to variable capital as is his surplus labor to his necessary labor. But in reality, for capital, in order to make the male worker produce that surplus-value it is not sufficient for him to supply that necessary labor within the process of production, housework is also necessary. In other words, to make the male worker produce that surplus-value the surplus-value produced by the female houseworker is also necessary.

If one wishes to calculate the rate of surplus-value for the entire capitalist process, this would be represented by the average of the rates of surplus-value of all sectors of production, including reproduction. However if one wishes to show this latter with respect to a particular cycle of production, given that the cycle of reproduction is present in every cycle of production, here again the average must be taken.

On the other hand if one is trying to calculate the magnitude of surplus-value produced by the whole capitalist process, this will correspond to the sum of the amounts of surplus-value produced in the various sectors including that of the production and reproduction of labor-power. Thus, this is equal to the amount of variable capital paid in advance multiplied by the average rates of surplus-value for the various sectors, i.e. it is determined by the compound total made up of the number of labor-powers simultaneously exploited, directly and indirectly, by capital, and of the average of the various degrees of exploitation of the single labor-power calculated, obviously, in all sectors.

If p' is taken as the amount of surplus-value supplied in the processes of production and reproduction and P is the average surplus-value supplied by the single labor-power, and if v^a is the total value of the single male worker's labor-power when it enters the process of production, and V is the sum total of all variable capital, and f' the value of an average labor-power, a value will be obtained by dividing variable capital by the total labor-power used directly and indirectly by capital;

$$\frac{a''}{a'} = \frac{(\text{Surplus labor} + \text{Surplus housework labor})}{\text{Necessary labor} + \text{Necessary housework labor}}$$

is the average of the degree of exploitation of both the male worker's labor-power and the female house worker's, and if n' is the number of workers directly and indirectly employed, then we have:

$$P' = \frac{P}{v^a} \times V$$

$$f' \times \frac{a''}{a'} \times n' = \frac{(\text{Surplus labor} + \text{Surplus housework labor}) \times n'}{\text{Necessary labor} + \text{Necessary housework labor}}$$

NOTES

¹ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 518.

² *Ibid.*, p. 519.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

PART TWO

8

REPRODUCTION WORK IS PRODUCTIVE

In the first part of this book the main outcome of our analysis was to show that the process of reproduction is a process of value formation, and that housework is productive work. This is not the right place to take up the general question of productive and non-productive work, an extremely complicated and problematic issue. Instead, our argument here will confine itself to examining whether such analysis can be extended to the sexual reproduction of male labor-power. Is prostitution also productive work? The answer is “yes”, because these two processes – housework and sexual reproduction work – despite their different characteristics, function with the same logic.

For Marxist tradition, this is tantamount to a heresy. Traditional Marxism has always had a somewhat moralistic, “redemptionist” attitude towards prostitution, and has always effectively excluded it from the class composition. From this argument’s point of view, however, such an attitude is despicable, not only with regard to the prostitute, but also to women in general; it is blind, manipulative and violent, as well as being politically non-productive.

But what was Marx’s own attitude on the subject? He looked at the problem several times in “Theories of Surplus-Value”, but each time revealed his own conceptual uncertainty. The first time he mentions the issue is when he is examining Smith’s second formula on productive work:

The largest part of society, that is to say the working class, must incidentally perform this kind of labor for itself; but it is only able to perform it when it has labored “productively”. It can only cook meat for itself when it has produced a wage with which to pay for the meat; and it can only keep its furniture and

dwellings clean, it can only polish its boots, when it has produced the value of furniture, house, rents and boots.

To this class of productive laborers itself, therefore, the labor which they perform for themselves appears as "unproductive labor". This unproductive labor never enables them to repeat the same unproductive labor a second time unless they have previously labored productively.¹

Here he is talking about housework in terms of non-productive work and referring to a mythical working class that is simultaneously labor-power as capacity for production and labor-power as capacity for reproduction, i.e., that carries out productive work in the factory and non-productive work in the house. He saw a working class that goes from factory to fireside, from workshop to washing-up, from work productive for capital to work non-productive for capital. Had he instead developed an analysis of this passage, of a kind that was already developing in his day, and seen the tendency towards the sexual division of labor, he would have begun to deal with the kernel of the problem, but he didn't.

Still, during his confrontation with Smith, Marx takes up the problem again, and ends by agreeing with him:

It remains true, however, that the commodity appears as past, objectivized labor, and that therefore, if it does not appear in the form of a thing, it can only appear in the form of labor-power itself; but never directly as living labor itself (except only in a roundabout way which in practise seems the same, but whose significance lies in the determination of different rates of wages). Productive labor would therefore be such labor as produces commodities or directly produces, trains, develops, maintains or reproduces labor-power itself. Adam Smith excludes the latter from his category of productive labor; arbitrarily, but with a certain correct instinct – that if he included it, this would open the flood-gates for false pretensions to the title of productive labor.

In so far therefore as we leave labor-power itself out of account, productive labor is labor which produces commodities, material products, whose production has cost a definite quantity of labor or labor-time.²

Here, Marx does notice that Smith's exclusion of reproduction work, in its broad sense, from the rubric of productive work, is at best arbitrary. But he nevertheless supports Smith on the grounds that the inclusion of such work could raise unfounded pretensions on the part of other work to be called productive.

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His fear of the two being confused probably stemmed from the fact that he seems to have been confused between housework and domestic work carried out by menial servants and the like.

A few pages later he makes a third point while looking at John Stuart Mill's argument in "Essays on some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy", and says:

He in fact added nothing to Smith's (second) definition except that labors which produce labor-power itself are also productive.³

Again he looks at the problem but does not take it up. The only conclusion one can draw from this is that Marx was inconsistent in his arguments about whether reproductive work was productive or not.

So the question remains to be taken up here: do housework and prostitution work posit themselves as what Marx would define as productive work? He says, "The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital."⁴ In "Theories of Surplus-Value," he defines the concept even more precisely, saying:

only labor *which is directly transformed into capital* is productive....⁵

and he stresses the fact that the production of surplus-value must take place directly in order to qualify the work as productive work. Furthermore, he sees the production of surplus-value as being firmly entrenched within the wage / work relation, i.e. "a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital's direct means of valorization."⁶ and in fact he says that for work to be productive it must be waged.

Productive labor, in its meaning for capitalist production, is wage-labor which, exchanged against the variable part of capital (the part of the capital that is spent on wages), re-produces not only this part of the capital (or the value of its own labor-power), but in addition produces surplus-value for the capitalist. It is only thereby that commodity or money is transformed into capital, is produced as capital. Only that wage-labor is productive which produces capital.⁷

A secondary way that Marx offers of determining whether work is productive or not is that:

it can then be said to be a characteristic of *productive laborers*, that is, laborers producing capital that their labor realizes itself in *commodities*, in material wealth.⁸

If this criterion is used and compared with the determining characteristics of reproduction work, then it becomes clear that at least at the formal level such work does not qualify as productive. In fact, at the formal level reproduction work seems neither to produce surplus-value nor to be paid work, nor does it seem to produce commodities. At the real level however, the opposite is true. Here, (a) it produces surplus-value even if not in terms of exchange-value; (b) despite being posited by capital as a natural force of social labor it is non-directly waged work; (c) it is work that produces a commodity, labor-power, notwithstanding the fact that this is a "special" commodity, which takes on the secondary determining characteristics of productive work in a specific way, because it is a commodity which cannot be sold either by capital or by the female houseworker, but only by the male worker himself.

However, these peculiar and specific characteristics do not prevent reproduction work from being, in reality, productive work, because its specific nature can be attributed to the dual character of the work itself. Indeed, rather than preventing such work from being considered as productive, this specificity constitutes the other face of the normality of the determining characteristics of productive work within the process of production. Just as the non-directly waged work of reproduction posits itself as a pre-condition and condition of the existence of waged work within production, so too does the surplus-value produced within the process of reproduction posit itself as a pre-condition and condition of the surplus-value produced within the process of production. Furthermore, while the direct transformation of the work of producing commodities into capital is a necessary condition of its productive existence, so too is reproduction work's indirect transformation into capital a necessary condition of its productive existence. Thus, reproduction work *does* posit itself as productive work, productive work which has its own specific determinants, and it posits itself as such insofar as it is a precondition and condition of the existence of productive work within the process of production.

Two problems remain to be resolved. First, to argue that the transformation of reproduction work into capital is indirect is the same as saying that such work must always, in every case, be productive work, it must *always* produce surplus-value. This is the sole condition that allows capital to decide whether or not to transform this surplus-value into capital, and to determine what use, productive or non-productive, it will make of the labor-power produced, as well as when it will use it. If – and this is obviously an absurd argument – reproduction work were productive only when and where it produces and reproduces the productive male worker, it would then follow that the production of surplus-value within the process of production – production that is posited as a necessary condition for the male worker to create the surplus-value that is transformed into capital – would posit itself as the outcome of

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productive work carried out in the process of production. In other words, if it were the *productivity* of production work that controlled reproduction work, it could no longer be capital that decided how many workers to employ productively and how many non-productively and by how much to reduce the relative surplus population. Without doubt this is the only case where – precisely because of the specific character of the process through which the female houseworker creates surplus-value – the difference is not between productive and non-productive work, but between work that transforms itself directly into capital and work that does *not* transform itself and hence must be directed towards consumption, not towards production. Here, work transforms itself into capital only if the labor-power that contains the housework surplus-value is consumed productively within the process of production, because then the surplus-value contained within the male worker becomes surplus-value in terms of exchange-value, and then of capital. In every other case the precise opposite is true. Thus Marx did well to argue against the economists who maintained that the productivity of work depends on the productivity of the consumption of what this work produces. Countering this notion, he said,

The producer of tobacco is productive, although the consumption of tobacco is unproductive. Production for unproductive consumption is quite as productive as that for productive consumption; always assuming that it produces or reproduces capital.⁹

The second problem is how reproduction work can seem to capital to be productive work if at the same time it is defined as a natural – or unnatural – force of social labor, i.e., as an immanent productive force for capital. There is a clear contradiction here, because the same productive force appears as both a productive force of labor and productive force of capital; it cannot be counted twice. But this is an apparent and not a real contradiction because such work as a natural – or unnatural – force of social labor, that is, as a productive force of capital, is, like all other productive forces within capital, only concerned with the work process, which in this case is reproduction. It is only concerned with use-value. It presents itself as capital's property, as a thing, as its use-value, and therefore does not directly affect the use-value of labor-power. It does not matter whether the female houseworker or sex worker works or not, whether she works more or works less, since the exchange-value of her product, labor-power, always remains the same, because such value is determined by the necessary labor time supplied within the process of production. The only thing that changes is its use-value. But in the case of labor-power as capacity for production, capital is only interested in its use-value and not in its exchange-value. Consequently, given that changes in the productivity of reproduction work only changes use-value, the same productive force is not

counted twice. In front of capital, reproduction work presents itself as a productive force of labor, productive because of the difference between its value and its valorization.

NOTES

- 1 *Theories of Surplus Value*, p. 166.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- 4 *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 644.
- 5 *Theories of Surplus Value*, p. 393.
- 6 *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 644.
- 7 *Theories of Surplus Value*, p. 152.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 410.
- 9 *Grundrisse*, Notebook 3, p. 306, note.

9

THE DUAL CHARACTER OF REPRODUCTION WORK

If reproduction work – housework and prostitution work – is productive, then it goes without saying that it too must take on the dual character assumed by all other work that produces value. Reproduction work is not only concrete work, individually necessary and complex, it is also abstract human labor, socially necessary and simple. Like commodity-production work, it too has gone through the historical transformation from work that produces use-values to work producing value: or more specifically, it has gone from being *the work of the reproduction of individuals* – posited as a natural condition of human existence and of the exchange between the individual and nature – to *housework and prostitution work, the two principal specifically social forms of the work of the reproduction of labor-power*. It is this passage from the pre-capitalist to the capitalist form of work that reveals the effectively dual character of work, the “*doppelcharackter*” first recognized by Marx himself. Although establishing the predominance of exchange-value over use-value, of work which produces value over work which produces use-value, such a passage permitted the work that produces value to maintain the characteristics of work producing use-values.

This is equally valid for both production and reproduction work, because just as productive work within the process of commodity production requires productive work within the process of reproduction, so too labor is either abstract, social, and simple in *both* or in *neither*. There can be no reproduction work in which the product – labor-power – is realized in terms of abstract, social, simple labor that is not in its turn abstract, social, simple work itself.

Within production, capital has to separate off the way in which the value of the commodity produced is determined from its concrete materiality, from the particular qualities and many aspects of work involved, and it must do the same within reproduction.

However, reproduction work takes on the characteristics that determine

value-producing work in a particular way. Reproduction work is abstract human labor, but, unlike the work that produces commodities, it omits the exchange-value of the product – labor-power – and not the use-value. It, too, is social labor but it is so because of its social determinations, which are: (a) its general character, in that it is the work of a single female house or sex worker (which is, however, undifferentiated from the work of any other house or sex worker); and (2) its social character of equality, in which the work of one house or sex worker is equal to the work of another. Thus, despite being individual labor, it is work in its immediate social form, like the work that produces commodities. It is also simple work but, unlike production work, it is so notwithstanding the fact that the value of its product – labor-power – is far greater than its exchange-value.

At this juncture, the fact that reproduction work takes on this dual character in a particular way should be no surprise. The reason for this is already familiar: the commodity produced is a “special” commodity that shapes the characteristics determining its existence in an equally “special” way.

With regard to its first determining characteristic – as abstract human labor – reproduction work is work, whatever the exchange-value of the commodity produced. And this is so because, as has been said, its product – labor-power – only interests capital for its use-value. Furthermore, it only interests capital in its *quantitative* and not in its *qualitative* aspect; it ignores the abstraction of the constituting parts and the material form of labor-power which render use-value for capital. For example, capital is not interested in whether this labor-power belongs to X or Y or Z. For capital it is enough that it is labor-power, and as such has the capacity to supply abstract human labor. All its particular, individual qualities are cancelled out, except that of being a producer of value.

Because its character of being “use” does not disappear, neither does the character of “use” of the work contained in it disappear. What does disappear are the various material / concrete forms of such work. For example, housework does not appear differently from prostitution work: both are reduced to equal human labor, abstract human labor, and distinguished not by being human labor – as Marx would define it – but by being reproduction work.

This limitation on the abstraction of the work contained within the commodity labor-power is also found on the work contained in all other commodities, because this is the spending of human labor-power which is *not only* labor-power but also labor-power as *capacity for production*. Only if a further abstraction is then made with regard to the commodity itself – be it object or individual – can the work appear as abstract human labor without limitations.

With regard to the second determining characteristic, reproduction work is *social* because it is *social work*, not because it is socially determined. This is because, if it is true that the individual as labor-power only has value insofar as he/she contains “abstract human” reproduction work, then it is only the *quantity* of such work socially necessary to reproduce him/herself that determines the

magnitude of the value of his/her labor-power. However, if capital needs average social labor-power within the process of production, it needs such labor-power *even more* within the process of reproduction, and needs it in the quantity that corresponds to average necessary, or rather socially necessary reproduction work. In other words, such labor-power must be standardized and no longer identifiable with the individual. *To do this, capital must also "standardize" women*, it must divest them of all their individual particularities during the process of extraction of their labor-power, because the determination of socially necessary reproduction work can only posit itself as *average time of necessary work*, i.e., of *socially necessary work for reproduction*. Only in this way can capital determine the magnitude of the value of the male worker's labor-power.

Reproduction work is simple work despite the fact that the value of its product is greater than its exchange-value, because *it is the expression of a labor-power whose product costs more in work time than it appears to cost*; not because the material costs of preparing or creating it are higher, but because of the amount of work entailed.

Within the process of capitalist accumulation, the most radical and the easiest way of simplifying both commodity-production work and reproduction work is to posit the latter as a natural force of social labor. Thus reproduction work has been "rendered" even more simple than commodity-production work because the labor-power involved, as a natural force of social labor, is assumed to have a lower cost of preparation and a lower value than that of the male (production) worker. Because it is "simpler" than that of commodity production, *it is the "unskilled labor" par excellence*. Thus reproduction work is work that can be reduced to simple work where the woman's simple labor-power — that contained within her body — is used *as it is*, without any need of specific development. Hence it is undifferentiated, uniform and qualitatively always equal work; it can only be differentiated in quantitative terms.

Thus commodity-production work is made simple too, not only because it is rendered undifferentiated and uniform and not only because the value of labor-power has been progressively reduced, but also because the use-value of labor-power has always been greater than its exchange-value. In other words, *the costs of commodity production have been drastically cut*, not only because necessary labor-time has been reduced to the minimum, but also because *the female houseworker's labor-power has been posited as non-value*.

This last simplification of work, however, means in reality that capital makes the process of simplification less extreme than it seems to be at first sight. *All work is rendered simpler*, and from the moment in which it is the expression of a labor-power whose production costs far more than it appears to cost. Thus labor-power manifests itself in work that is in reality of far higher quality than it appears to be, and it is always supplied at a higher value than that which is reflected in its exchange-value. This is why average social labor in both process-

es of production is always more complex than it appears to be.

This is no contradiction: the greater complexity costs capital nothing to produce, yet it simultaneously produces a greater magnitude of value. Nor is it a contradiction that reproduction work is simple work even though it produces a labor-power that is more complex than it seems to be, because this is one of the ways of simplifying: by reducing its exchange-value. In fact, capital must be able to determine the magnitude of value of labor-power and remove the qualitative aspect of its content, which is the development of the female houseworker's labor-power invested in some way or other in it, in order to force her to supply simple labor-power.

One last point must be clarified here. At the *real* level, reproduction work takes on the characteristics that determine value-producing work in all its articulations, yet at the *formal* level, housework takes on such characteristics in a different way from that in which prostitution work assumes them.

The reason why is clear. The commodity aspect of the prostitute's labor-power is more evident because it is expressed in direct money terms. As a result, the relevant work also appears more clearly as abstract, social, simple work. On the other hand the houseworker's labor-power shows itself as a commodity less clearly, thus allowing capital greater latitude to mystify it and misrepresent it at the formal level.

How does such a difference express itself at the formal level? Prostitution takes on the above-mentioned determining characteristics in a way closer to that in which commodity production assumes them, while housework takes them on in a different way – it takes on those of work which produces use-values, as its sole characteristic. Any development by commodity-production work of the determining characteristics of work-producing value must be paralleled by a similar development by housework of the work-producing use-values.

Just as the *factory* posits itself to the *male* worker as the place where he is required as abstract and, in general, socially necessary and simple labor-power, so too must the *house* posit itself as the place where *he* is a concrete individual, individually necessary and complex to the greatest extent possible. Capital can only posit housework as abstract, human, socially necessary and simple labor to the degree that it represents itself as concrete, individually necessary, and complex.

Capital must create this seeming contradiction for work in order to confront the contradictions of its own mode of production. Its fundamental contradiction here is that the individual as labor-power is represented as a *commodity which could in itself disrupt or destroy the mode of production itself* since it gives considerable latitude to the individual concerned to refuse and to struggle against capital. It became crucial for capital to find a way of limiting this space for struggle, and it did so by creating a *non-factory*, a "non-capitalist" relation to act as a safety valve for the production worker. Thus, the place where *labor-power* is produced *had to appear different* in structure and organization from the

place where *commodities* are produced. The worker had to have the illusion that the siren meant the end of his day's work for capital.

From early on, in his "Manuscripts," Marx began to question what possible sense this reduction of a large part of humanity to abstract labor could have, despite the fact that he was only concerning himself with the process of commodity production. Now his question can be answered, and not only by describing what effect this abstraction, socialization and simplification of work have within the process of reproduction, but also by describing what particular characteristics they lead housework to assume at the formal level. Only thus can the process of abstraction, socialization and simplification of work be described within the whole process of capital's cycle, and the consequent differences and contradictions produced by the process be explained. The expenditure of abstract human labor within the process of production negates the individual / labor-power as a concrete individual. He/she is taken on as any other X, Y or Z: an individual who is indistinguishable from any other individual and distinguishable from other *commodities*, as objects, only by the fact that this commodity, labor-power is able to create value. Abstraction removes any particular individuality. But since the individual is a particular individual, not a "general" individual, this abstraction represents the de-humanization of the individual him/herself.

The use of abstract and social labor implies that, in the process of production, the individual / labor-power required in order to produce a determinate use-value, — a certain quantity of socially necessary labor — must in reality abandon all his / her individual characteristics and individual ways of supplying his / her labor-power in order to conform to the required "average" labor-power, and thus be uniform, standard, and undifferentiated.

Also, given that within production there is a sociality of work which is the outcome of the determination of social labor, the individual / labor-power is opposed to all other individuals, not as a single individual confronted by a mass of other single individuals but as an individual / labor-power in front of the *average of the mass*, which is the social dimension in which he/she must include him/herself. But the individual is, and remains, an individual inasmuch as he/she is characterized by a unique set of attitudes and material and non-material characteristics which define him/her. Consequently, such standardization and "mass production" can only be his/her *dehumanization*.

But the expenditure of abstract, social, simple labor — possible because labor-power is reduced to simple labor-power — implies that individuals themselves are made "simple," and their potential and real individual complexity is abstracted, massified and depersonalized. The individual / labor-power who is obliged to supply simple labor becomes undifferentiated, standardized and made qualitatively equal to all other individuals / labor-power. It is because he/she is a complex whole that this simplification process dehumanizes all it touches.

While the abstraction, socialization and simplification of work within the

process of production has the above effects on the individual /labor-power, it has other slightly different effects within the process of reproduction. This is not to say that in reality work within the process of reproduction must not be equally abstract, social, and simple, but that it must present itself at the formal level solely as concrete, individual and complex work. In other words, it must never be allowed to posit itself as anything other than work which produces use-values: it must *seem* to produce individuals and not labor-powers.

This illusion must be maintained by capital in order to reduce the space for struggle against it.

In effect, because housework represents itself formally as concrete, individual and complex work, it seems to be the opposite: the negation of production work. Housework appears as:

(a) the most *concrete* of all work, capable of separating itself into an infinite number of modes of work and of realizing itself within an equally infinite number of use-values – as many as are the needs of individuals themselves;

(b) the most *private*, isolated, and individual work, capable of acting in any number of ways, as many ways as there are individuals / labor-powers which are produced and reproduced by it;

(c) the most *complex* of all work, able to differentiate itself in an infinite variety of ways and in a variety of operations, and able to posit itself as qualitatively unique with regard to the work supplied by other female houseworkers.

Housework must appear like this because the more production work is made abstract, social, and simple – dehumanized – the more housework must compensate and “re-humanize” the production worker, creating the illusion that he is more than a commodity, a labor-power, that he is an individual with unique characteristics, and a real personality.

Obviously this concreteness, non-sociality and complexity also permeates the female houseworker herself. She must appear to the male worker as a unique individual, a woman distinct from all other women, someone who has a private and personal relationship with him, who is a complex being. The more the individuality of the individual labor-power is taken from him/her, the more the female houseworker's individuality and isolation from other houseworkers must be increased. Her individuality, non-sociality and complexity must be made as concrete as possible because the individual / labor-power must not feel he/she is being reproduced as an ill-defined average and simplified individual, which would be a negation of his/her individuality. He/she must also firmly believe that he/she can only be reproduced by this one woman in one particular privatized individualized situation. This throws light upon the capitalist concept of “love” and of being “in love,” which is closely connected to the way in which housework is organized with its particular dynamic of abstract / concrete, social / non-social, and simple / complex features and characteristics.

This contradictory situation also reflects itself within the fundamental

conundrums that characterize "bourgeois" human science. Here the individual is assumed to be the subject of social action and hence the object of "scientific" research, but this individual must continually be re-identified as the socially average person, who is characterized by the points of similarity he/she has in common with other individuals, and not by his/her distinguishing features. Within current political economy, the individual who seems to be the subject of the argument is in fact investigated as "labor", that is, as a force of production indistinguishable from the other factors of production: land and capital. There is an attempt to "apologize" for the fact that the greatest example of humanity — the individual — has been turned into a commodity among other commodities.

Within the process of the sexual reproduction of male labor-power, the position is almost, but not quite, the reverse. Even at the *formal* level the prostitute does not have a concrete individual as object of work, but *any* individual, the client. Thus such work seems not to "satisfy" the sexual needs of the individual, either in their concrete specific aspect or in their particular complexity. Prostitution work is openly carried out with the aim of satisfying the general, social and sexual needs of the male individual and as such these client needs are simplified, de-personalized and generalized.

This is not to say that there is no division of labor within prostitution work, developed in order to "satisfy" the variety of sexual needs, including so-called perversions. But even these divisions deal only with general typologies of need. It is therefore not surprising that the male worker, as client, sees himself as a commodity, and realizes that here his sexual reproduction is the reproduction of a commodity: of his labor-power. Within prostitution he experiences conditions and hence effects that are very similar to those he experiences as a producer of commodities: his de-personalization, standardization and non-differentiation.

Thus capital has succeeded in putting into motion and controlling this process of transformation and determination of both production and reproduction work to the extent that within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power it has been able, at the formal level, to posit them as being the opposite of the characteristics of work within the process of production.

But what happens to humanity — present here as labor-power as the capacity for reproduction — when it is reduced to abstract, social, and simple labor? Unlike the *male worker* who, the more he is abstracted, socialized, and simplified within production, the more he posits himself as a concrete, individualized, and complex individual within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power, the *female houseworker* undergoes an opposite, further change. At the moment of production, rather than going on towards the abstraction, socialization, and simplification of her work, she has to *represent* it as the *opposite*, as concrete, individual, and complex. It is this final stage that leads to the female houseworker being reproduced "less and worse" than the male worker.

10

THAT STRANGE FORM OF ABSOLUTE SURPLUS-VALUE

Having shown that reproduction work is productive work, it now remains to be seen how that productivity is developed. Here the process of production and reproduction of labor-power must be separated off from the process of the sexual reproduction of male labor-power, because they follow different paths.

Taking the first process, the argument is, once again, that this process is the reverse of that within the process of production. Within production, increases in productivity have always followed upon the development of co-operation and the division of labor and upon increased levels of mechanization. Within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power, however, co-operation and the division of labor have been under-developed, and there have historically always been low levels of mechanization. The two processes have different aims and different methods of raising productivity.

In the first place, higher productivity of housework cannot be determined by the development of its productive force, because it is always posited as a natural force of social labor. Also, because of the particular nature of the commodity produced – labor-power – the housework process is not suitable for co-operation and the division of labor to be developed.

For a start, capital cannot gather female houseworkers together in the same place, at the same time, or under the same boss like it can with male workers. But the necessary conditions for accumulation are all present. The number of women working in this process is very high, and tends to co-incide with the number of women in the population. Similarly the duration of work-time is also high; on the one hand, it is limited by the beginning and ending of the working day within the process of production, and on the other by the natural physical limits of the day. While the place of work is not the same, the area of work is,

and production within the housework process is production of the same type of commodity everywhere.

But there are exceptions. Firstly, within this process of production the male worker's wage is only able to buy the labor-power of one woman; thus he usually only supplies the means of subsistence for himself and his family and no others. Consequently the single male worker cannot control more than one process of production at any one time, and each of these processes must take place in one place which is separated from all others.

Thus this process of production is made up of a whole series of "micro-processes" of production, each one separate from the others. It is organized like this because, in order to be mobilized at the real level, it must at the formal level appear to be a process of individual consumption on the part of the male worker which is activated by just one wage. If a factory for reproduction were ever constructed and if it showed itself for what it was, the functioning of the entire system of reproduction would be thrown into crisis. But it is unlikely to ever happen because it would entail the state/capital taking an unacceptably open level of control over proletarian lives, which would not be accepted.

There is another subjective reason why female houseworkers cannot be accumulated. On the one hand it is in the interests of capital to divide up the male workers – who already spend their commodity-production working-day together – and separate them off within their time of reproduction; and on the other hand, it is in capital's interest to keep the female houseworkers separate, reducing their possibilities to organize amongst themselves.

Thus reproduction presents the opposite characteristics from those that mark production: in the latter capital accumulates workers and makes them cooperate, while in the former it divides up female houseworkers each into a separate place of work – the house – and puts them under the control of one male worker per unit of production.

Both historically and conceptually capital's starting point for production in these two processes has been very different. Within production, the *workshop* was the place of work during the period of manufacture and the *factory* during the period of large-scale industry: within reproduction the place of work is the *house*, the dispersed factory which, because it is the factory for reproduction, appears as a non-factory. Capitalist relations seem to stop at the doorway of the house; the male worker is no longer male worker, the woman is a woman and the work carried out is non-work. Thus capital can build factories within the process of production only to the extent that it can build non-factories within the process of reproduction.

However this dispersion of female houseworkers does not stop average housework from being determined. Housework, objectified within the use-value of labor-power, is work of average social quality, inasmuch as it is controlled in its totality by capital. This makes it possible to talk of a whole housework working day, and of

the average length of such a day. Any individual differences with regard to length of day, etc., are compensated for and disappear within the average.

The dispersion of female houseworkers makes the common consumption of a part of the means of production and co-operation impossible. There can be no common consumption of the means of production anyway, because they are contained within the means of subsistence of a single male worker, and posit themselves as the means of production for a single work process; they are therefore only consumable by a single female houseworker. Thus the means of production are not concentrated, accumulated in a single place, but are consumed within a single work process where they cannot be consumed in common, and for two reasons:

(a) Male workers can neither be given nor hold their means of subsistence communally. Firstly because the individual male worker holds the means of production of housework for the single female houseworker, means of production which are also part of the family's means of subsistence. Secondly because the means of production of housework such as water, gas, electricity etc., which with the advent of large scale industry have all acquired exchange-value cannot be held by a single male worker nor consumed in common. They can only be consumed collectively, thus do not help to develop co-operation in housework.

(b) There can be no common consumption of the means of production of housework because on this scale the means of production cannot be concentrated in the hands of one capitalist. No capitalist would want to create such a massive concentration, and as soon as women were put to work together they would have to be paid a wage. It is much more profitable for capital to posit housework as a natural force of social labor because with one wage it can pay two workers.

Although no capitalist would ever be interested in organizing reproduction work along the lines of production work, the state, in its role as capitalist collective, is obliged to do so, and to posit itself as the holder of the mass of the means of reproduction. Although the area of individual reproduction remains the fundamental point of the entire process of reproduction, it has to be continuously replenished by a sufficiently high level of social reproduction of labor-power. The area of social reproduction is therefore posited as complementary to that of individual reproduction. Because, on the one hand, it can only cover some segments of the housework process, thus presenting itself as a *far less complete work process*, it can only cover the reproduction and not the production of labor-power, and some non-material use-values, information, etc., and not love or affection. And on the other hand, it has limited scope, because such means of production are consumed communally, and work must become *waged work* – a “disadvantage,” which means that the family remains the most “economical” choice for capital as a unit of reproduction.

Within the capitalist mode of production, the common consumption of the means of production is also impeded by the fact that the female houseworker's

own body is one of the fundamental means of housework production. This signifies that no other individual than she – and in part the male worker who has bought her labor-power – can consume this body in order to reproduce themselves. To a lesser degree the same argument is also valid for the male worker's body. Their bodies are the only means of production that in some measure presuppose that there will be a common consumption by both. But this is not the type of common consumption alluded to here, because it is not common consumption between female houseworkers, the primary work subjects of the process, but common consumption between her and a secondary work subject, the male worker. In any case this common consumption never adds any value to labor-power, since the bodies concerned, being posited as natural forces, do not contain any value within themselves.

The general confusion over how the capitalist organization of housework functions has led to many erroneous theories, proposals and demands to change or modify it. There have been calls to concentrate the means of subsistence, or to force capital to concentrate them. But most proposals which at first sight seem to be more productive for capital have always had a flavor of compromise, involving calls for the emancipation of housework's slaves. Neither proposals to develop co-operation within housework nor to create alternatives to capital's mode of organizing it, nor even prefigurative communist organization, have had any success. Their failure is proof of the fact that there are specific laws that govern reproduction within capitalism and that the only way to change them is by struggling directly against capital within this area too.

(c) The dispersion of female houseworkers reflects the non-cooperation inherent in their work. Each single production process is isolated from all others, as is each single houseworker. This non-co-operation is presumed to exist, and is a condition of the existence of male worker's co-operation.

The fact that a degree of simple co-operation can exist between family members – particularly between women – does not alter the fundamental argument about co-operation, because this type of informal co-operation is not historically specific to the capitalist form of production.

Let us return to the image of the photograph printed back to front. In the process of production, capitalist accumulation of workers in one place puts average social labor into action. It follows that one part of the means of production is consumed in common within the work process and that co-operation is developed. Within the process of reproduction, the dispersion of female houseworkers and the atomization of the place of production disperses the means of production, underdeveloping co-operation, even though it too puts average social labor into action. Within reproduction, co-operation and the common consumption of the means of production would have no sense for capital, as they would not increase the productivity of housework.

Common consumption would merely lead to a fall in the value of the

product – labor-power – a value that capital wants to be as high as possible. It is individual consumption that raises the productivity of housework increasing capital's opportunities for valorization.

The development of co-operation would entail the accumulation of female houseworkers in one place, which would not be convenient for capital, as it could lead to the division of labor. Within the process of the production and reproduction of labor-power there is no division of labor between female houseworkers within one single work process, only a division between each single work process. Therefore *labor-power*, unlike all other commodities, does not posit itself as the common product of many female houseworkers, but as *the individual product of a single female houseworker*. Here, the woman is not a *partial* but a *complex* worker, because she is able to produce the single labor-power in its entirety, at least in this process of production. Certainly other members of the family are involved in this production process, but the co-operation between her and them is simple co-operation, and does not affect the argument here.

What this means is that there is a type of "co-operation" in consumption between the male worker and the woman in the sense that, since the means of production are also the means of subsistence – even though they can only be consumed by one woman within the housework process – they are consumed in common by all the family members. This implies that although there is no economizing on the means of production within the housework process, there are considerable savings made in the use of the means of subsistence. And these savings are already allowed for *within the male wage*, i.e., within the monetary representation of the value of the entire working family's labor-power.

The lack of development of co-operation in housework is matched by the lack of development of any division of labor. Once again the functioning of the *process of reproduction* shows itself to be the exact opposite of the functioning of the *commodity-production process*. While in the latter co-operation is based upon the division of labor, in the former the underdevelopment of the division of labor underdevelops co-operation. *It is the separation under capital of the process of production from that of reproduction that has destroyed the previously existing co-operation within the latter between men and men, women and women and men and women*. Proof can be found in a comparison of the process of reproduction under pre-capitalist modes with the process under capitalism.

Within *pre-capitalist* modes, every individual appears as partial reproduction worker. Consequently his/her reproduction was a common product, the result of many peoples' work. But at the same time that every individual was a partial worker with respect to the reproduction of many individuals, each one was therefore partial worker for many common products. The partial nature of the work was determined not only by the division of work along lines of sex and age, but also by a further division of labor existing within such divisions, which was based upon the fact that co-operation took place within reproduction

between men and men, women and women, and men and women.

Here then there were many partial work subjects of many common products which were produced by everyone carrying out different and independent parts of a work process that took place during the time of necessary work, at many points in the working day, and in many different places.

With the coming of capitalism, the entire process was radically transformed in that division, and co-operation within housework was drastically cut. Consequently, the reproduction of the individual became the individual product of the single female houseworker. In other words, female workers became separated from each other and each one became *the complex female houseworker of a single work process*, where before there were many partial workers. And the process itself was/is the accumulation and concentration of the different operations previously carried out by the partial workers, the combination of the different and independent parts now concentrated in a given time and place. Thus during the passage to capitalism *the reproduction of the individual changed from being a common social product to being the product of a single female worker*, and housework became the work of the production and reproduction of the single male worker's (and future workers) labor-power.

But why is it inconvenient for capital to develop the division of labor and co-operation within housework? This question is best answered indirectly, i.e., by showing why it is convenient for capital to underdevelop them. Paradoxically it is precisely because of this underdevelopment that capital is able to determine the level of productivity of housework, make it rise and force the female house worker to produce more in less time... but how?

(1) The female houseworker uses *less time* to carry out all the reproductive operations than that which is required by the complex worker composed of many partially employed workers producing many common products. This is because on the whole *she will spend her entire life carrying out the same operations in relation to the same labor-power*. Furthermore, in pre-capitalist society reproduction work, performed by many partial workers, was not controlled or in any way part of a strategy. Within capitalism however, as will be seen later, housework is controlled by a strategy.

(2) Housework produces more because there is a *progressive drop in the non-productive consumption of the female houseworkers labor-power*, and because of the *growing intensity* of housework itself. Both these factors are the result of the capitalist mode of production's intervention at various levels aimed at restructuring the pre-existing organization of reproduction.

In pre-capitalist society the succession of work subjects who carried out the different partial procedures for the production and reproduction of various individuals implied changes in space, inasmuch as the work was carried out in a variety of different places. It also meant that reproduction work was carried out at various times within the working day, and through a diversity of partial acts,

according to which individual was being reproduced at any one moment. Passing from one individual to another and from one operation to another would interrupt the flow of the working day of the single worker. Such "interruptions" do not occur within the working day of the complex female houseworker, who moves from one operation to another but always within the same work process, and carries out housework all her life on one single labor-power. The spatial disjunction between the various phases of reproduction also largely disappears, and when it goes, so too does the time taken to pass from one stage to another, because housework is more and more concentrated within the house. Finally, if one takes into consideration the fact that the female houseworker must carry out housework within a given time and during a given section of her working day, then it becomes clear that more of her labor-power is used during this given time period.

(3) Housework's productivity cannot be raised or determined either by the perfection of the instruments used, or by the introduction of machines – the "classic" methods of raising productivity within production. This is for three reasons. Firstly, there are the historically different struggles and transformations that reproduction has undergone. Secondly, too great a use of technology would make it difficult to represent housework as a natural force of social labor. And thirdly, because a different type of machine, a "natural" machine, already functions within it. Thus *this process can only show itself as a process that produces labor-power by means of the fundamental consumption of labor-power*. Within it the natural machine runs at full speed in parallel with the machines in the factory.

The point of departure for the female houseworker comes when the male worker supplies his labor-power. The machines in the factory that extract the maximum quantity of work possible in a given time from the male worker, also "work" with respect to the process of production and reproduction of labor-power in that they force the male worker to consume the maximum possible of reproduction work within a given time, thus driving up its productivity, too. This interconnection between the two work processes means that *the woman is also subject to factory-work discipline and must carry out housework with a degree of continuity, regularity and intensity very unlike that of the process of reproduction within former, pre-capitalist modes of production*.

This great "technological" discovery was made at the beginning of capital's development. But its use was only perfected with the advent of large-scale industry, when it was discovered that *total work productivity rises if the housework machine is forced to function for longer periods and more continuously*.

The mass use of "natural" machines in the process of reproduction explains why the production of relative surplus-value is limited here. In fact it makes no sense to compare the machines of housework, washing machines, vacuum cleaners etc., with the factory's machines – the comparison can only be made between factory machines and the "natural" machines of housework. This does

not, however, totally exclude the fact that instruments and mechanical machines are used within the housework process of production, even though they obviously have a minor role in productivity here compared to their role in the factory; but they do change the work in both qualitative and quantitative terms.

(4) Increases in housework productivity can never be achieved by raising surplus labor time through the lengthening of the houseworking day. This working day cannot be extended because it already is the maximum, i.e., the woman's physical living day. There is, however, constant pressure within this mode of production to keep the working day at its maximum in the face of various struggles to reduce it. It is a productive but not an easy battle for capital for two types of reasons:

(a) The relationship between work time and the value of labor-power is based upon a working day that tends to be the same as the woman's living day, which is never precisely determined as a time period. For capital, this can be an advantage – if it succeeds in tacitly lengthening it, or a disadvantage – if the woman succeeds in equally tacitly shortening it.

(b) This is an "intersectoral" relationship, since the value of labor-power is in fact determined within the process of production, and the value of the female houseworker's means of subsistence always remain the same whether she works, 6, 8, 10 or 12 hours a day. Once the value of all labor-power has been set – always at the lowest feasible amount – within the process of commodity production, capital seeks to ensure that this value corresponds to the maximum possible amount of housework. The woman's interests are of course different: she seeks to make the minimum housework time correspond to the greatest possible value of her labor-power, and she has a better chance of success precisely because such value is not directly related to her work time.

How is the productivity of prostitution work increased? There have been two main lines of development here within capitalism. The first is very similar to the path housework has taken. Various micro-processes of production, each separated from the others, have been organized: sex workers have been dispersed, the means of production consumed individually, and co-operation and the division of labor have not been developed. In the latter's case however, while there has been a lack of development of the division of labor within the single work process, at a wider social level a degree of specialization has emerged, with prostitutes catering for particular sexual needs and tastes.

Here, too, the use of instruments of work and machines is very limited for the same reason – the prime machine is the woman's body, in particular its sexual functions. It can be said that it is precisely the limitations on the usage of this machine, how much it can be used, that has given rise to a large market for *pornography* in all its aspects, which requires less living work, can be mechanized more easily, and permits the consumption of sex at a non-material level.

Within prostitution, too, capital always seeks to impose the longest possible

working day on the woman and to increase the intensity of the work itself, while simultaneously trying to reduce the non-productive consumption of the female sex worker's labor-power to a minimum.

The second path of development taken in the development of the productivity of prostitution work is closer to that taken by capital within the process of production. It is founded on the fact that prostitution work can be subjected to a final leap in its productive force. The fact that the value of the sex worker's labor-power represents itself in money terms implies that *her work is vulnerable to being organized by capital within a social relation of production that is directly regulated by exchange-value, i.e., as a "waged" work relation.*

Throughout its history capital has followed both these paths, depending on the equilibrium of the social relations of production at any one time. Both have their disadvantages for it. Without doubt the second path is more profitable for capital in terms of the production of surplus-value, but it is not always the best in terms of the reproduction of capital as a social relation. On the one hand it is clear that the organization of prostitution along the lines of "waged work" has the advantage, in that it excludes the dangers inherent in the exchange between the female sex worker and the pimp, which exchange, as has already been argued, represents an inversion of the roles of female houseworker and male worker. On the other hand the sex "factory" brings with it such contradictions for the state at the social level that it is frequently forced to abandon the "factory" policy and return to the first solution.

This final jump in the productive force of prostitution work takes place through the restructuring of the exchange between the woman and the pimp. It can take place in two ways: either the exchange can be completely reversed, or there can be an attempt to make it into a forced exchange between the female sex worker and the state.

In the first case the pimp is transformed from being a dependent worker, paid by the female sex worker to reproduce her, into an entrepreneur, a boss who pays her to work for him. In this case the exchange now takes place between "illegal" capital and prostitution work, between the pimp-capitalist and labor-power as the capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor-power.

Such a change limits the pimp's non-productive consumption of the money he derives from prostitution. As entrepreneurs, pimps tend to re-invest their money within the process. The limousine, the night-life — all seemingly close to what is considered to be non-productive proletarian spending — now can re-enter the capitalist framework.

In the second case however, the state abolishes the pimp and becomes the sole employer, the sole legal entrepreneur of prostitution. Here the exchange takes place between *state capital* and prostitution work, between the pimp-state and the female sex-worker. In this case there tends to be an accumulation of female sex-workers. Whether it be in the brothels of West Germany, of Africa, or

of Latin America, etc., there is a common consumption of some of the means of production, and a certain level of co-operation and division of labor. In both cases the prostitute becomes a female "waged" worker, and because of this her work, already productive, becomes even more productive.

To sum up, the form of the production of surplus-value within the process of reproduction is similar in both the housework process and the prostitution work process. Within the process of the production and reproduction of labor-power there is no development of co-operation and division of housework labor. Nor is there common consumption of the means of production. Furthermore, increases in its productivity derive from the underdevelopment of the former and the individual consumption of the latter. There is a limited use of machines only in a context where the basis of production is the production of labor-power through the use of labor-power itself. The real area of conflict is around the maintaining of the housework working day, which tends to be the same as the woman's living day. The same is true within the process of the sexual reproduction of male labor-power, whichever path of development it has followed.

Thus the form taken by the production of surplus-value within the process of reproduction is a strange form of absolute surplus-value, even though it is, if limitedly, from the moment when the production of relative surplus-value prevails within the process of production. In the future, the degree to which the production of relative surplus-value is increased within reproduction by the introduction of higher levels of technology or decreased by the opposite process will depend largely on the power relation women are able to establish between themselves and the state/capital.

However, while the increased (or decreased) level of technology within housework is important, it is totally irrelevant in the context of prostitution work. In prostitution work, the introduction of technology frees no one from anything. The only thing that will bring freedom from prostitution work is the common struggle of all women united in struggle against the non-directly waged work-relation. This is a very different struggle from that espoused by large sections of the left, who limit themselves to demanding the abolition of prostitution and the extinction of the prostitute as a social figure. This only creates a situation in which prostitutes are persecuted, or are re-educated/rehabilitated, i.e., forced into a waged work-relation – obviously at the lowest possible wage.

Within the process of production and reproduction of labor-power the question of technological development is a strategic issue, because the possibility of being freed from a large quota of material housework will depend on how the problem resolves itself. The resolution of the question will depend on how women struggle for it. In the United States, for example, a fall off in the sales of domestic appliances has been matched by an increase in the numbers of people eating out, in the increased use of laundries and launderettes – that is, by an increase in the housework operations being carried out *outside* the house: i.e., by their increased

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socialization. But this is not generally true in other countries as yet.

What is true at the more general, international level is that the growing numbers of women entering waged (production) work has led to a fall off in the productivity of reproduction-work. It is rarer today to find a woman who works a 24-hour-a-day houseworking day, either because she can buy the opportunity of doing less housework or simply because she is less willing to do so – her attitudes have changed. *Even though women have made no "official" contract to reduce their work time it is tending to fall, which is a defeat for capital but remains an organizational and political problem for women.*

For women's struggle against non-directly waged work to have any chance of success, women must become more involved, take more control within the sector of science and technology. Not only in relation to the common demands of the proletariat – over energy, etc. – but also to increase levels of technology directly within the sphere of reproduction, including contraception, household appliances, etc. This problem does not arise within the production process, where both capital and male workers, albeit for different reasons, have sought to develop technology to its limits. Capital has always tried to reduce its variable part to the minimum, while workers have always tried to reduce their work time. In the short term, technology has often produced adverse consequences for production workers – redundancy, cut-backs, and the like. But it has always been viewed positively in the long term, as a means of reducing the time spent in waged work. Within reproduction, there is no such coincidence of interests between women and capital; the level of technology has remained low and is likely to continue to do so. Technological developments would have brought no reduction in the variable part of capital – the wage – and would have served only to reduce the time spent working, thus freeing women from non-waged work. Hence capital's control over scientific developments has tended to be directed in the opposite direction.

So for women, unlike men, one organizational problem is how to force this technological leap to be made: how to automate large areas of housework. To do this *women must learn to organize against all non-waged work*, to take control over reproduction at every level and above all *not permit capital to usurp any time gained free from non-waged work for capital itself*

11

THE FAMILY AS A FORM OF CAPITAL'S DEVELOPMENT

The *family* is the privileged center where the housework process is carried out, the productive nucleus where the female houseworker works, the nerve centre of the process of reproduction.

Within capitalism this structure – the family – has always had the crucial function of producing and reproducing labor-power. This has not, however, always been its sole function, as witness the history of the family itself, where *two distinct phases* can be identified. In the first phase – which corresponded to the extraction of absolute surplus-value – the family was a unit for *both* commodity production and for the production and reproduction of labor-power. In the second phase – which corresponded to the extraction of relative surplus-value – it became the fundamental unit for the production and reproduction of labor-power only.

The passage between the two phases co-incided with *the passage from manufacturing to large-scale industry*. The factory represents the pivot between the two types of family because the factory system brought with it class struggle, forcing capital to take measures to preserve and guarantee the constant reproduction of the class. Furthermore, as well as bringing in a physical/spatial separation between the process of production and that of reproduction, the factory system also increased the sexual division of work subjects. With the factory came the concept of the man as male, waged, production worker and the woman as female, non-waged, reproduction worker, and the family became above all the unit for the production and reproduction of labor-power.

Here the family will be analyzed only during its second phase. It too, like so many other elements and agents of reproduction, has a dual character, a double life. It has an apparent life, as the “natural” center for the reproduction of individuals as use-value, and a real life, as the center for the production of labor-

power as a commodity – the center where the female houseworker produces a huge quantity of surplus-value. It is precisely this double life that allows it to function as a nerve center of production, since it can only function as a center for the creation of surplus-value insofar as it appears as a center for the creation of non-value, the complementary opposite of the factory.

The family is the place where variable capital is mobilized both as *income* and as *capital* – capital in relation to the female houseworker and then in relation to the male worker and future workers. Mothers, fathers, husbands, wives children and siblings appear to be a natural force of social labor, but they are in reality labor-power as the capacity for maternal,* paternal, etc., reproduction of labor-power. They are *commodities*, and insofar as labor-power is “bought” by capital and produces capital, reproduction workers do not belong to themselves but to capital – they *are* capital. But this is already well known and recognized. It is common knowledge that family relations are alienated and alienating, that the “love” we have for our fathers, mothers, children and siblings has to be expressed through the work we do for them – work which produces them as commodities. *All family members – even within the “love” of the family – are not protected from but remain subject to capital’s will and discipline.* Children “must” go to school whether they want to or not, for example, and everyone is aware that *the family is in reality the pool of labor on which capital draws.* It appears as a place of “love,” but is in reality a place of alienation, of commoditization, of non-communication.

What is not common knowledge, however, is how the family functions in the production of surplus-value. To investigate this, one must start from the character of the commodity. Firstly one can show that these commodities – these labor-powers as the capacity of paternal, maternal, marital, child and sibling reproduction with respect to labor-power in its capacity for commodity production – have even more specific characteristics than have housework labor-power. Unlike the latter, they cannot circulate freely on the labor market but only within a determinate family: the one to which they, as individuals, belong. In other words *the family is the labor market within which these labor-powers must circulate as a presupposition and condition for the existence of both the*

*Maternal reproduction of labor-power is included here because this is not completely contained within labor-power as capacity for the production and reproduction of labor-power. In part it is contained, because when the male buys the female houseworker’s labor-power, he buys it not only for its capacity to reproduce him, but also for its capacity to produce and bring up new labor-powers. But once they are produced, a relation develops between the female houseworker and these new labor-powers – a relation of exchange and of production which is separate and different from that which she has with the male worker. Thus it is necessary to specify “maternal” labor-power within the articulations of labor-power as capacity for reproduction.

"free" exchange between the male worker and capital and the exchange, mediated by the male worker, between the female houseworker and capital.

It is this "obligation" that gives the family productive structure its flavor of "slavery". This flavor permeates the family, and posits itself as a pre-condition and condition of existence for the real form of the capitalistic center of production: the factory. The only partial exception to this among all the family labor-powers is that of the capacity for marital reproduction, which – by being able "officially" to posit itself as labor-power within the family – can do likewise outside the family context, also. The traditional acceptance of husbands having "lovers" has never served to invalidate marriage, and may indeed have served to make it more solid. This however is *not* true for the woman's "adultery," which has always put marriage into crisis, in large part because of the low level of power she has in relation to her husband; she is non-waged, while he holds the wage.

At the real level of behavior, and partially at the juridical level, *this male "privilege" has recently started to erode*, albeit slowly, and largely as a result of pressure from women who have begun to demand equal liberty for themselves within marriage. But this is also because *monogamy has diminished in its importance within society*. Extra-marital relations are often seen as a way of keeping a marriage going. This is not to say that the situation has changed completely, only that it is changing, slowly.

Except in this latter case, all articulations of labor-power as the capacity for reproduction can posit themselves as commodities – take on exchange-value – only to the degree in which the subjects of the exchange are obligatorily determined, i.e., determined by both their buyers and their sellers. Non-adult labor-power can posit itself as labor-power as the capacity for reproduction only to the extent that it is exchanged either between parents and offspring or between sibling and sibling. Labor-power as the capacity for reproduction can only become a commodity here for two subjects: the parents who have materially produced it, or for the other siblings produced by the same parents. It can only be child or sibling labor-power as capacity for reproduction because there cannot be a non-adult free market for reproductive labor-power: minors cannot sell such labor-power.

However, the male worker and female houseworker cannot buy non-adult reproduction work for their own reproduction, even if they need it, because it is a commodity that cannot circulate. Neither can they posit their adult labor-power reproductive capacity as a commodity, except as the maternal or paternal capacity of reproduction. Even this latter cannot circulate as a commodity, however, since those who *would* buy it *cannot* they are non-adult. Thus the only way that the male worker and the female houseworker can make their labor-power as the capacity for the reproduction of non-adult labor-powers function as a commodity and simultaneously exchange it as the capacity for the reproduction of adult labor-power is to *have children*, become parents: materially

produce the other subject of the exchange, to oblige it to exist, and then to exchange themselves with it.

These labor-powers do have one feature in common with housework labor-power — they exist for an indeterminate time within the individual, indeterminate both within the context of the single working day and within the entire arc of all working days. The capacity for offspring or sibling reproduction exists within the individual from the moment of his/her birth. Even a newly born child reproduces its parents at a non-material level... when it smiles for example... producing a large quantity of use-value for its parents.

Because of the material/concrete work cycle of reproduction, *all these labor-powers must diversify themselves and carry out different operations according to age*, and in the case of offspring and sibling reproduction, also *according to sex*. A new-born child reproduces his/her parents differently from how a six-year-old will, and so on. Furthermore, a male child will reproduce his parents differently from the way in which a female child will, and vice versa. In their turn they too are reproduced differently by their parents.

Thus *the family is the place where capital as variable capital is mobilized*, and where all the articulations of the capacity of reproduction operate, with the exception of the capacity for the sexual reproduction of male labor-power.

Obviously, the female houseworker does the lion's share of the work. She is the pillar of the family, the foundation on which it is built. It is her housework that makes the family a productive structure. This too is well-known. The functioning of the relation between her and the male worker has already been explored in depth and can be left to one side in this discussion of the structure of the family. Here, instead, it is better to take up an analysis of the *secondary subjects* of housework, of their exchanges and relations of production, since they are the missing elements needed to complete the picture of the family reproduction of labor-power.

Historically the *capitalist family* presents itself as being founded upon five different presupposed types of exchanges which bring into being the same number of non-directly waged relations of production. These are: (a) the relation between the female houseworker and capital, mediated by the male worker, and (b) vice versa; (c) that between the male worker and female house worker, as *parents*, on the one hand, and capital on the other, mediated by the new labor-powers as children; and (d) that between the new labor-powers as siblings and capital, mediated by other new labor-powers as siblings and (e) vice versa. This is an extremely complex series of exchanges and relations of production, all of which bring to mind the complexity of the exchange relations between the female houseworker and capital as mediated by the male worker, which we have already analyzed. Thus in order to understand how these relations function one needs only to extend what has been said in the context of the former fundamental exchanges and apply it to these other ones, inserting their various relevant peculiar features.

The main difference between the exchange between male worker and female houseworker and those between parents/children and sibling/sibling is that, while the former is posited as a free exchange, the latter are not, since the subjects are constrained to exchange with each other. These obligatory exchanges tend to be tacit. Moreover, unlike other family exchanges, that between parents and their offspring is also characterized by being partly immediate and partly postponed; any counter-exchange by the children is usually put off for some years, i.e., until they themselves become active adult labor-powers. These family exchanges, like that between male worker and female houseworker, are not direct relations between family members: they take place *through capital*. Each family member as a reproductive labor-power not only *is* capital, but is also its *image* and its *mediation*. Husband, wife, father, mother, offspring and sibling all not only directly produce surplus-value within the family, but are also the *tools* by means of which capital makes the other family members produce surplus-value and work productively. Each individual is therefore the mediator of the production relation between every other family member and capital.

Taking the husband/wife relationship as an example. It has been shown that there is no *direct* relation here — only the one between the woman and capital mediated by the man — and we can now add that in his relationship with the female houseworker the male functions in another secondary but necessary way: as the seller of housework, or rather of labor-power as the capacity for marital reproduction. Here it is the wife who functions as the mediator of this exchange and production relation between the husband and capital, mediating it at the real level. As husband and wife they do not reproduce themselves as individuals but as commodities, as labor-powers, which is true in all other family relationships as well. They, too, are all dual.

There is no direct relationship between *parents* and *offspring* either. Here, in reality, there are two distinct relations of production: one between parents and capital mediated by the children, and the other between these children and capital mediated by the parents. The same is true for the relations between sibling and sibling. Every family member must confront variable capital, which acts like capital before all else. Hence *capital predominates within all family exchanges and relations*, making them the exchanges and relations of the production of the commodity, labor-power.

The chain of capitalist exploitation does not therefore stop at the factory gates, but enters the house. Family relations are capitalist relations and only appear to be interpersonal relations. Family members are only the channels through which capital exploits the other members. The child does not exploit the mother for itself, but for capital, and vice versa. And even when they have no interest in producing surplus-value, only in their own survival, their reproduction.

Obviously such relations do not appear as dual relations, but as a single relation. Neither do they show their capitalist function in fact, they *appear to be*

the least capitalist relations that exist. The husband does not seem to be a male reproduction worker, but he is; he too is exploited by capital to produce surplus-value within the family. His relation is not with his wife, but with capital through his wife, who capital uses in order to extract the maximum possible amount of reproduction work from him. The same is true for the male worker in his role as father; for the female worker in her role as mother; and for future labor-powers in their role as offspring and siblings.

The only thing that does change is *the subject that functions as the mediator for capital* in its exploitation of other family members. In the first two cases it is the *children*, in the third, the parents, and in the last two, the siblings themselves. And it is because capital uses them to exploit each other that there are so few limitations on its capacity to exploit. Within production the male worker can confront his capitalist boss and impose some limits on his exploitation, but what mother can do that in the face of her children? She, when reproducing her child, is reproducing a commodity, hence capital. But their relation seems to be non-capitalistic, so here too such exchanges take on a dual character: they are one thing at the formal level and a quite different thing at the real level.

With regard to the exchange between the husband and capital mediated by the wife, capital represents such labor-power as capacity for marital reproduction as a natural force of social labor. The male worker as husband becomes a non-directly waged worker too, and marital reproduction work becomes a personal service.

If however one considers the relation between parents and off-spring mediated by capital, here the father *formally* relates to the children as the owner of the wage and the supplier of paternal housework. In *reality*, he is relating to capital in a relation mediated by the new labor-powers as offspring, as labor-power in its capacity for paternal reproduction. The mother, at the *formal* level, relates to the children as supplier of housework, but at the *real* level she is relating to capital as a labor-power in its capacity for maternal reproduction, in a relation mediated by the children.

In both cases the children are mediators for capital. On the one hand they mediate between the male worker as capacity for paternal reproduction and him as the value of his labor-power as capacity for production, which functions as capital. On the other, they mediate the relation between the female houseworker as capacity for maternal reproduction and variable capital that functions as capital. Always, though, at the formal level they simply posit themselves as the subjects of the exchange: the children.

Within the exchange between children and capital mediated by the parents, during the whole period of their formation the new labor-powers present themselves to the parents as the child suppliers of housework, while at the real level, through parental mediation they are, to capital, labor-powers with a child's capacity for reproduction. When — through production work — they become

active labor-powers, they posit themselves, when opportune, as owners of a wage. Here it is the parents who function as mediators of the exchange and relation of production between the new labor-powers as offspring and capita. At the real level they mediate the positing of the children in the latter's capacity for non-adult reproduction; they do so in the first instance with regard to the value of the male worker's (father's) labor-power and in the second, when necessary, with respect to the value of the labor-power of the children themselves as the capacity for production. Throughout such mediation, they posit themselves at the formal level as the other subjects of the exchange: the parents.

Finally, at the formal level, the exchange between siblings appears to the siblings involved as an exchange of sibling housework within which one sibling supplies another/other sibling(s), and vice versa. In reality each sibling has a relation with capital where the mediator(s) is/are the other sibling(s) as labor-power in its capacity for sibling reproduction.

These exchanges – like the one between the female houseworker and capital mediated by the male worker – are *not exchanges of equivalents* at the real level. Nor do they represent themselves as such at the formal level: they are *exchanges of exchange-values*. *Capital appropriates the work time of all*: the male worker as husband/ father; the female houseworker as wife/mother; and the children as offspring and as siblings. *It appropriates these work times indirectly through the exchange with labor-power as capacity for production*. Here, too, every reproduction worker produces far more than he/she receives, which is at most the means of simple survival.

This becomes very clear if one thinks of the work that mothers do for their children, or grandparents for their grandchildren. They do not receive equal "value" for what they give, but neither do they care, since they do it *for* the child or grandchild, for both its and their own happiness. But they are *also* doing it for capital's happiness too. Everything extra they produce in terms of commodities – labor-power – makes capital happier when it appropriates this value as it buys the labor-power of this child or grandchild. Perhaps these children will be happy, but this happiness always remains the fruit of capital's exploitation of the mother and grandmother.

Thus family exchanges are all exchanges of non-equivalents between non-equals, and are exchanges whose capitalist nature is hidden behind a non-capitalist facade. In the eyes of the male worker, the female worker and the future workers, these exchanges appear to be exchanges between individuals, interpersonal relationships taking place outside of the capitalist context. The most important thing is, however, that these exchanges should appear to the various family members as being the most "convenient" and economic way to reproduce themselves. *As these exchanges are increasingly revealed as convenient and economic for capital and not for the workers, they will be broken down and destroyed*.

For these exchanges, too, their duality means that not only the *act* but also

the *conditions* essential for them to take place must be different from those required for the exchange between the male worker and capital, and complementary to the those needed for the exchange between the female houseworker and capital as mediated by the male worker. Their particular characteristics are, however, even more clear than those of the latter exchange. Rather than being proof that they remain outside any capitalistic labor market, they are instead considered as presuppositions and conditions of the existence of the "normality" of the conditions that the exchange between male workers and capital are based upon.

The exchange between husband and wife, between parents and offspring, and between sibling and sibling, are the forms of dual exchange that take place between themselves and capital; they posit themselves to each other as *forms of capital*. To take the first case; both husband and wife produce surplus-value within the housework process, although she produces far more than he – or at least did until housework began to be spread more equally in recent years, when the apparent equivalence of the exchange began to be revealed as a sham to many women in areas of advanced capitalism. Women ceased to be satisfied with the "equality" of what men gave them – fundamentally the wage – in return for their housework, and began to demand more in terms of marital and paternal work.

It was a battle that had to begin in the family before moving on to confront the state, a battle that took off during the 1970s and 1980s and in many ways succeeded in both demystifying the nature of the exchange between husband and wife and in re-defining the roles of husband and father. The crudity of capital's way of organizing interpersonal relationships was revealed. Experiments in new ways of relating were tried out, and the connection between housework and these relationships was made clear.

Also, importantly, it was argued that the struggle was/is *not only women's struggle, but the struggle of all those who are reproduced*. How far the "new" husbands and fathers will function for capital, and how far they will prove a means of dislocating the capitalist organization of reproduction, remains to be seen. So far the state has attempted to recuperate and compensate for women's lower levels of housework by re-creating the formal image of paternity and marriage, presenting it as "a new world for men" from which they were once excluded but are now free to enter. The old female images remain strong but are no longer inviolate: there is "paternity leave" too, now.

But not only has there been a refusal of the non-equivalence of the exchange but also a refusal of the exchange itself. Single parents – particularly *single-mother families* – are becoming more and more usual. These are families that do not have the usual channels of mediation, and which therefore *pose a new problem for the state* as it tries to "manage" and control them in terms of their output of housework.

Both parents and children produce surplus-value within the housework process, surplus-value which capital appropriates for itself for its valorization.

Thus they lose, even though they are only interested in whether their needs are satisfied or not. Such needs are, for the parents, to have themselves reproduced at least non-materially by the children during the period in which the latter's labor-power is being formed, and then, when the children are active, to be reproduced either/both non-materially or materially as required. The children need to be reproduced both materially and non-materially while their labor-power is in formation, and to be reproduced more non-materially than materially when they are active. In fact, parents seldom cease to work materially for their children, as witness grandparents' roles in child care and the like.

However, parents decide whether this exchange is going to be convenient for them or not from the start, knowing that this is an exchange that will be mediated and diversified over time. It is obviously they who decide whether to initiate this exchange with children or not; children only have the choice later on, of whether to maintain relations or not. Thus it depends on the parents whether this exchange ever takes place.

Within the history of capitalist production, the exchange between parents and children has gone through *two phases*, characterized by both the different needs that encouraged the former to produce children and by the different manner in which the exchange appears to the parents. Capital makes it very hard for the male worker and female houseworker to ignore the need to have children, because the work time for the reproduction of offspring is a part of the necessary work time for the reproduction of their own labor-power. This remains basically true in both the first and the second phase. What distinguishes one phase from the other is that in the first phase this need is closely tied in with the *material survival of both parents*.

This first phase broadly corresponds to the phase of the extraction of absolute surplus-value. It is the phase in which the children from early on re-exchange both material and non-material reproduction work with the parents, and/or re-exchange a wage. As one goes back in the history of capitalism, so the reproductive work load passed from the mother onto the children increases, particularly onto the female children. The simpler the labor-power being produced, the easier it became for the mother to pass over and share out the work. Nowadays such a sharing out and division of labor within housework is almost impossible, because the labor-power being produced is so much more complex, at least within the areas of advanced capitalism. It is also almost impossible because children spend so many hours at school and participating in other "formative" activities. Today, consequently, children are very much secondary housework subjects; before, they were not.

In the first phase, parent and children appear to exchange equivalents, at least in the parents' eyes. The initial costs of having children were repaid later when the children looked after other children and worked in the house and/or began to bring in a wage.

With this type of equivalence and the common consumption of some of the means of subsistence, it was more convenient for the parents to exchange with the *highest possible number* of children. The lower the wage, the more necessary it was for the working family to produce labor-powers in order to increase the family wage to the highest amount possible.

The drawback to this was the increased risk of dying of hunger, and of never becoming a part of the active labor force in production. One side of this is then the idea of raising the total family income and thus raising the standard of living itself. For the children themselves, it meant the opposite: the more there were of them, the less they can individually consume, because the available "fixed capital" did not change and the "circulating capital" did not grow in proportion to their numbers.

This lack of "convenience" for the children in this wage exchange with their parents may have led to many leaving home, entering vagabondage and not counter-exchanging with their parents. But in general having the maximum number of children was a "guarantee" of the parents' own material production and their survival. This was a weakness of the proletariat at the time, because the proletariat was forced to guarantee its own subsistence by making the maximum possible number of exchanges with the minimum number of children.

The second phase — which corresponds to that of the extraction of relative surplus-value — is different. Here the exchange seems to the parents not to be an exchange of equivalents but of non-equivalents, and therefore not convenient.

This change in view is the result of both subjective and objective factors. The objective factors are those which have made the exchange more risky and often more deferred. They are, firstly, the *progressively rising cost* of raising new labor-powers, costs which effectively erode the wage; secondly, the *lengthening of the time period required* to form these new labor-powers, which now tends to finish when the new labor-powers start to produce and also begin to "produce" their own family; and thirdly, the *increase in both scope and intensity* of housework that falls mainly on the shoulders of the female houseworker.

The subjective factors are the *growing struggles* by both parents and children against what each represents to the other as the means of their exploitation by capital. Many of the coercive elements of the family have been reduced, with the result that the state has been forced to take up part of the bill for producing new labor-powers by providing social service such as kindergartens, schools, hospitals, etc., and has been forced to pay for some housework that was often considered extra, such as caring for old, sick, or disturbed people.

This phase has been characterized by the *limitation* of the number of children produced, a limitation imposed by the parents. A productive level of children, from capital's point of view, is no longer the same as that which the parents consider productive from their point of view. For the latter, to have a lot of children is no longer convenient. The male wage is stretched too far, and the

female houseworker's working day becomes too intense. Thus they tend to reduce the number of children. The falling birth rate is today, and has been for a long time, a problem for capital. This fall in birth rate is the result of the fact that now parents may only produce one or two children – or even no children at all. In general though, children are still considered to be a necessary element for the male and female worker's reproduction, though no longer are they seen as indispensable, like before.

During the formation and restructuring of the family in this second phase, not only have the proportions of what is given and received changed, but also the object exchanged. There is not only a rise in the volume of use-values exchanged but also a rise in the volume of non-material use-values exchanged. This exchange increasingly presents itself as unequal and working to the detriment of the parent's interests. The quantity and quality of the work has changed. It goes on much longer, and covers a wider range of jobs, and because it is a capitalist relation of commodity production this has negative effects: unfaithfulness, hatred, more witness to incapacitations and deaths in the family.

This is only one side of the question, however, for the new relation can also provide the opportunities for a richer relation as well. *The worker/boss relationship that previously existed between parents and children can be replaced by a new closeness which develops alongside the erosion of parental "authority."* Such authority has been eroded by changes in the norms of family behavior: Physical violence within the family has been condemned and actively discouraged. Children are now seen as having "rights" in relation to their parents and so on. In fact today, far from being the children's "bosses," the parents more often seem to be their "slaves."

But the simple overturning of this relation is not what is really being sought. The real struggle is the destruction of capital's control over family relationships, and of the power relationship between capital and the class.

However, the ways in which and the mediations through which parent and children exchange have not been modified by these historical transformations. The act of exchange always takes in a particular form; it is an obligatory exchange, and an exchange that is partly deferred in time. Parents and children do not enter into a reciprocal relation as the owners of commodities who have equal rights, nor as juridically equal people because they aren't at any level. The male worker is not equal to the female worker, nor as parents are they equal in relation to their children, and so on.

As the free holder of the wage the male worker posits himself to the children differently from the way in which the female houseworker posits herself, since she does not hold the wage but only has the right to consume a part of it. Likewise the children, who are even less equal than she is in relation to the male worker/father, have to posit themselves differently. They are less equal than she because they can neither sell nor dispose of their labor-power, which is consid-

ered to be "in formation." They cannot even freely dispose of its non-material aspects, for it is fundamentally at the parents' disposal and is not theirs to "sell." On the other hand though, neither the male worker nor the female houseworker are entirely free to choose another or other subjects to exchange with. They are obliged to exchange their respective commodities within the family itself: parents with offspring and vice versa. Because they cannot choose, neither can they change the subjects with whom they exchange.

Notwithstanding the fact that this exchange appears to be the precise opposite of capitalistic free exchange, it is in reality a pre-supposition and condition of existence for the production of new labor-powers by the male worker and female houseworker, and of the "free" exchange of these latter with capital.

Because of the conditions of the exchange, both parents and children are tied or committed to exchanging their respective commodities for an indeterminate time, both in regard to the duration of the single working day and in regard to the entire arc of working days represented by their lifetimes. If this exchange is examined closely, it can be seen that it is composed of *two phases* determined by the specific nature of the commodity that must be produced at the second moment of the exchange: labor-power.

The first phase is that in which the new labor-power is being formed; the second is when the labor-powers of the male worker and female houseworker are in decline and the new labor-powers are beginning to become active. It is often only during this second phase that the true inequality of this exchange is revealed. But by then it is too late for the parents to refuse it. Recently, the first phase has become longer and longer, not only because of the longer time period spent in compulsory education, but also as a result of rising youth unemployment. Thus the parents must continue their maximum level of productivity much longer.

Future parents are nowadays often aware that it is unwise to expect that there will be any return from children. This obviously affects their willingness to initiate the exchange at all. Children are beginning to reject the idea that, because someone chose to bring them into the world, this means that they must forever be indebted to this someone. Children are more often refusing the traditional counter-exchange of family relationships.

Within the family, siblings also produce surplus-value. This exchange is also "on trial," because its inequalities are becoming clearer. In particular it is the "sisters" who are rejecting the exchange, refusing to serve their brothers, refusing to provide a larger amount of reproduction work than is required from the male children. Slowly this exchange is equalizing itself, just as the exchange between the parents is equalizing — as a result of the struggles of all women as unwaged workers within the family.

The concrete cycle of the exchange between siblings has two phases too. It is also being transformed, but in the first phase it has changed very little. This phase is characterized by the continuity of the exchange, it is where the new

labor-powers are created and when the Siblings reproduce each other mainly at the non-material level and together consume the necessary use-values required for their formation. The transformation is greater in the second phase. This is the time when the new labor-powers become productive and found a family themselves. Today this often marks the end of the sibling relationship, which will often finish when they leave the family of origin.

In the second phase the family – the sole center for the production and reproduction of labor-power – still presents itself as a “unity” of production. A unity because, as has been seen, the work required to reproduce labor-power consists of many segments of housework time which are supplied by a variety of working subjects: the male worker as husband and father, the female houseworker as wife and mother, the future labor-powers as both offspring and siblings. The family – with its five types of non-directly waged relations of production – is the fundamental center for the production of surplus-value within the process of reproduction. As such, even during the process of its transformation, the family is posited as the nerve center for capitalist accumulation on a par with the factory. Thus, like the factory, it has been and is a place of class struggle, the area in which the various sections of the class continually redefine their reciprocal relation based on the power they express in the face of capital.

But why do these exchanges and this composition of relations of production exist within the family? The broad answer is – because they meet the requirements for the productive organization of reproduction. The exchange and the relations of production between the female houseworker and capital mediated by the male worker are fundamental but insufficient.

To make the process of production and reproduction of labor-power function, other exchanges are also necessary. The most important of these “secondary” exchanges is that between the male worker and capital mediated by the female houseworker. This exchange and relation is required because the female houseworker’s reproduction cannot only consist of the use-values into which the wage can be transformed; it must also include the consumption of use-values which only the husband can and must produce. For although this relation this housework is paid for by the wage, it must not appear so.

Thus “love” enters the discourse, and the relation can be expressed in other non-money terms. Without love, capital would not be able to make this relation function, nor would it be able to isolate the male and female houseworker within the family. But their exchange and relation is only the first of a series that are required to complete the process. The exchange between parents and offspring is also necessary for the process of production and reproduction of labor-power to take place. The aim of the family is not only the reproduction of the male worker and female houseworker, the already existing and active labor-powers; it is also the production of new labor-powers to replace existing labor-powers, and furthermore, the production of the greatest possible numbers of new labor-powers.

The optimum production of labor-powers is usually the maximum production – the highest population growth possible has been an important factor within the development of capitalism. Perhaps even more important, however, is the fact that this reproduction should be posited as a natural force of social labor, and that the main burden of costs should fall upon the parents and not on capital. Again the structure of family relations of production allows capital to meet these requirements.

The further exchange required by this process of production and reproduction of labor-powers is of course that between siblings. This is declining in importance, if only for the fact that so many families nowadays are smaller, often even one-child families.

These exchanges and relations – husband/wife, parents/offspring and sibling/sibling – are the sufficient basis for family reproduction. Other exchanges do exist though, within the family context, but will often no longer form part of the family basic unit. One example would be the exchange between the parents and their parents, for example.

Two factors have contributed to such "other" relations being excluded from the original family unit of today. First, consider the developments in the exchange between variable capital and housework that have tended to totally involve all the labor-powers in the production of the new family. Second, there is the lengthening of the average life-span of individual labor-power that has altered the exchange between parents and offspring. Today it is unusual for parents to form part of their offsprings' families, if only because the original parents still have a fairly long and active period of life ahead of them after the children leave home.

These two elements have led to the formation of the modern "nuclear" family. Such a family – founded upon the five types of exchange and relations of production already analyzed here – has until recently always been considered to be the most productive family form. The push to develop such a form undoubtedly came from the need to continually raise the productivity of housework. It has become the most common form of the family within capitalism, because it is the form of capital's development.

This family is founded upon and built around the male worker who holds the wage, the properties and capacities of the female houseworker's housework labor-power, and upon the "free" exchange between them both. Because he holds the wage, the male worker also effectively holds the means of subsistence of the woman and any children; he does not, however, hold their labor-power. The fact that only he holds the wage explains the power structure within the family under capitalism, explains why the distribution of power is so unequal; it also means that since he posits himself as the holder of the wage, the wife and children are able to posit themselves as non-waged labor. In other words, the relations between the members of the family are transformed from an exchange of

work with living work, into relations of production that formally exist between the man/husband and father and the woman/wife and mother on the one hand, and the children themselves on the other. The transformation of these relations has had various consequences:

(a) The father and, in her subordinate position, the mother, are formally required to initiate a relation of production with the offspring;

(b) Such relations posit themselves as relations of production only to the extent that they also posit themselves as interpersonal relations, and they also presuppose exchanges of exchange-value that are, however, not represented as capitalist exchanges even at the formal level;

(c) The relation between parents and offspring is no longer based upon the working co-operation of both, but becomes a specific relation of production that connects them formally;

(d) While, in the pre-capitalist forms of production, the man and the woman as parents and the children were expropriated of both the product of their reproduction work and of their work that produced use-values by the feudal lord or master, within capitalism they are formally expropriated of the product of their housework not by capital but by the product of their work — the other labor-power.

The fact that the male worker holds the wage is fundamental for this family structure to function. Capital needs to have "its" representative within the family in order to impose its authority and control over the family members and to ensure that the entire process of production and reproduction of labor-power functions in an orderly and productive way. It must have an "agent" because its control can only ever be indirect.

But even then, the male worker must never appear to be capital's agent. His power within the family must always appear to be "natural," a natural right, as opposed to one created materially and juridically by capital. Capital's control, mediated through the male worker, regulates the family work process, i.e., the *type* of division of labor and co-operation that takes place there. The *type* is emphasized here because the true division of labor and co-operation has never been developed within the family; instead, there is a simple form of co-operation and a division of labor that takes place between one primary work subject and other secondary work subjects. It is a "division" of labor that brings with it an unequal distribution of work. The fact that there is a primary work subject — the woman — implies that she does most of the work, and that the "secondary" subjects have a lighter work load. But such a "division" also means that there is inequality with regard to the *quality and quantity* of both the consumption of the use-values produced and of the product itself, i.e., of the labor-power incorporated within the family members. Furthermore, here — unlike within the process of production — the division of labor within the housework process does not automatically mean that there is a division between the objects themselves. The woman is simultaneously wife and mother, the man is husband and father,

and the children are offspring and siblings. Each work subject has two roles that he/she must carry out within different segments of the housework process.

Such duality of role also characterizes the type of co-operation within the family that is founded upon the need of every individual labor-power to consume other's housework and to co-operate with the other family members in order to reproduce him/herself. This co-operation is vital since these dual roles must be played.

It goes without saying that the individual's family role is only dual if one takes each family in isolation. Potentially, the individual family member can/will play many more roles in any context outside of the basic nuclear family unit.

If in the factory the male worker is subject to the authority and discipline of capital, in the family he holds the formal authority, and administers capital's discipline to the woman and children. But his authority is weakening, because of the reasons already mentioned, and also because increasing numbers of women are now working outside the home, i.e., holding a wage.

Yet the male worker's patriarchal authority within the family is not intended as a way of valorizing himself, but of valorizing capital; *it is the real form of the authority exercised by capital over housework work subjects*. Such authority appears as the formal outcome of the fact that the female houseworker and children do not work for themselves but seem to work for the male worker; in reality, they are working for capital. But this is not only a particular function that arises from the nature of the process of production and reproduction of labor-power and thus only relevant to that one process. It is also a function not of male exploitation directly, but of capital's exploitation of other labor-powers.

This co-operation within the family is on the same basis as co-operation in the factory, where

the co-operation of wage-laborers is entirely brought about by the capital that employs them. Their unification into one single productive body, and the establishment of a connection between their individual functions, lies outside their competence. These things are not their own act, but the act of capital that brings them together and maintains them in that situation. Hence the interconnection between their various labors confronts them, in the realm of ideas, as a plan drawn up by the capitalist, and, in practice, as his' authority, as the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose.¹

Within the family this process is repeated exactly, the only difference being that it takes place with respect to the co-operation of non-directly waged labor-power as capacity for reproduction.

But the male worker, capital's "representative" within the family, is not sim-

ply an overseer, a supervisor of the process. He too is a reproduction worker, and he also holds the means of subsistence for the entire working family. Thus capital creates a contradiction for itself through its use of him. He is a representative who could easily refuse to exercise his delegated authority on behalf of capital. Whether he does or will refuse is up to him.

One last point should be made here. Just as a hierarchical structure develops within the factory, so too does a hierarchy develop within the family, which assigns each to his/her allotted post under the control of the supervisor: the male worker. Such a hierarchical structure is fundamental if the family is to function "properly." *There have been and increasingly are struggles against this hierarchy, struggles that are every bit as virulent as any in the other factory of production.*

The family as a unit of production and reproduction of labor-power also posits itself as *a unity for the production and consumption of the use-values necessary for the production of labor-power itself*. This is a unity in which the use-values produced by one work subject are consumed by another, or others, and vice versa. However this does not mean that the quantity and quality of work supplied by each individual work subject is in any way homogeneous, nor does it imply any homogeneity in their consumption. Yet they do all have one thing in common: in every exchange that takes place because of the male worker's wage money, none of the participating subjects can buy money with their housework. The only legitimate holders of variable capital remain those who have earned it — the male workers. The others have the right to consume, but not to hold the variable capital that corresponds to their means of subsistence.

This effectively means that these others — the woman and children — are always subject to the male workers consensus with regard to the quality and quantity of their consumption. Or rather *were*. Here again the situation is beginning to change and *the structure of consumption in the family is being altered*. Less and less does the male worker have the "right" to be the major consumer, or the "sole right" to decide who shall consume what, when and how.

During the 1950s there was a trend towards higher levels of consumption, often headed by women trying to "improve their children's consumption, aided and abetted by youth who were demanding a greater share in such consumption decision-making. This enlarged the sphere of consumption. Capital was obliged to "discover" women and particularly youth as new important agents of production and consumption. It is from this period on that children's demands for pocket money, for record players, tape recorders, etc., began to rise in a crescendoing chorus. A larger and larger part of the paternal wage began to go to meet these demands, and a higher level of maternal housework went into the children.

But women, too, began to demand a larger slice of the wage. And usually got it. The father now became the source of a "minimum wage" — an "allowance" — which the children "earned" solely by virtue of the fact that they

existed as individuals, and not because they were active as labor-powers. This is a very anti-capitalist idea.

This restructuring of the hierarchy of decision-making about family consumption has had certain clear effects, amongst which are the facts that (1) now the father too is forced to make greater sacrifices for the children, sacrifices which usually fell to the mother's lot before; (2) that the new generation of workers is accustomed to a higher level of income than before; and (3) that the father has clearly lost a good part of his formerly absolute authority in this sphere, and by implication in other areas, too.

So the family is the place where capital articulates the various exchanges and relations of production, and regulates the power differences which are created between family members through the division of labor within it. This "division" of labor obviously corresponds to a *stratification of power* between the family members. In other words this division of reproduction work labor, its consumption as well as its supply, gives rise to a hierarchy that is founded on age and sex differences, and which functions as an *immanent productive force* for the capitalist organization of housework with respect to both its material production process and as a control over any potential revolt. This stratification of power and the diversification also facilitate exploitation within the family.

In such a context it is easy to see why the family is in crisis. It is a tangle of bosses and workers, of exploiters and exploited, held together by a web of dependence. It is too easily forgotten that the family is capital's organization and that the "enemy" to be struggled against is not another member of the family, but of course capital itself.

On the other hand, it is also easy to see that the family has the potential to be a place of love, affection, and solidarity. But for it to become so, capital's power must be destroyed. It is a very hard struggle, one very difficult to organize, and one that, if it is to be successful, must involve all reproduction workers.

The family can either be transformed or destroyed. Alternative structures are already being tried out at a variety of levels, some individual and some group oriented. Just as the "form" of the productive unit — the factory — is being changed, so too could that of the family. They could both become extinct. There are changes taking place now that will eventually lead to a profound restructuring of the social productive body. But if the family does cease to be the center of reproduction the presently offered alternative — a *co-operative form* of the reproduction unit — is still a process of commodity production. *Co-operation and self-management seem to be capital's response both to struggles in the family and in the factory.*

NOTE

¹ *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 449-450.

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CAPITALIST ACCUMULATION & POPULATION

Since the aim of reproduction* is the creation of surplus-value, events that take place within it obviously have as much effect upon capitalist accumulation as do events within production. Thus it is not sufficient simply to analyze the organic composition of capital; the composition of variable capital must be studied too, and the relevant dynamic of its different – perhaps contrary – laws.

It is difficult to make such an analysis, but it is possible. The organic composition of variable capital – i.e., its value and technique – is harder to see than is that of capital. Within the process of reproduction, the means of production are less easily separable from labor-power, from both the technical and value points of view, than they are in the process of production. Even within this latter, constant capital is not separated from variable capital, as it would seem: it is only past work. But in fact the organization of work also performs the functions of fixed capital, of machinery, which in reality uses only living labor. For ease of analysis, first the production of labor-power will be separated from its reproduction.

In the former, it seems almost impossible that the composition of variable capital can be determined from the point of view of value, because the value of the raw materials, of the means of work, and of the auxiliary materials, cannot be separated from that of the female houseworker's labor-power.

Here, the raw materials and means of work that are contained within the bodies of the woman and the man have no value; they are pre-suppositions and conditions for the existence of capital. The value of the auxiliary materials made up of the female houseworker's means of subsistence is not separable from the value of labor-power; it is the same value. Therefore, the only part of the value of the means of production that is not contained in labor-power is given by the

*"Reproduction" is used here in this chapter to mean the production and reproduction of labor-power, in an attempt to simplify the language.

value of those auxiliary materials which do not at the same time act as the means of subsistence of the female houseworker's labor-power.

On the other hand, within the reproduction of labor-power, the value of the raw materials, of the means of work, and of the auxiliary materials, seems to be at least partly separable from the value of the female houseworker's labor-power. It is separable during the first phase of the housework process in relation to the production of material use-values. In this case, the raw materials correspond to food, clothes, furniture, and the like; the means of work to the washing machine, vacuum cleaner, and the like; and the auxiliary materials to gas, electricity, water, and the like. To discover the value of labor-power and the value of the means of production, it is sufficient to simply separate off the value of the female houseworker's means of subsistence from the value of the means of subsistence necessary for the rest of the family's survival — which appear as the means of housework production — and then divide the value of these means of subsistence between those consumed in common by the number of family members. Add this last value to that of the female houseworker's means of subsistence, and one has the value of her labor-power.

In this first phase, it seems to be impossible to separate the value of the means of production of non-material use-values from that of the female houseworker's labor-power, because the raw materials and means of work co-incide with her, and the auxiliary materials — clothes, make-up, etc. — are comprised within her means of subsistence. This is why the value of the means of production, of auxiliary materials, is the same as the value of the female houseworker's labor-power.

In the second phase of the housework process, the value of the means of production is easily separable from that of the female houseworker's labor-power. This value is given by the value of the material and non-material products produced during the first phase. In the second phase, these posit themselves as housework's means of production — or more precisely, as raw and auxiliary materials with respect to which the means of work is the individual as labor-power.

However, these difficulties in determining the organic composition of variable capital can be overcome if one just assumes that the means of production which are at the same time the female houseworker's means of subsistence function from the side of value as the variable part of variable capital and not as its constant part, i.e., as the value of her labor-power. From here — assuming that within the constant part of variable capital only that value of the means of production which do not function as her means of subsistence must be included — *it is possible to separate off the constant part and the variable part of variable capital.*

Correspondingly if one assumes from the technical side that the only true and real means of production are those which do not function simultaneously as the means of subsistence of labor-power, then it is also easy to obtain the average of the organic composition of variable capital, because this is the sum of the

average of the various existing compositions of each housework process.

But having overcome these initial problems, the major one remains: the dynamic of the organic composition of both capital and variable capital.

Our hypothesis here is that in a "phase of this process, that in which the increase of capital occurs while the technical composition of capital remains constant,"¹ both capital and variable capital are subject to the same dynamic of value composition, inasmuch as, in both, the variable part increases. As Marx notes, within the process of production "growth of capital implies growth of its variable constituent, in other words, the part invested in labor-power. A part of the surplus-value which has been transformed into additional capital must always be re-transformed into variable capital, or additional labor fund."² Thus the "accumulation of capital is therefore multiplication of the proletariat."³

But the multiplication of the proletariat — that is, an increase in the variable part of capital, which derives from an increase in capital itself — signifies a rise in the variable part of variable capital. Hence, the accumulation of capital means not only a rise in the numbers of the male proletariat — male waged workers who produce and valorize capital and who are thrown out when they become superfluous to capital's needs in valorization — it also means a rise in the numbers of female proletarians who also produce and valorize capital, and find themselves destitute when the male workers become superfluous to capital's needs. However, they do not become superfluous, as will be seen.

With regard to the phases where, given the general basis of the capitalist system, "the development of the productivity of social labor becomes the most powerful lever of accumulation,"⁴ our argument here is that the *dynamic of the organic composition of capital and that of variable capital diverge*. Within the process of production, the expanding magnitude of capital that enters corresponds to the relative magnitude of the means of production, which, as Marx says, accompanies a rise in their absolute value, but is not in proportion to their volume.

Within the process of reproduction, the magnitude of capital that enters is rising. But this is the case only in absolute terms. It falls in relation to the single housework process, in correspondence with the fall in the exchange-value of labor-power that accompanies the progress of accumulation. Furthermore, within reproduction, the specific development of labor productivity expresses itself in a different way: not through the rising magnitude of the value of the means of production comparable to the labor-power incorporated in it, but through the sum total, the mass, of housework supplied by all female houseworkers. In other words the crucial, decisive point in this accumulation process is identified by the creation, or by the maintenance, of the "houseworking day," and also by its work subject, the female houseworker.

The fact that within reproduction capital concentrates upon increasing the mass, the total of labor-power, and not upon increasing the volume of the means of production has already been discussed in the context of the under-

development of the division of labor and co-operation within housework (See Chapter 10). This divergence in the path of development that capital has taken derives from both the specific nature of housework that is posited here by capital as a productive force of social labor, and from the different path that struggle against it has taken.

Within the process of production, faced with growing struggles for the reduction of the working day, capital has been forced to develop the productivity of labor within the restrictions of a limited working day. It has raised productivity usually by increasing the volume of the means of production – by altering the ratio of the input. Conversely, within reproduction, capital has been able to increase productivity by lengthening the working day: creating a specific, unlimited houseworking day. In the factory, the age of large-scale industry began when large-scale machinery was introduced. In the house, this “age” initiated a rise in the scale and the scope of housework, compelling the proletarian woman to make the house her primary place of work, and compelling her to become a female houseworker. Thus capital usurps the woman’s working day within production and reduces the value of her labor-power to that of her “value” as a female houseworker, which is totally included within the male wage.

Capital’s lever for development is the creation and formation of “the female houseworker class” which, because of the transformation of the age and sex composition of the waged labor force, enables variable capital to return to its former position and once again correspond to the value of the entire working family’s labor-power.

Only in a second moment does capital augment the magnitude, intensity, and at a certain point also the productive force of housework within certain limits. It raises the latter through a rise in both the volume and the quality of the means of production which are used by the single female houseworker, though the value of her labor-power will decrease in correspondence with a rise in the productive force of labor within the process of production.

This second moment, which passes through a different technical composition of variable capital, was *started up by capital in response to the cycle of struggle around the reduction of the houseworking day*. These struggles were initiated and developed by women, often invisibly, but nonetheless effectively. This cycle of struggle – which was built around the struggle for the reduction in the number of new labor-powers produced – led to a reduction in both the extent of the houseworking day in relation to production of new labor-powers and in relation to the process of reproduction.

The fall in the birth rate is in part a direct expression of the female houseworker’s refusal to take on the extra housework that children require. And it is also a way for her to reduce the volume of the means of housework production that she, the female houseworker, must use, at the same time and to the same extent.

Capital’s response to this struggle has been:

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(a) To raise the relative magnitude of the means of production within the housework process, in comparison not with labor-power but with the quantity of housework;

(b) To transform its quality; and

(c) To re-impose the magnitude of the houseworking day, making it longer and more extensive.

This does not contradict the earlier argument about capital's limited use of machinery within the process of reproduction. The fact that there is a limited use does not mean that there can be no increase in the volume of the means of production, instruments, and to a certain extent machinery, used in both relative and absolute terms. But it does mean that any increases made here are relatively less unimportant in comparison with any made within the other, the production process.

Here one is dealing with both a qualitative and a quantitative increase, insofar as the true means of production, i.e., those that are not part of the family's means of subsistence, increase relatively more. This increase in volume and quality of the means of production, which takes place within the single work process, has led on the one hand to an increase in absolute terms in the mass, the total of means of production with respect to the total of labor-power mobilized to use it. On the other hand, it has led to a greater concentration of these means with respect to the single female houseworker. Each of these female houseworkers now transforms a greater volume of the relative magnitude of the means of production into use-values which are directly consumable by the members of the family, and does so within a given time and with an average effort of their labor-power.

In this process, however, the increase in volume and the change in the quality of the means of production is *not matched by any diminution in the amount of labor-power used*, but by a decrease in the amount of housework required to use them. Capital's attitude to women as workers changes in accordance to how and where it wants to use them. When it wants to use them on a large scale as either full- or part-time workers within the process of production, however, it expects the absolute total of housework supplied to remain the same.

To use female labor-power as houseworkers in the areas most amenable to it, capital merely adjusts the housework load in such a way that it falls only in regard to the single operation, which can be carried out in less time using the means of production. The total of all housework supplied therefore does not diminish; if anything, it tends to rise in absolute terms, raising the number of operations the female houseworker must carry out, too.

The increase in volume and the changing quality of these means of production serves only to shorten the time necessary for the production of use-values; it does not alter the total time taken by housework operations. The use-values are now produced using a greater volume of the means of produc-

tion. But an increase in the productivity of work does not lead to more commodities being produced in less time. Given that the quantity of housework's product is limited and tending to reduce, *some operations are done in less time in order that other operations can be carried out as well*. Thus increases in housework productivity are not reflected in more and hence cheaper commodities being produced, but rather in an expansion in the content of housework, itself which takes on new operations.

One further factor that should be noted here is that in reproduction as in the process of production, as the volume of the means of production rises value falls in comparison, and even if absolute value rises it does not rise in proportion with the rise in volume. Hence the increase in the difference between the constant and variable parts of variable capital is far smaller than the increase in the difference between the total of the means of production – into which the constant part of variable capital is converted – and the total of female labor-powers – into which the variable part of variable capital converts. However if the progress of accumulation *diminishes the relative magnitude of the variable part of variable capital*, it does not necessarily mean that there cannot be an increase in absolute magnitude. As Marx argues, the uninterrupted re-transformation of surplus-value into capital shows itself as the rising amount of capital that enters into the production process, and hence into that of reproduction.

Within the process of capitalist accumulation, the different dynamics of the organic composition of capital and of variable capital mobilize labor-power in the factory in a different way from that in which it is organized in the home. They mobilize it according to opposite laws. Marx saw the laws that govern the "movement" of labor within the process of production with great clarity, despite the fact that he saw them only in terms of the general laws of capitalist accumulation and not as laws which only functioned and governed the process of production. The following law is one he considered to be absolute:

The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore also the greater the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labor, the greater is the industrial reserve army. The same causes which develop the expansive power of capital also develop the labor-power at its disposal.⁵

However, the laws governing reproduction remained unrecognized by Marx. In general, these tend to operate in precisely the *opposite* direction to those in production. Which is to say that in this process there is no reserve army of labor, and there is no relative surplus population, either.

The reason for this has already been noted: the rise in the numbers of workers employed in the production process – even if it is in a constantly decreasing

proportion with respect to the increase in total capital – only represents itself as an increasing magnitude of variable capital entering the process of reproduction. And this increasing magnitude in its turn implies an increase in the variable part of variable capital. Thus, demand for housework increases in the same proportion as any rise in variable capital that, it should be remembered, takes place in a constantly decreasing proportion to the increase in total capital.

Within the process of production, *a surplus population of workers must exist in order that capital accumulation can develop*. Within reproduction, *it would be superfluous*, because a rise in the working population here would mean *a rise in the total usable population*, inasmuch as all are indirectly valorizable and valorized by capital. Capital does not need to suppress any part of necessary housework in order to be able to posit it as surplus labor. In production, unemployment, retirement, redundancy, and the like are the expression of the dual movement of capital. In reproduction, full employment expresses the only movement of capital that is taking place. Likewise, in production, capital tends continually both to raise the working population and transform part of it into relative surplus population. In reproduction, however, it only raises the number of workers. In other words the necessary work carried out in the process of production that capital renders superfluous does not automatically make the housework it mobilizes superfluous as well. (However this housework could seem "superfluous" to the unemployed worker, who no longer receives it in exchange for his wage. But this risk does not in fact arise, as will be seen.) This is the moment in which labor-power as capacity for production "appears *outside the condition of the reproduction of its existence*; it exists without the *conditions of its existence*, and is therefore a mere encumbrance; needs without the means to satisfy them."⁶ Even if it does survive, it won't be because it reproduces itself through the dual exchanges between work/labor and capital, and between the wage and housework, but because it is maintained as labor-power (of production) by collective capital – and today, also by the state. It is easy to understand why, in this situation, housework does not become "superfluous" for the male worker, either. He may not work, but he still has basic needs that have to be met, and that can only be satisfied by housework.

Therefore, housework continues to be necessary for both the male worker and for capital. Capital wants the female houseworker to continue to carry out housework for the male worker in order to maintain his labor-power for possible future use. In such cases, housework is no longer valorizing the wage, instead it is valorizing the dole, the welfare or the social security payment, and is reproducing a *potential* and not an *active* labor-power.

It has been shown that an absolute rise in the working population within production provokes a parallel rise in the female houseworking population within reproduction; that such a rise is, in both cases, always faster than that of variable capital, or rather of the means that give employment; and that this does not

mean that a relative surplus houseworking population is created which is superfluous to capital's average needs for valorization. Far from it. The entire living female labor force is always necessary to capital.

Thus, the absolute law of capitalist accumulation operating within the process of reproduction is: *the greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and therefore the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productivity of its labor, the greater is the absolute mass of the working population within reproduction.*

However, the argument about how the different dynamics of capital's organic composition and that of variable capital mobilize labor-power within the two processes does not end here. Until now only the use made of labor-power and the different laws governing such use – depending on whether the aim is to produce commodities or reproduce labor-power – has been discussed. How these dynamics mobilize the production of labor-power remains unexamined.

So how is population produced in capitalist society? Population which presents itself as a pre-supposition and condition for the existence of the process of production itself. There are many interwoven arguments here, but each one can be taken separately.

A preliminary problem is the concept of population itself. Marx is unclear. Sometimes he talked about laboring population, sometimes about population *tout court*, and sometimes about working population. But he saw the need to define the concept of population – as the mass of both active and potential labor-power – to distinguish it from the bourgeois economist's definition: the mass of individuals including everyone – bosses, workers, etc. It makes sense to keep this problem of defining population alive, because the concept of population has historically been defined by capital's economists. Here, however, the current concept will be used, but used in Marxian terms, because *in the context of mass proletarianization the degree to which total population does not tally with total labor force is statistically negligible.*

As has been seen, the female worker is the "creator" in the production of future workers, and the family is the place chosen for this production. This means that the laws which govern housework production and the struggles that take place within it will and must affect the structural changes occurring in the population. Thus, in order to analyze the problem of population, one cannot simply assume, as Marx did, that its increase is a natural force of social labor.

Population must be looked at in the context of the entire cycle of capital: that is, on the one hand, as the outcome of the housework process, and on the other, as a pre-supposition and condition of the existence of the process of production. Only then does it become clear (1) why the greatest possible increase in population – i.e., of living labor-powers – is a pre-supposition and condition of existence for capitalist production; (2) how this maximum production takes place; (3) which laws govern its expansion; and (4) what type of work process

produces these necessarily more numerous living labor-powers.

From Marx on, it has been generally recognized that the capitalist mode of production – the accumulation process – produces and needs the maximum possible population growth it can achieve:

As to production founded on capital, the greatest absolute mass of necessary labor together with the greatest relative mass of surplus labor appears as a condition, regarded absolutely. Hence, as a fundamental condition, maximum growth of population – of living labor capacities. If we further examine the conditions of the development of the productive forces as well as of exchange, division of labor, cooperation, all-sided observation, which can only proceed from many heads, science, as many centers of exchange as possible – all of it is identical with growth of population.⁷

It is not sufficient that already existing labor-power should reproduce itself, it has to multiply and generate new labor-powers. It is taken as given that this rise doesn't just happen "naturally". But it is with the "nature" of this rise that the problems begin. Marx talks of population increase in terms of a natural force of social labor, therefore unwaged. By assuming this, he manages to avoid a major ambiguity regarding the naturalness of the increase, because he takes the increase to be the historically-given product of the development of the capitalist mode of production. What he did not see is that, although being posited as natural by capital, population increase is in reality a rise in the value produced by housework, which latter is of course productive work. The absolute increase of the proletariat is the accumulation of capital, not only because the absolute mass of the variable part of capital rises, but also because the quantitative dimensions of the proletariat rise in absolute terms, too. Such accumulation raises the production of labor-power that must both reproduce and multiply itself, and with this also raises the production of value, and therefore also of capital. This multiplication must represent the maximum possible increase in the proletariat, because it is "the development of population, in which the development of all productive forces is summarized,"⁸ which is the basis for capital's appropriation, and which does not find itself faced with any obstacles. "Only in the mode of production based on capital does pauperism appear as the result of labor itself, of the development of the productive force of labor."⁹

It has already been seen that one of the conditions of existence of the capitalist mode of production is the continuous and maximized production of surplus-value within reproduction, even if such surplus-value is not entirely re-transformed into surplus-value, and hence into capital within the process of production. This is to say that such a mode of production presupposes that there will be a continuous and maximized creation of new labor-powers that – even if

they are not all transformed into productive workers – they are the condition which allows capital to decide how many, where, and how to transform them into productive workers: how to apply the laws that govern the process of commodity production.

Capital's development gives rise to the maximum development of population, which leads to the progressive devaluation of the individual who has been reduced to a commodity – to labor-power. This is not only because "the working population therefore produces both the accumulation of capital and the means by which it is itself made relatively superfluous," but also because "it does this to an extent which is always increasing."¹⁰ Nor is this only because relative surplus population rises to a greater extent than population in general does, which makes "an accumulation of misery a necessary condition, corresponding to the accumulation of wealth,"¹¹ which, as Marx argues, has the consequence "that in proportion as capital accumulates, the situation of the worker, be his payment high or low, must grow worse."¹² But this is also because for the proletariat to multiply itself means intrinsically to valorize itself. The greater the number of labor-powers produced and reproduced, the greater the self-expropriation of the value produced in the reproduction process. Also, during "multiplication," consumption of the exchange-value of labor-power is carried out in conformity with capitalist expectations of the increase in population, which allows for the production and upbringing of an average number of new labor-powers.

When capital's management of consumption functions well, each labor-power corresponds to a pre-determined, pre-estimated quantity of the means of subsistence; the value of labor-power – which is determined within the process of production – is "confirmed" within that of reproduction. However, only the estimated numbers of labor-powers produced and reproduced can validate such value as being the average value of a labor-power within an average family, in accordance with capital's calculations. There are always large – above-average – and small – below-average – families. In the latter case, the greater availability of the means of subsistence raises the use-value of the single labor-power. But when it fixes the exchange-value of labor-power, capital takes no notice of variations in its use-value, since it is only interested in average use-value. So capital has no problems here. Instead, capital's problems begin when the exchange-value of labor-power corresponds to the labor-power of a working family whose average size is below that which capital requires and has calculated for. This is because a reduction in the numbers of new labor-powers brings with it a rise in the value of the means of subsistence available to the single worker, and hence also a rise in the use-values incorporated in him/her, which are then above the level that capital needs in order to valorize itself. This is the weak point in capital's mechanisms for producing increase in the population, It is the point where the exchange-value of labor-power somersaults into the

process of reproduction. And it has always been its weak point. *Proletarian determination of such use-value has historically been a major area of struggle.*

Another main area of struggle has always been realizing the value of labor-power. It is the male worker and in particular the female worker who fundamentally determines family size. *If they do not produce an "average" family, the value of a single labor-power is raised.*

There have been many struggles here, often initiated by women, around the lowering of the birth-rate, the reduction of the houseworking day within the process of the production of labor-power. These struggles have focused upon the weak point of capital's mechanism. The breakdown of the relation between the exchange-value of labor-power and its projected numerical strength has indirectly led to an increase in the exchange-value of labor-power, in that if a labor-power has become accustomed to a certain level of access to the means of subsistence while it is in formation, then when it becomes active it is very unlikely that it will accept a level of consumption – an exchange-value – lower than it has had before.

But the contraction of the population not only puts exchange-value under pressure, it also raises the use-value of labor-power above what capital requires. It also *reduces the number of workers available to take on waged work* and, last but not least, it alters the structure of the population. The unforeseen rise in the use-value of labor-power is but a small consolation for capital, which in the meantime has to resolve the immediate problem of a fall in birth rate by importing/exporting labor-powers, which may have less use-value but are at least available to work in the factory.

In production, struggles to reduce the length of the working day forced capital to *mechanize production*. In the production of labor-power, struggles to reduce this working day forced capital to develop an *international labor market* and to develop a *"multinational" working class*. This operates either to make up the short-fall in working population and the related surplus population, or to compensate for the lack of skilled labor in Third World countries. Whichever way it goes – import/export, immigration/emigration – the contradictions and the consequences are enormous.

Within production, the power relation established between capital and the working class is represented within the political determination of the price of labor-power, the wage, and the time worked. Within reproduction, this power relation is represented above all by the number of new labor-powers produced, i.e., *in the rise or fall of the birth rate.*

The drop in the birth rate has affected the structure of the population, effectively making it less productive for capital. For example, in much of the First World the proportion of old people is rising and that of new young recruits is falling. The aging of the population is a blow for capital, because there is a greater number of labor-powers in existence from whom it cannot extract sur-

plus-value, and moreover whose presence requires, if anything, an increase in public spending.

The assumption that the more the proletariat multiplies the more it self-values itself is equally valid, whether one is looking at the diachronic movement of proletarian reproduction, or whether one looks at the different contributions its various sections make to any increase on population in a synchronic way. The assumption is also valid in reverse: the lower the value of labor-power is in one section of the proletariat, the greater will be the contribution it makes to an increase in population.

In relation to this, Marx observed that the reproduction of the stagnant relative surplus population made him think about "the boundless reproduction of animals individually weak and constantly hunted down."¹³ But the reasons for this inverse relationship between the value of labor-power and its capacity to increase have already been discussed. What needs to be added here is that this assumption is also valid for the inverse relation that exists between *the amount of the wage and the number of new labor-powers produced*. The lower the former, the higher the latter, and vice versa.

When the wage is low, the mass of the means of subsistence of the working family's labor-powers – means which also function as the means of production – is also lower. So too is the mass of the means of production that function solely as such. In practice, the only means of production that does not also function as a means of subsistence is the womb; and under such conditions its continuous functioning represents the productive force of housework. The higher the wage, the greater the mass of the means of subsistence that also function as the means of production, and above all, that function solely as the means of production of housework.

This dynamic within the various sections of the proletariat has also been affected by women's struggles, both in the past and today. After a point, even the poorest sections of the proletariat in the so-called advanced countries began to be affected by the falling birth rate. More recently Third World countries – where the low level of capital makes population "surplus" – despite continuing high levels of labor-power production, have also begun to register falls in the birth rate. These are as much *the consequence of women's political decisions* as they are the outcome of demographic campaigns conducted with a mixture of incentive and violence.

The inverse relation between the size of the wage and the number of labor-powers produced within the single working family was noted by Marx, who understood its function and scope and defined it as a "law of capitalist society." Unfortunately, he only mentioned it, and in order to bring out more clearly the different proportions in which the various elements of the working class participate in bringing about its total increase, he took it no further.

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The third category of the relative surplus population is the stagnant population... it forms at the same time a self-reproducing and self-perpetuating element of the working class, taking a proportionally greater part in the general increase of that class than the other elements. In fact, not only the number of births and deaths, but the absolute size of families, stands in inverse proportion to the level of wages, and therefore to the amount of the means of subsistence at the disposal of different categories of workers. This law of capitalist society would sound absurd to savages, or even to civilized colonists.¹⁴

Marx limited himself to stating this law as if he had deduced it from empirical observation, and by analogous observations made by Adam Smith ("Poverty seems favorable to generation") and S. Laing ("Misery up to the extreme point of famine and pestilence, instead of checking, tends to increase population").¹⁵ Marx did not recognize that this law is valid from the diachronic point of view with regard to the history of capitalist development, as, for example, in Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century, where capital accumulation led to an absolute increase in population, but a simultaneous fall in its relative growth.

Both subjective and objective factors, determined by the process of capitalist accumulation itself, are working behind this inverse relationship. Among the subjective factors: women's struggles. Among the objective: obligatory schooling, the prohibition of child-labor, and the like. Such factors have had a variety of consequences, among which are the lengthening of the time period spent in bringing up new labor-powers, the increased costs of production and reproduction (in part due to the fact that children and young adults no longer bring in a wage).

But leaving aside the reasons and causes, the important point to stress is that this inverse relation between the size of the wage and the numbers of new labor-powers produced represents the internal mechanism of the process of reproduction, and contributes to the regulation of the development of population itself. This is development which is affected both by the mass of wages – which will rise in absolute terms, despite being a constantly decreasing proportion with respect to the increase in total capital – and by the general movement of the age, which is of course determined by the relation between the working class and total social capital.

Each of these movements provokes its respective movement of population, interacting both on and with the other, repercussing and reverberating back. The first general movement involving population, because of the dynamic of the total wage, is, as Marx stressed, that movement which is expressed by absolute population growth. This takes place in correspondence with the absolute rise in variable capital, even if this latter's growth takes place in a constantly decreasing proportion with respect to the increase in *total* capital. The second move-

ment involving population – after a certain point in the process of accumulation and because of the dynamic of the wage – is expressed by the constant fall in the relative growth of population, or rate of growth.

One of the fundamental aspects of the general law of capital accumulation is, therefore, that it is accompanied by an accumulation of population in absolute terms which is greater than its average needs for valorization, but whose growth always takes place in constantly decreasing proportion.

NOTES

¹ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 772..

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 763.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 764.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 772.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 798.

⁶ *Grundrisse*, p. 609.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 608.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 605.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 604.

¹⁰ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 783.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 799.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 799.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 797.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 796-97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 797, n. 22.

13

FOR A WORKER'S HISTORY OF REPRODUCTION

What has been the history of reproduction within the process of the accumulation of capital, during both the phase of the production of absolute surplus-value and that of the production of relative surplus-value? What have been the struggles that lie behind this history? Or more simply, what is the worker's history of reproduction?

These questions are not going to be exhaustively answered here; there is neither time nor space. They merely serve to identify the main points that will be taken up.

The main argument here is that during both phases *capital's development took the precisely opposite direction within reproduction to that which it took within production*. This is why Marx's worker's history functions *only* in relation to the sphere of production and *not* for the whole cycle of capitalist production.

Furthermore, because he did not see reproduction as a process of value creation, Marx's reading of the history of production sometimes goes wrong. According to Marx, the production of surplus-value is fundamentally characterized by the lengthening of the working day. This does not exclude the fact that during its first phase of development capital neither sought nor applied particular methods – such as the development of co-operation and the division of labor – in order to produce relative surplus-value. It does mean that increases in the productivity of labor were realized through the expansion of surplus labor-time up to the natural limits of the working day, instead of by shortening necessary work time, which would have made the worker a low-cost commodity. Clearly Marx's argument is only applicable to the process of production.

In reality, the expansion of surplus labor-time has gone beyond a simple lengthening of the working day within production. It has also affected all necessary work time within the process of the reproduction of workers which is not included within that supplied in the process of production, thus making it "sur-

plus" work time, hence non-waged.

Thus the production of absolute surplus-value signifies the absorption of reproduction – all reproduction – into the realm of surplus labor; in effect, it becomes separated across the line of value from the process of production, and housework is posited as a natural force of social labor. Despite this however, in the context of the entire cycle of capital, reproduction functions as another process of commodity production. As such it is a process complete in itself, and like the others, one in which work is divided into necessary and surplus labor.

But within reproduction, what movements lead to the production of absolute surplus-value? Our argument here maintains that there are *two separate and distinct movements*: the *production* of labor-power follows the same course as the production of commodities, i.e., the development of the sector by means of the lengthening of the working day. The *reproduction* of labor-power is, on the contrary, underdeveloped through the curtailment of the working day. The first movement is developed and the second not because the development of the first does not impede the process of commodity production, while that of the second would seem to.

The working day within the process of production of labor-power is lengthened. This is a somewhat particular working day; it must be calculated in months – the nine months of pregnancy – and years – the years between puberty and menopause, which represent the woman's working life in this work process. The lengthening of this working day up to its physical and moral limits implies that:

(a) From a temporal point of view, it is made to co-incide with the period of the woman's fertility; and

(b) From a spatial point of view, it contains the maximum possible number of working days. The greater the number of these latter, the greater is the simultaneous valorization of capital.

In short, the lengthening of such a complex working day reduces the necessary work time required for the production. Individuals as labor-power are not only constrained to reproduce themselves in the least possible time, but are also constrained to produce more individuals at the same time. Women have to procreate during the whole period of fertility, and all have to be mothers. Capital does all it can to keep this exchange between variable capital and housework at its highest possible level. It wants everyone to marry and have children, because the more widespread is the exchange, the more surplus labor capital can appropriate.

The "inflation" of maternity that capital develops is not at odds with the lengthening of the working day within the process of commodity production, because pregnancy itself does not stop women working in this process. The work of bearing children – apart from the moment of birth – does not prevent women from supplying their wage labor, so increases in maternity are no obstacles to capital's accumulation of surplus-value.

Although it is true that the large-scale production of labor-power only became possible with the development of the true capitalist mode of production, it is also true that it had already begun to "take off" in the first phase. This take-off can only be considered to be a general trend, however, because it is too difficult to demonstrate that the rise in population is/was solely attributable to an increase in the birth rate. It was, however, a crucial factor insofar as "the growth in population here forms the mathematical limit to the production of surplus-value by the total social capital."¹ Obviously in the period of manufacturing – the form of the capitalist mode of production where the division of labor predominated – the rise in population must have been quantitatively proportional to the rise in capital. At a general level, such an increase in population is fundamental with regard to the total working day of a society, because "the increase in population increases the productive force of labor, since it makes possible a greater division and combination of labor etc."²

It was particularly fundamental in the period of manufacture, which required that "a division of labor within society should have already attained a certain degree of development," which division of labor in its turn "reacts back upon that in society, developing and multiplying it further."³ But while the division of labor and co-operation posit themselves as particular ways of producing relative surplus-value – ways that develop the productive force of labor by shortening the amount of necessary labor time required to produce a given amount of commodities – the rise in population is never posited as such. Although it is posited as the outcome of the productive force of capital, the rise in population – which is the expression of the development of housework – is in reality the outcome of the spatial and temporal lengthening of the houseworking day at the moment of the production of labor-power. It is therefore the outcome of the lengthening of surplus labor time in absolute terms and as such is the outcome of a process of production which posits itself as the production of absolute surplus-value.

During this first phase then, capital shortens the working day and underdevelops the process of production within the sphere of reproduction. It has to do this because it has to lengthen the time of surplus labor within the process of commodity production. So it shortens the houseworking day, even though this latter is all posited as time of "surplus labor." For capital, it is a tactical and not a strategic choice. Capital usurps not only free time, but also that part of necessary reproduction work time that appears as non-work time.

But how did capital manage to overcome a barrier that pre-capitalist forms could not surmount, the barrier erected by necessary housework time? And not only overcome this, but also reduce such time to the minimum?

These questions must be asked, because at first it seems to be a contradiction to say that capital's greed for surplus labor within the process of production leads it to usurping both housework time and consumption time as well. But in

fact there is no contradiction, not if the economic aims of pre-capitalist forms are compared with those of the capitalist mode of production. The aims are very different; hence the requirements of and for surplus labor which existed and were developed in each were very different, too.

In pre-capitalist modes of production, the need for surplus labor did not derive from the character of production. Here the economic aim was the production of use-values, i.e., the reproduction of workers, of the holders of the means of production and of the social relation of production that bound the former to the latter. The limit of surplus labor was determined by a twofold relation: the circle of the greater or lesser extent of the needs of the holders of the means of production, certainly, but as much the time, of greater or lesser length – in relation to the single working day – of necessary work for the worker to produce and consume his/her means of subsistence, which in its turn delimited the circle. This time represented an insuperable barrier for the holders of the means of production from the moment that their reproduction depended upon the reproduction of the workers themselves, the latter as means of production.

How much the need for surplus labor affected both the circle of the holders of the means of production and the worker's necessary work time for the consumption of his/her means of subsistence, is shown by the fact that when the circle expands, increasing the need for surplus labor, the limitation upon the extension of surplus labor time cannot be overcome temporally with respect to the single working day, but only spatially, by the juxtaposition of more working days. *This is why the numbers of slaves or serfs was so important*; the more there were, the more surplus labor time the master or feudal lord could count on having to satisfy his/her own need.

Within the capitalist mode of production, where the economic aim is the creation of value for value, the need for surplus labor is unlimited, insofar as it derives from the character of production itself and it manifests itself without limit in relation to the working day of the single worker. The novelty introduced by the capitalist mode of production is that *it manages to increase surplus labor time in relation to the single working day*. But it does so within an entirely different situation.

The worker has become the free owner of a commodity – labor-power – that the capitalist buys for a determinate time. *The moment of its reproduction represents itself as completely separate from the moment of its consumption*. The necessary work time of reproduction posits itself as being composed of two sections: one within the process of consumption of labor-power – the work time necessary to produce the value of the means of subsistence; and the other within the process of reproduction – the necessary work time supplied by the female houseworker, within which the moment of the individual worker's consumption time is also included. One part of reproduction's necessary work time – that related to the production and consumption of non-material use-values – seems to disappear.

The only moment of capitalist production appears to be that of the material production of commodities as objects. In effect, it is only within material production that capital finds its opportunity to act directly, because here the moment of production of material use-values is separable from the moment of their consumption, which interval makes it possible for them to circulate as saleable commodities.

On the other hand, the production of the non-material use-values that have no independent form, met with many obstacles. They are not separable in terms of production and consumption, and therefore have no "interval." Broadly speaking, it was only with the first appearance of the extraction of relative surplus-value that the production of non-material commodities – such as, for example, "information" – became crucial within the sphere of the process of production, and this and other such commodities became part of the worker's pay packet.

But throughout the period in which the extraction of absolute surplus-value predominated, the capitalist mode of production seemingly found no relevance or application for such non-material production, and it apparently disappears. "Apparently" because in reality it never disappeared; it was made to re-enter within the sphere of *reproduction*, and in particular within the *family*, where such work encapsulated within housework becomes a natural force of social labor. Here the initial contraction of the houseworking day brings about a sudden contraction. Indeed, it is this time that is sacrificed, more than any other, to the ends of absolute surplus-value, (consider, for example, all the repressive laws relating to sexuality, play, entertainment, idleness, etc.).

The advent of capitalism brought the de-humanization and materialization of the individual. As Marx commented in the *1844 Manuscripts*, the new production not only produced "man" as a commodity, as a human commodity, one who functioned as a commodity, but also produced him as a spiritually and physically de-humanized being.

Furthermore, the moment of production of the means of subsistence of the worker presents itself as separate from the moment of their consumption; and the work time necessary for their production also presents itself as separate from the necessary work time required by the worker to consume them. What is most relevant here is that this is not solely a temporal and spatial separation, but one delineated by the line of value. As a result, the first segment of time posits itself as work time wherein the capitalist has bought the labor-power, thus it is also the measure of the value of labor-power, while the second segment posits itself as non-work time, as free time, the time in which the labor-power "belongs" to itself. Only under capitalism does this paradoxical situation arise, where time needed to consume represents itself as non-work time while still being a moment of production of the basic commodity, labor-power.

Since the worker is now reduced to a commodity, the measure of necessary

work time no longer derives from the necessity to reproduce him/herself as individual, but derives instead from the necessity to reproduce him/herself as labor-power. Hence such time is drastically cut. Everything that is not strictly necessary for the reproduction that continually replenishes their capacity to work is now deemed superfluous. *Capital's message to the proletariat is that the only purpose of life is work.*

The main result of this for workers is that not only are they exploited more within the process of production, but *they are also exploited within reproduction*, because now they are constrained to reproduce themselves only within and for the time necessary to reproduce their own capacity to work. If the worker is a woman this is not even the main consequence; it is only one, because the production of absolute surplus-value not only lengthens the time of surplus labor within production – i.e., for both men and women – it also lengthens the totality of work time for the woman. She – posited as the fundamental work subject of the reproduction process – finds herself saddled with the houseworking day as well, even though this has been reduced to the minimum. This move by capital succeeds because it simultaneously increases the discriminatory male/female wage difference, making it impossible for the woman to survive solely on the necessary work time she supplies within the process of production.

As we have seen, the production of absolute surplus-value brings with it the underdevelopment of reproduction. But it is only under-development in comparison with pre-capitalist forms. If one considers the capitalist mode of production in itself, it is clear that this is not underdevelopment as such, but represents precisely the type of development that capital required/requires during this phase. And it is therefore "productive."

At this point capital would not have been interested in labor-power that had a use-value any higher than that which was permitted by the fastest possible reproduction of the proletariat. It was because the increase in productivity within the process of production was achieved through the lengthening of the working day that *necessary reproduction work time was rendered unproductive unless it was that which directly produced commodities.*

The reason why is easily deduced. Now that the worker was reduced to a commodity, capital was interested in making him/her be like any other commodity, and be reproduced in the shortest possible time. This was because, given the development of the productive forces within the process of production it was not possible to produce the value of the means of subsistence in a shorter time, i.e., it was not possible to reduce the worker's exchange-value by reducing necessary work time within production. Thus capital cut the working day – hence also the time of surplus labor – within the process of reproduction instead.

This reduction meant that capital, while not extracting *relative surplus-value*, nonetheless did manage to effect a change in the relative magnitude of the two parts which made up the working day – necessary labor and surplus labor –

within the process of production. This was a change that drastically shortened what was once necessary reproduction work time. Only one segment of this time was now posited within the working day of the production process. All other segments were put within the reproduction process, where they became non-waged work time, and as such "surplus labor" time. So capital succeeded in both lowering the work time necessary for the reproduction of the worker – now reduced to a labor-power – by gathering together a large part of the work time necessary for the reproduction of labor-power outside the "working day," and in so doing also managed to de-valorize labor-power in terms of use-value. The non-development – or rather underdevelopment – of the production of use-values within the process of reproduction, seemed to capital to be the only possible way to develop the production of absolute surplus-value within the process of production.

Throughout the entire period of manufacture it was crucially important to capital that the development of value production took place only in terms of exchange-value and not of use-value. Given the development of the productive forces, the only way to achieve this was to raise the time of surplus labor within the process of commodity production. So on the one hand capital subordinated reproduction to the process of commodity production, and on the other, detached its consumption of labor-power from the need to create the conditions for labor-power to reproduce itself. It could do this because the growing numbers of autonomously existing labor-powers allowed it to free itself from the necessity of producing sufficient use-value within the reproduction process. This allowed it to concentrate on its position as buyer of labor-power, and it only had to concern itself with buying as much as it could, ensuring that there was always a fresh supply constantly available.

With the coming of large-scale industry, the production of both absolute and relative surplus-value became more closely intertwined, up to the point where workers' struggles around the reduction of the working day forced capital to make a fundamental leap in the direction of the production of relative surplus-value. In this phase, the process of production is separated spatially from that of reproduction; the use of machines in the factory – and therefore the increased intensity of work this led to – was accompanied by a further lengthening of the working day, and hence also to an increase in the scale and magnitude of work. Furthermore, the sex, age, and racial composition of the labor force is changed. In this phase, *the increased productivity of labor within the process of production* goes ahead in such a way as to swallow up the working day of the other process, a day already reduced to the basic minimum, seriously damaging its production.

"Après moi, le déluge" is the motto which underlies the practice of every capitalist, and it is echoed in the killing consumption of labor-power in the factories. Here capital's avidity for surplus labor not only reduces the necessary work time of reproduction to that work time necessary for the production of the means of subsistence, *it also usurps the woman – the prime work subject of reproduction*

– by forcing her to come into the factory as a worker, thus *almost completely excluding any possibility of exploiting her as a capacity for reproduction.*

In this phase, therefore, the development of the capitalist mode of production requires that the interests of reproduction should be sacrificed in the interests of developing production. Initially, the already limited houseworking day is almost destroyed, with the consequence however that *both male and female workers are now reproduced insufficiently and inadequately for capital's own need.* Workers' struggles for the reduction of the working day not only bring an end to this particular form of production of absolute surplus-value within the process of production, they also simultaneously force a turn around, an inversion of the tendency to contract, within the process of re-production. Having reached the bottom in its destruction of this sector, capital is now constrained to re-develop it.

Now it becomes productive for capital to raise productivity within reproduction by lengthening its working day. Because of the struggle to reduce the working day in the factory, capital now has to face the fact that from now on the rate of surplus-value can only rise within the process of production under conditions where it is given by the relative variations in the constituent parts of the working day: necessary labor and surplus labor. Furthermore, it can now only rise if the valorization of labor-power takes place in a parallel fashion within reproduction, i.e., through the lengthening of the necessary reproduction work time that is not included within the "working day." This lengthening must be seen not only in terms of an expansion of the worker's time of consumption – in other words a lengthening of "free time" as opposed to "work time" – which takes place almost automatically as the factory day is shortened, but also, and more importantly, as a lengthening of the houseworking day.

Thus *at this point capital is forced to invest increasing amounts of housework time in reproduction if it is to succeed in raising productivity within production, i.e., succeed in lengthening surplus labor time in relation to necessary labor time in production.* Given the development of the productive forces, labor-power must not be valorized within reproduction in order to create relative surplus-value within the process of production. *There can no longer be any productive consumption of labor-power within the factory unless the male worker's individual consumption includes his consumption of the female houseworker's labor-power, as well as that of the material means of subsistence.* To raise the rate of surplus-value in terms of exchange-value, capital must develop the rate of surplus-value within reproduction. Relative surplus-value implies a lowering of the value of commodities and therefore also of the value of labor-power, but only in terms of its exchange-value because – as has been seen – the use-value of labor-power rises with the lengthening of the houseworking day. However such lengthening is but one aspect of the transformation underway within the capitalist mode of production.

The production of relative surplus-value also provokes a new leap in the

development of the sexual division of labor, which leads to a new sex-and-age-composition of the labor force active within the process of production. Before the struggle for the shorter working day, the watchword was "women and young adults work"; now it changes and becomes "adult males work." The production of relative surplus-value means that *capital concentrates its interest upon exploiting women primarily in their capacity to produce and reproduce labor-power*, instead of a double exploitation. Consequently it also signifies the *passage from a houseworking day posited as an extension of the factory working day, to a house working day characterized by the fact that it has no limit other than the duration of the day itself*. Thus a new working figure is born, the *housewife, or rather the female houseworker*. The workers involved in large-scale industry are women and young adults, and all the workers are accumulated in one place, the factory; the workers involved in the production of relative surplus-value are the male waged worker in the factory and the female non-waged houseworker, outside the factory in the house.

Marx's arguments around the working day are the arguments of the working class, struggling against capital for the reduction of the working day. Marxian writing has always been rather vague on the "how" of this struggle. Its history cannot be read solely as a struggle between working class and capital, which omits the political consequences that the class relation has brought within this struggle. *Class relation* is understood here as the relation which was founded from the outset by capital within the working class itself, between its different sections. *Class struggle* – not class relation – is limited to the two fundamental classes. What took place during and after this struggle between workers and capital is witness to the argument here about the complexity of class relations.

Marx did not recognize such complexity in his analysis of this struggle; neither did he recognize it in his writings, where he historically analyses the political composition of the class. This is because in his analysis he remains tied to the abstract concept of "working class" – directly derived from the concept of abstract labor, abstractly human labor – that, while functioning with the necessary precision within capital, does not function at all at the concrete level of historical analysis, where it does not – and where Marx cannot – resolve the problem of class composition with this concept.

In *Capital*, Volume One, Marx defines labor-power. "We mean by labor-power, or labor-capacity, the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind."⁴ His definition works well there, and can be integrated with what has been said here, but it no longer functions at the level which is of interest here. Physical and intellectual characteristics are both acquired and historically determined attributes. They are not homogeneous in all individuals, men, women, children, Africans, Asians, Europeans etc.; in everyone they are different. In the pre-capi-

talist division and organization of work within the various specific forms of social production, each section had its own historical place. Thus they also presented themselves differently to capital and not as an undifferentiated mass. They were already divided into sections, with diverse aptitudes which capital either accepted, re-made or further diversified with the aim of establishing different relations with the various sections of the class.

Precisely because *Marx did not start from here*, he found it impossible to see the different sections and how they were divided among themselves from the moment in which this difference became a power difference, a divisive mechanism.

Marx also never really understood the history of the liberation of labor-power. The proof of this lies in his assumption that the history of white male adult labor-power is synonymous with the history of the liberation of the entire working class, or, if not synonymous, at least representative of the main trend. He did not understand the different processes of liberation undergone by other sections of the labor force, nor did he see that the process of the liberation of white male labor-power went ahead at the cost of other sections.

It would have been very inconvenient for capital if, in freeing labor-power, it had also freed it from the power differences which divide it internally, because the stratified composition of the labor force allows capital to use high levels of wage differentiation and thus avail itself of a greater quantity of surplus labor and also to put the brake on working-class struggle by setting one section against another. Furthermore, the stratification of power within the class represented an essential condition for political control over the entire class.

The limitation of the Marxian reading of capital's history – a limitation which can be found in both his American and German "Neue Rheinische Zeitung" articles – is also reflected in the Marxist tradition. When taking account of the various class relations, the product of the different processes of liberation undergone by *other sections* of the class, the main Marxist tradition has tended to define *them* as vestiges of pre-capitalist relations that the capitalist process would progressively eliminate. This somewhat "idealistic" interpretation of the capitalist process is based on the Marxian limitation of taking a particular process as the general one, as well as upon an insufficient knowledge of the true history of capital.

The political limitations of this approach have been manifold:

(a) Not recognizing the differentiation of, and discrimination within, the labor force, which capital has used as it is, or even re-established when necessary. Therefore, not recognizing the ways in which capital has moved at different times in order to re-determine the age, sex and racial composition of the working class;

(b) Not understanding that it was crucial for capital that it was and is able to set women against men, black against white etc., and vice versa, in order to have before it an enemy class that was divided and involved in struggle with itself. This was and is the only way in which capital could hope to stop or in

some way control the potential power of workers' struggles;

(c) Not seeing that, for capital, having at its disposal an articulated offer of labor-power, or being able to determine such an offer, was the only guarantee it had to make the necessary amount of female, male, child, black, white, etc. labor-power available according to the precise needs of the process of production in any one moment;

(d) Not understanding that, for capital, control over labor necessarily became control over the composition of the class, and that *class struggle is also the struggle against the class composition that capital imposes*;

(e) Not taking up the fact that the working class came into existence deeply divided within itself by capitalist relations, and that the area of working-class composition has long been an area of struggle within the class itself and is part of the working-class struggle against capital.

Similarly, Marx's point of view on the question of the labor market goes well at the theoretical level, but not when examined in the light of history and of its material transformations. Now one can see that the "particular section of the commodity market" — that is, the labor market — is not full of "free laborers" but of workers with age, sex and race differences. And also that the power hierarchy within the class — which is founded upon the different exchange-values of the labor-powers of the various sections, and upon the diverse opportunities each has of earning a wage — also reflects upon the possibility for political organization of the class itself.

As soon as the exchange for the buying and selling of labor-power developed — when it no longer had the single worker and the single capitalist as the two protagonists, but two social aggregates instead — so *the institutional organization of the working class in reality posited itself as the organization of a single section of the labor force — adult male workers — against women and youth*. From that moment on, *struggles on the labor market became ever more weighted against "collective" workers than it ever appeared to Marx and the Marxists*. Not only because this area is naturally advantageous to the boss, but also because when labor-power is bought and sold the workers are already divided up beforehand amongst themselves, through their different abilities to make contracts with capital. In the face of this intra-class division, the unions were born as organizations of struggle that *solidified the capitalist-imposed hierarchy within the class* and selected the interests of the strongest section, the adult male workers, to organize against the interests of capital. From then on, the other sections of the class could not organize themselves (officially) in their own interests, but only for those of the adult male workers, which were claimed to represent the interests of the class in general.

But this argument is well-known, as it has long been part of the feminist debate. It can be well-illustrated if one looks at what happened to class composition during and after the struggle for the shorter working day. It is useful to

take a concrete example, as it helps to understand both the complexity of the struggle and the complexity of capital's response. Why did capital introduce machinery into the process of production? Why did it develop reproduction, the organization of housework, and form the female houseworking class?

During the period of manufacture, capital did not manage to determine the age and sex composition of the waged working-class in a way that was consistent with the needs of the productive process because of the proletariat's opposition. With the advent of large-scale industry, the political initiative for the determination of class composition passed over to the capitalist. The waged work of women and children was "the first result of the capitalist application of machinery."⁵ Capital became greedy for their labor because "machinery dispenses with muscular power, it becomes a means for employing workers of slight muscular strength, or whose bodily development is incomplete, but whose limbs are all the more supple."⁶ Already during the period of manufacture, capital had sometimes "preferred to employ semi-idiots for certain operations which, although simple, were trade secrets,"⁷ but their use was numerically irrelevant. It was only through the introduction of the machine tool that capital was able to determine a radically different age and sex composition of the waged working-class. "The complaint that workers lack discipline runs through the whole of the period of manufacture,"⁸ and such indiscipline became intolerable for industrial capital, which found a way of eliminating it... by eliminating large numbers of male adult workers from the production process.

On the one hand, machine tools made the artisan skills of the adult male manufacturing worker superfluous, and there was a growing surplus of such workers. On the other hand, the new waged workers — women and children — were already accustomed to greater discipline in the family, and therefore put up less resistance to factory discipline; they were a more malleable work instrument.

But capital didn't only resolve the problem of discipline when it ceased to employ so many adult male workers; it also resolved the problem of labor costs. The wages women and children received were lower than men's. The lower muscular strength and the physical immaturity of children gave large industry an excuse not only to use them for the new machines, but also to pay them less. "A woman has less needs than a man, she eats less. Children have less needs than adults," etc. Because the value of labor-power tended to represent the work time necessary to produce the "means of subsistence" of a single labor-power, and since it now corresponded to that of female and child labor-power, obviously the value fell. The new waged working-class composition immediately implied the devaluation of labor-power. Formerly, the value of labor-power had tended to correspond to the value of the means of subsistence of the entire working family; now it corresponded to that of the single labor-power. Even if the total of all wages within the family, in the end, led to a greater capacity to consume commodities, this does not automatically mean

that there was a higher level of reproduction.

Capital's voracious appetite for absolute surplus-value usurped the time of consumption and the housework time that Marx called "family work necessary for consumption" from the worker. More accurately, while capital usurped the time of consumption from the male worker, it usurped from the female houseworker *both* this time and the housework time she supplied to make the means of subsistence consumable by the entire family

Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers who have been confiscated by capital must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence the diminished expenditure of labor in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside. The cost of production of the working-class family therefore increases, and balances its greater income. In addition to this, economy and judgement in the consumption and preparation of the means of subsistence become impossible. Abundant material on these facts, which are concealed by official political economy, is to be found in the *Reports of the Inspectors of Factories*, the *Reports of the Children's Employment Commission*, and particularly in the *Reports on Public Health*.⁹

Marx saw the stealing, the usurpation of the houseworking day, very clearly here; but this is the only point in his writings where he talks explicitly of such work, and then only in a footnote. Marx managed to see housework only when capital destroyed it, and saw it through reading government reports, which latter had realized the problems posed by the usurpation of housework even far earlier. But Marx never entirely understood the problem. What he called "economy and discernment in the use and preparation of the means of subsistence" is none other than the housework necessary for the production and reproduction of labor-power, and hence indispensable for the productive consumption of the wage. Proof of the latter lies in the fact that the huge leap in the level of productivity within reproduction only came when the female houseworker was made the primary subject of housework. Then the individual consumption of the male worker made a parallel leap, and the exchange between housework and the wage became widespread at a mass level.

The fact that it was housework that made the individual male worker's consumption — i.e., his consumption of the wage — more productive is easily verifiable precisely when the exchange no longer functions, i.e., when in the historical moment analyzed here housework was practically destroyed. There were many

witnesses to the fact that the productivity of the individual male worker's consumption had fallen. One of whom, reported by Marx, was Dr. Edward Smith, who

was sent by the English Government to Lancashire, Cheshire and other places to report on the state of health of the cotton operatives. He reported that from a hygienic point of view, and apart from the banishment of the operatives from the factory atmosphere, the crisis had several advantages. The women now had sufficient leisure to give their infants the breast, instead of poisoning them with 'Godfrey's Cordial' (an opiate). They also had the time to learn to cook. Unfortunately, the acquisition of this art occurred at a time when they had nothing to cook. But from this we see how capital, for the purposes of its self-valorization, has usurped the family labor necessary for consumption. This crisis was also utilized to teach sewing to the daughters of the workers in seeing schools. An American revolution and a universal crisis were needed in order that the working girls, who spin for the whole world, might learn to sew!¹⁰

Because, often, the greater costs of the working family's own production were higher than its increased income, *the devaluation of labor-power posited itself not only in absolute term with respect to the single labor-power, but also in relative terms with respect to the entire working family.*

Precisely because the lengthening of the working day within production was combined with this particular class composition of active workers, it had negative consequences for capital as well as for the workers. These consequences were far greater than those Marx saw when he concentrated on the increases in the costs of labor-power production. Above all, it became harder for capital to obtain the maximum amount of absolute surplus-value within the process of commodity production, because this was now in direct conflict with the production and reproduction of labor-power itself; that is – in conflict with the production of potential capital.

Not only was the average length of the individual worker's active working-life reduced, but also the drop in the use-value of labor-power affected capital's consumption of it, once it had been bought. In six years capital would consume labor-power that it should have been able to consume for forty years, and these six years of consumption of labor-power within production were not matched by its adequate or sufficient reproduction within the other process. *The entire "race of workers" was in danger of extinction.* Surplus labor was killing off the worker after a few years of work, and was killing off the female worker in her role as houseworker by destroying the relative houseworking day. Also, *the conditions necessary for the exchange between male wage and female housework*

broke down. Now that the wage corresponded to the value of the single labor-power's means of subsistence, there was little advantage to be gained by women in making the exchange.

At first, however, this did not affect individual capitalists. They were not interested either in the average length of the worker's life, nor in the conditions of his/her production and reproduction. Such matters did not affect them as single capitalists, because each posited him (her) self to the workers only in the role of buyer of labor-power, so as long as the commodity continued to reach the market in sufficient amounts for his (her) needs, no thought had to be given to the matter.

Later on, however, the devaluation of labor-power brought such grave consequences that the capitalist was forced to do something about it, and quickly. The gravest problem was that the supply of housework had almost completely dried up. On the one hand, because of the capitalist's usurpation of the woman into commodity production, and on the other, because of women's indiscipline; they had their own work relation with capital, and therefore saw no need to work for the male worker and children. Capital's total lack of interest in the conditions of the production and reproduction of labor-power was eventually matched by the workers' disinterest; in particular, by women's refusal of and resistance to taking up a housework role in the first place. Thus women made their own contribution, alongside capital, to the destruction of housework. Official inquiries of the period were very clear about the reasons for the rising rate of mortality among worker's children during the early years of their lives. Marx quotes an enquiry carried out in 1861 which showed that:

while with the described circumstances, infants perish under the neglect and mismanagement which their mothers' occupations imply, the mothers become to a grievous extent denaturalized towards their offspring – commonly not troubling themselves much at the death, and even sometimes... taking direct measures to insure it.¹¹

Also in the agricultural areas the "revolution in cultivation had led to the introduction of the industrial system.... All the phenomena of the factory districts are reproduced here, including a yet higher degree of disguised infanticide and stupefaction of children with opiates."¹²

However the refusal to bear and raise children was not only a refusal on the part of women to take on the extra housework that children bring. It was also a refusal to take on the costs of children, most if not all of which fell onto the shoulder of the parents. One image of this is the rapidly rising numbers of abandoned children who transformed the cities of the industrial revolution into vast "child dumps."

Faced with this phenomenon, the state was obliged to take on the costs of raising a large number of new labor-powers itself. It had discovered that women's supposedly "natural" instinct to procreate and reproduce the species was little more than a sham, that it was an "instinct" that lasted for as long as the exchange between the male wage and female housework lasted. This made it clear that the relation between men, women, and children was not a natural one but historically determined. When the pre-conditions of the exchange no longer functioned, the "naturalness" became "unnaturalness." Returning to Marx, one reads:

As was shown by an official medical inquiry in the year 1861, the high death-rates are, apart from local causes, principally due to the employment of the mothers away from their homes, and to the neglect and maltreatment arising from their absence, which consists in such thing as insufficient nourishment, unsuitable food and dosing with opiates; besides this, there arises on unnatural estrangement between mother and child, and as a consequence intentional starving and poisoning of the children.¹³

Here Marx himself is blinded by capitalist ideology; he does not see that it is not the "naturalness" or "unnaturalness" of the mother that is in question, but the material transformations of the relation to which men, women and children are subject. In this historical phase, the conditions for the existence of such a relation had largely been destroyed, and with it the conditions for the existence of the working family as center for the production and reproduction of labor-power had gone, too.

About the only relation of reproduction that somehow survived – indeed flourished – as a result of the near complete disappearance of the exchange between male worker and female houseworker was that relating to *prostitution*. *Prostitution work was the only form of reproduction work that capital did not usurp in the interests of its self-valorization within production.* And it was not usurped partly because it was organized in a way that was similar to that of commodity production. With the advent of large-scale industry, prostitution expanded rapidly, and as it expanded so too did the prostitute's working day, up to the point where even their labor-power was being consumed within a few years.

This bears resaying. As time went on, the *state*, as collective capital, had to take note of the fact that the greed for surplus labor within production was attacking its interests in reproduction. Capital learned that if it did not control its development in such a way so as not to damage reproduction – and in fact *control* reproduction to make it functional for the needs of production – then it would eventually destroy itself. It had learned that a particular age and sex composition of workers was only profitable in the short term, and was in the long run less convenient and less productive than a class composition that privi-

leged one section, the adult male worker.

This is not the place to re-trace the historical development of the struggle, the whole dynamic of inter- and intra-class struggles around the question of the waged working-classes' composition, or over the reduction of the working day both in production and in reproduction. Neither is it the place to reconstruct the dynamics of the clash of interests between the capitalist class, as producers of commodities and buyers of labor-power whose only interest are lower costs and maximum exploitation — and the state — as collective capital, the expression of capitalist control over society — that had to guarantee the preservation and constant reproduction of the working class in order to guarantee the constant reproduction of capital.

Instead what is of interest here is to reconstruct, in all its complexity, capital's answer to the cycle of struggles around the reduction of the working day, or rather, the *state's* answer, which *provoked a profound transformation of the state itself*.

During the period of manufacture *the state subordinated the interests of reproduction to those of production*, that is, it subordinated the reproduction of labor-power to the formation of the proletariat, underdeveloping the former in order to allow the latter to "take off." With large-scale industry, the state began to posit itself as the "planner" of reproduction's development, in order to be able to develop it. Among other things, this represents the passage to the true modern state, which expresses itself on one hand by the construction of the female houseworker section of the class and the reconstruction of the working family, and on the other in the creation of structures and fundamental tools required for the social reproduction of labor-power. Thus *the state intervenes both by planning the production and reproduction of labor-power in the individual sphere, and by positing itself as the entrepreneur of the reproduction of labor-power in the social sphere*.

The need for the capitalist state to function as "planner" within reproduction has always been crucial right from the start, because of the organization of this productive sector. Crucial because of the *indirect form* that the production relation between women and capital takes, a form which requires that the male worker should function as intermediary. It is this form of relation that determines a housework process and a process of the sexual reproduction of male labor-power that is characterized by two particular phenomena.

The first of these is that *capital cannot use the wage as an instrument of direct control over the female houseworker and the prostitute* — they are not directly waged. Consequently, the male worker must be able to supply the necessary discipline and control over them.

The second is that *capital cannot directly control the consumption of female labor-power within the process of reproduction* since its control is indirect, passing through the male worker.

In other words, because capital does not formally posit itself as the owner of the means of production within reproduction, means of production which enable the process to take place, neither can it directly control the quantity and quality of the production itself. However it is crucial that it can have control, because it is not only interested in the quantitative aspects of the production of new labor-powers, but also in the magnitude of their use-value.

It is because of this that the role of the state within reproduction is so different from its role in production, and also why its role in the former is so important. Within *production* the state only needs to function as the expression and instrument of collective capital's control, as there is already a direct relation between the individual male worker and the single capitalist. However, within *reproduction* – where the relation between the individual female houseworker and the single capitalist is indirect – the state must also act as the direct manager and organizer of reproduction. The net result is that the state has ended up virtually running the sector, and, because there is no competition within reproduction, the state, as representative for collective capital, has had to take on a specific role with two main functions:

(1) It must take care of the socialization of housework and prostitution work, otherwise, because such work has to be individualized, it would not be possible to achieve the average social determination of housework and prostitution work. Here the process of socialization is not directly entrusted to the reproduction process; thus it either goes through the state, or it does not take place at all. While within production the formation of the state as an agent working in the interests of capital was a long process and full of contradictions – because the process of socialization was allocated to the place of production (the factory) – within reproduction, the state showed itself almost immediately as the fundamental agent of capital.

(2) It must control the male worker in his function as controller and discipliner of the female houseworker and sex worker, because it must use him in order to organize the control of these women. Herein lies a contradiction for capital: the worker has ample opportunity to refuse to exercise his "duty." The dual nature of his role as exploiter and exploited also requires a level of control over him that would be over and above any that capital could organize and impose within the process of production.

Such control can only be organized and guaranteed by the state. So the state's function within reproduction becomes not that of doing everything that capital cannot do openly and directly, but of controlling the range and intensity of housework and prostitution work, and of ensuring that the quality and quantity of new labor-powers produced is in accordance with the needs of capital.

But how does it do this?

To control the quantitative aspects of the production of labor-powers, and to regulate the numbers to meet capital's requirements, the state posits itself as

the owner of the means of production of this commodity – the womb – expropriating women, leaving them in possession but without ownership. *Laws on contraception and abortion* should therefore be seen in this light, and understood in all their strategic importance to capital in the material production of the commodity labor-power.

With regards to the qualitative aspects of labor-power, the state intervenes at a variety of levels, although the socialization of the production process and that of social reproduction already combine materially and fundamentally to determine average social housework. Above all, the state intervenes here in order to ensure the homogeneity of housework, and does so by means of investment in social services, both in productive areas and areas of struggle. These services, as well as functioning as a control over the length and intensity of housework, also provide the means of determining its average level, and are a means of sustaining the family unit. They function by distributing quotas of reproduction work, throughout the social fabric, to the families where the quantity of housework supplied by either the female houseworker or other work subjects is considered to be insufficient by the state, or insufficient by the proletariat (which finds its needs are not being met).

The area of the state's intervention usually covers material organization: regulation of the management of the exchange between variable capital and housework; regulation of the exchange between variable capital and prostitution work; and regulation of the relations of production of these exchanges that include the continual normative restructuring of the relation between man and woman, as husband/wife or client/prostitute; also, the organization, regulation and management of the family, the center of reproduction work; and of the various institutions that support, control and complement housework. Such is the state's reply to women's struggle against housework.

Given that the development of mass production and of mass consumption run together in such a way as to determine average social consumption, the state plans and controls proletarian consumption using a variety of instruments that will not be examined here, if only because they differ historically.

Finally, the state organizes, manages and controls *average standards of mass information*. This includes the organization of obligatory social education as well as the construction, assumption and diffusion of bourgeois ideology which pertains to the conditions of existence. It gives particular attention and emphasis to matters that touch upon the relations of reproduction. It also controls the so-called mass media.

Thus the state develops an enormously high level of power and control over women, and decentralizes and breaks up its power over men.

On the one side, there is the state, and on the other, the male worker. The large-scale aspect of capital's control over women could not exist without its small-scale part. The working class has at times a capitalist face.. and a state face, too.

All these functions fall to the state's lot because *the simple subordination of reproduction to production sent capital into near-crisis*. What sent this policy of subordination into crisis – and with it the “old” figure of the state – was the passage from absolute surplus-value to relative surplus-value, a passage that was initiated by the effects of the worker's struggles for a shorter working day. While during the period of manufacture state action – or more accurately, non-action – had allowed the day to be lengthened, the state was forced to intervene in this passage, and *its intervention brought into being an opposite policy: the subordination of production to reproduction*, which the imposition of a reduced working day within the process of commodity production illustrates.

The state was forced to concede to the demand for a shorter working day within production, but immediately afterwards it set about radically altering the political composition of waged workers: more men, and less women and children. These latter, who had been the backbone of the work force in the period of large-scale industry, were forced to re-transform themselves into wives/mothers (primary subjects of housework) and into children/offspring/siblings (labor-powers in formation). Together they were trapped in non-directly waged relations of production that took place within the family, which was re-established as the privileged place where housework was supplied by the female houseworker, and where she now found herself faced with an impossibly long houseworking day

The place for the production of absolute surplus-value moved from the factory into the house. It became secondary with respect to production. Within the entire cycle of capital, the passage to the production of relative surplus-value within the factory was accompanied by a corresponding passage to the production of absolute surplus-value within the house.

NOTES

¹ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 422.

² *Grundrisse*, Notebook 1, p. 200.

³ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 473.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 517.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 483.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 490.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 518.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 517–18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

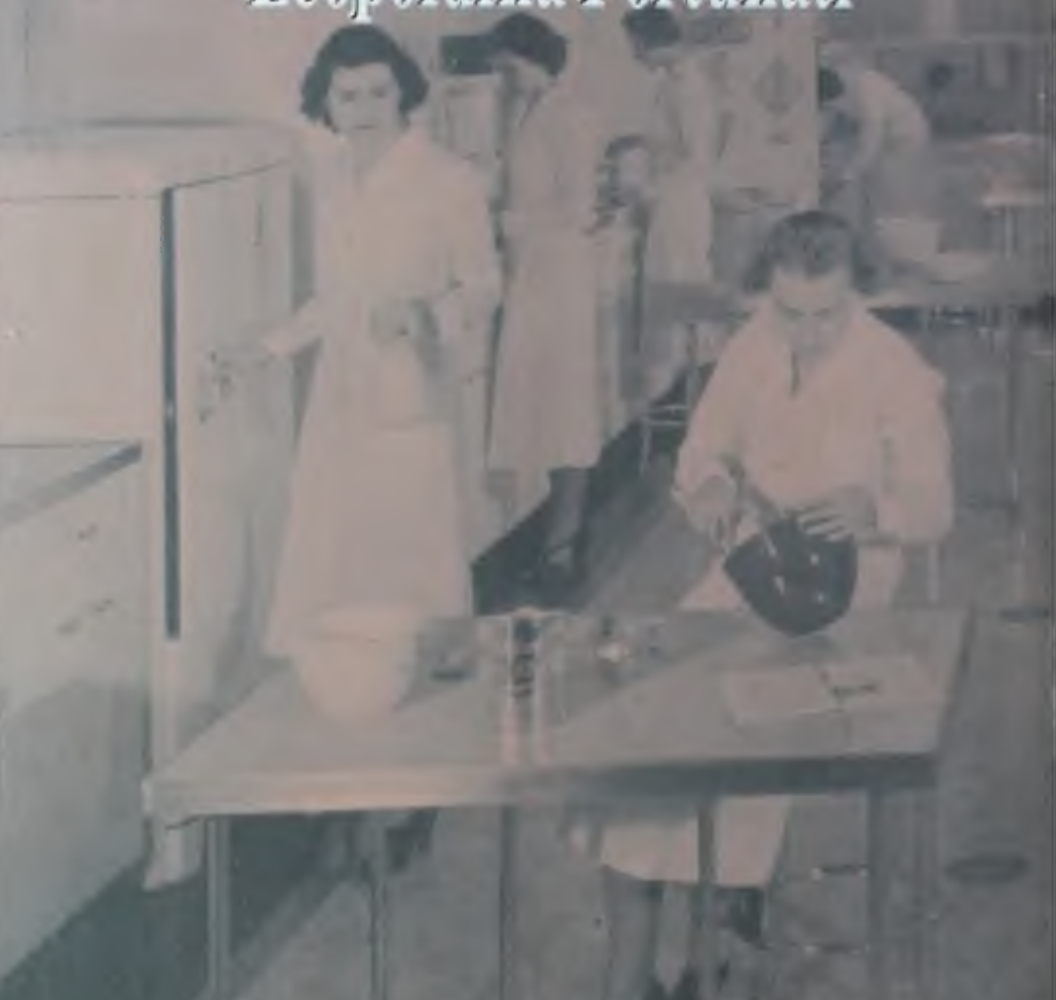
¹² *Ibid.*, p. 522.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

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