

# Humanism and the Ideology of Work

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of  
Chester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Samuel James Reuben Mercer

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The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

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# Abstract

Thesis Title: *Humanism and the Ideology of Work*

Author: Samuel J. R. Mercer

This thesis argues that humanism, despite being subject to a sustained critique within the social sciences over the past fifty years or more, continues to limit the critical and explanatory power of the sociology of work, preventing a fuller understanding of the nature of work under contemporary capitalism. Developing Louis Althusser's (1996) critique of humanism and ideology, humanism is shown to be an ideological problem for the sociology of work insofar as it brackets, obfuscates or mystifies key social relations of work and, by extension, the class struggles reflected in those relations. Humanism presents a persistent and pervasive problem for the sociology of work, as both an explanatory and critical framework. Because of the persistence of humanism in the sociology of work, the problems of contemporary work – and the proposed 'solutions' to these problems – are located not in an analysis of the social relations of these realities, but in ideological discourses of human alienation and human self-affirmation. The thesis explores the extent of this ideological problem across three contemporary debates within the sociology of work: 'postcapitalist' discourse (Srnicek & Williams, 2015) and the emergence of a contemporary post-work imaginary; feminist discourses on the 'bioeconomy' (Cooper & Waldby, 2014) and theories of social reproduction in the context of sex work, tissue donation and surrogacy; and the figuration of labour and work within contemporary social scientific discourses of the 'Anthropocene' (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016). In each of these areas, the thesis demonstrates how much of the sociology of work continues to rely on humanistic ideas to provide a normative theoretical foundation and a critical edge. If the sociology of work is to provide a genuinely critical orientation for understanding the changing world of work, this thesis argues, then the critique of humanism remains a central task.

## INTRODUCTION

# Humanism and the Ideology of Work

This thesis argues that sociology today is prevented from attaining a fuller understanding of the nature of work under contemporary capitalism, by a persistent and pervasive *humanism* that saturates its analysis. Humanism presents sociology with an ideological problem, preventing access to the matrix of social relations and the unique class struggles reflected in these relations that underpin contemporary work. Humanism mystifies these social relations, offering a platter of mythical representations to explain sociological phenomena that brackets these social relations or removes them from view entirely. Humanism is dangerous because it normalises and naturalises these social relations of work, presenting them not as sociological phenomena but as given universals: in this way, sociology risks complementing power itself. If sociology is to be adequate for the critique of work in the twenty first century, this thesis argues that it must begin in the first instance with a critical analysis of humanism as an ideology. The contemporary social relations of work and with them the mechanics of both exploitation and liberation, are visible only at the end of a theoretical struggle against humanism. Despite the widespread influence and recognised importance of critiques of humanism within sociological discourse, humanism continues to be mobilised as the normative foundation of much of the sociology of work. This thesis argues that the exposure, definition and deconstruction of humanism as an ideology remains a key theoretical task in the sociology of work if it is to provide a truly critical vantage point from which to analyse and understand transformations of ‘work’ in the twenty first century.

Historically, humanism has provided an influential set of ideas in which the critique of work has been carried and amplified. For example, the appearance of critiques of industrial work as it developed through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were made familiar in their crystallisation in the “dark satanic mills” of William Blake’s ([1808] 1966, p.481) poetry, the “organized misery” of industrial work described by William Morris ([1890] 1993, p.126), or the “filthy heart of civilization” that George Orwell ([1937] 1982, p.18) described in his observations of working-class life in pre-war Britain. Humanism has been a particularly effective method in pronouncing the harm of industrial capitalism as experienced through work, by juxtaposing the cold, mechanic, dehumanising and dangerous world of work with the apparent naturalism and humanism of the space outside of work. It is a juxtaposition well-articulated in films like Fritz Lang’s (1927) *Metropolis*, as defeated crowds of workers passed one another on their way to and from the production line, embodying in their posture, movement and overall behaviour the industrial machines on which they worked. Work is critiqued on the basis of the fact that it is antithetical to the very essence of human life, in complete contradiction with the movements, wants and desires of any human individual: “Man (the worker) only feels



himself freely active in his animal functions...and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal” (Marx, [1844] 1981, p.66). The critique of work is articulated in the *impossibility* of finding ‘Man’ in work: “When, in our civilized Europe, we would find a trace of the native beauty of man we must go seek it in the nations where economic prejudices have not yet uprooted the hatred of work” (Lafargue, 1883, para.3).

At the same time, humanism provides a vehicle through which to pronounce the liberating potential of work. Work is considered life-giving and self-affirming, as an act that goes beyond the mere satisfaction of economic need: “The reward of labour is *life*. Is that not enough?” (Morris, 1993, p.122, original emphasis). Such a maxim could well adorn the doors of many contemporary employers, as the celebration of the humanist qualities of work is today centralised as the guiding philosophy of twenty first century capitalism. The cold, brutal and mechanised factories of old have been replaced (apparently) by the high-rise offices designed as spaces in which work and play are fused together: the steam press replaced by the smart phone; the boardroom replaced by the games room; workstations replaced by bean bags and children’s slides. Work today is designed to maximise “essential human experiences in the workplace” (Robbins, 2015, para.1), by creating “an environment where people feel safe to bring all of who they are to work” (para.1). In this way, contemporary work is “100% human” (Oelwang & Hay, 2015, para.4), built around and at all times expressive of what it means to be a human being. Take it from the ‘Vice President of People Operations’ at Google: “All it takes is a belief that people are fundamentally good – and enough courage to treat your people like owners instead of machines. Machines do their jobs; owners do whatever is needed to make their companies and teams successful” (Bock, 2015, p.15). This is the new spirit of capitalism, in which work is valorised as the place in which “everyone should develop themselves personally. The new organizations...appeal to all the capacities of human beings, who will thus be in a position to fully blossom” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007, p.90).

Humanism is also integral to the imagination of life beyond work, of a life lived free from work. The consideration of human life or human societies freed of the obligation to work is of particular interest from a humanist perspective, as it begs questions about the way in which human liberty, human autonomy and individual self-affirmation can be re-imagined in relation to the abolition of work. In the *New Humanist*, Rhian E. Jones (2017) asks how considerations of the end of work offer the opportunity to consider “a post-work future, no longer shaped by capitalist impulses or built around low-paid and insecure drudgery, where we can find alternative channels of meaning and fulfilment and cease to regard ourselves as workers above all else” (p.25). Humanism provides the philosophical foundation for calls for policies towards this end, such as the greater use of automation and robotics as a way of reducing the amount of work (in particular bad quality work) that people have to do, but also through the introduction of schemes such as a universal basic income (UBI) that unties wages from work, reducing its necessity as

an activity of survival. According to Paul Mason (2018), “automation coupled with the socialisation of knowledge will present us with the opportunity to liberate ourselves from work” (p.31) thereby “ending alienation and liberating the individual” (p.31). In terms of a UBI, Jason Hickel (2017) writes that “a basic income might defeat the scarcity mindset that has seeped so deep into our culture, freeing us from the imperatives of competition and allowing us to be more open and generous people” (para.19). The use of machines and of alternative welfare policies is justified and pushed forward by a humanist philosophy that sees in its end the greater emancipation of the human individual, free to use their time as they please and towards more self-fulfilling ends: “Don’t we all have to work to live? No, not really” (Fleming, 2015, p.2).

Even though the above accounts of work are markedly different from one another, their considerations of work share one common humanist framing. Whether criticising, celebrating or transforming work, these accounts each rely on a normative humanism in which their expressions are grounded. The ways in which human beings and human subjectivity are thought about fundamentally condition the consideration of work across a number of different accounts. The critique, the celebration and the transformation of work are conditioned by a set of existing assumptions surrounding human subjectivity: its alienated condition; its autonomous capacities; or its revolutionary potential. These quite divergent considerations of work are manifestations of one persistent and underlying theoretical principle: *that knowledge of work and society must reflect the knowledge of human subjectivity and human experience*. The critique of work must *reflect* the critique of alienated and dehumanised human subjectivity; the celebration of work must *reflect* the celebration of the autonomous capacities of the human individual; and the transformation of work must *reflect* the transformational potential of revolutionary human subjects. This common requirement of considerations of work to reflect existing normative assumptions surrounding human subjectivity is codified here as the ‘humanism’ of these considerations and is the subject of the critique completed in this thesis.

However, this thesis argues that when it comes to the sociological consideration of work and society, these recurring humanist productions become significantly problematic. This is because the framing of work through this normative humanism effectively erases the social background from which work as a social relation emerges. In particular, the class struggle that determines the appearance of work in capitalist society is repeatedly bracketed and side-lined by this normative humanist framework that repeatedly conditions the way in which work is thought about. In its critique, it is the reification of an alienated humanity that is problematised *not* the material exploitation of one class by another; in its celebration, work is positioned as an expression of the natural creative capacities of an autonomous human subject, *not* as the meeting-point between unequal social classes; and in its transformation, work is configured as the revolutionary

tool through which human beings re-discover their autonomy, as opposed to the means of production themselves. In these ways and to different extents, the social character of work as a social relation is relegated to the background in favour of these more moralistic or anthropological explanations of work which latch on to existing assumptions surrounding the nature of human subjectivity. The objective of this thesis is to study the effects of humanism in this way upon the sociology of work.

In order to complete this study, this thesis will apply an Althusserian critique of humanist ideology to the sociology of work. In the context of the changing nature of work and employment in the twenty first century, this thesis shows how an Althusserian critique of humanist approaches to work enables an escape from the limitations of current thinking about work (indebted to humanism). According to Althusser's ([1964] 1996) critique, the humanist framing of work as a social relation is problematic, insofar as this humanist framing *mystifies* the specific social antagonisms (particularly those of class, race and gender) reflected in the social relations of work. This mystification is a problem insofar as it undermines the critical analysis of power and exploitation as it is deployed in the social relations of work and, in so doing, undermines the imagination of appropriate social orientations capable of overcoming existing inequalities and injustices. The Althusserian critique of humanist ideology provides a dialectical method through which to both observe and overcome this problem of humanism within discourses of knowledge, providing a conceptual repertoire through which to define humanism as an ideological problem and a theoretical mechanism through which the critical deconstruction of this ideology resolves itself productively in the exposure of the social relations hitherto obscured by this ideology.

The application of an Althusserian critique of humanist ideology allows for two things. First, it provides conceptual devices through which to recognise and define 'humanism' and how it impacts ideologically upon the sociology of work as a discourse of knowledge. Secondly, it points towards theoretical mechanisms that are capable of overcoming these ideological effects of humanism and can reveal the social relations and social antagonisms hidden beneath these ideological effects. In each of the chapters, this thesis applies this dialectical method to specific contributions to the sociology of work, defining humanist ideology as a problem and drawing on sources appropriate for its deconstruction. The resulting contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is thus the exposure of humanism as an ideological problem for certain contributions to the sociology of work, but also the revelation of the precise theoretical method (the critique of ideology itself) that explains the explanatory strength of the more appropriate sociological contributions that these chapters cite approvingly.

## HUMANISM AND THE IDEOLOGY OF WORK: CHAPTER STRUCTURE

Chapter One of this thesis sets out the parameters of the critique of humanism and the methodology through which this critique will be completed. In order to do this, the chapter grounds the thesis in the critique of humanism found in the works of Louis Althusser. The chapter demonstrates the extent to which humanism has been considered a problem within critical contributions to the social sciences, as it attempts to universalise the social experience of a very narrow definition of the human subject: namely the white, male, heterosexual and non-disabled human. This normative humanism has been problematised insofar as it hides the social experiences and voices of those deemed not to fit with this normative image and, in the same breath, justifies the social violence and domination often wrought upon these groups. Louis Althusser's critique of humanism is useful for this thesis insofar as it is useful in thinking about the relationship between humanist ideology and the social relations of work. For Althusser, humanism is problematic insofar as it mystifies class domination and class struggle within society, deployed by the dominant class as a way of hiding exploitation from view. Though Althusser's work has received a great deal of criticism and even dismissal in places, this chapter makes the case for re-visiting the critique of humanism found in Althusser's work as a way of thinking through the obstructive theoretical effect of humanist ideology upon the sociology of work.

Chapter Two moves to a review of (primarily Marxist) sociological literature to reveal the ways in which humanism has become deeply entrenched in the critical analysis of work. In various ways and within differing historical contexts, the critical sociology of work is here shown to rely heavily upon humanism as a way of articulating its critique: be this to pronounce the specific harms of work under capitalism, of sharpening the exposure of exploitation or of imagining emancipation and revolution. The critical sociology of work has been an important discourse through which these themes have been discussed but not, it would seem, without the continuous presence and reproduction of humanist ideological tropes. Problematically, the humanism of this critical sociology leads it astray, contributing to the construction of a narrow conception of 'work' through the mystification of particular social relations; by acting as a crutch on which the rigour of sociological analysis comes to depend; or by presenting liberation and revolution as exercises of individual self-affirmation rather than acts of social upheaval. In various ways, humanism is diagnosed as a chronic ideological malaise that persistently afflicts the critical sociology of work, preventing this sociological discourse from obtaining a fuller understanding of its object.

Chapter Three focuses its attention on the zeitgeist of the contemporary sociology of work, critically analysing the 'postcapitalist' discourse and the emerging post-work

imaginary that has accompanied it. This discourse has developed amidst an identified 'crisis of work' in Western Europe and the United States, which bears witness to the disintegration of traditional patterns of working in favour of more precarious, informal, individualised and sporadic working conditions, mediated by a growing globalised labour market and emerging technological innovation: a landscape described by Ulrich Beck (2000) as the *Brave New World of Work*. This emerging reality has given rise to a critical sociology of work that pivots on the advocacy of the abolition of work, through the embracing of technological innovation (so as to automate vast swathes of work) and through the implementation of new welfare policies (such as the UBI or other variations of this model). However, despite the apparent radicalism of this sociology, the functionality of the postcapitalist discourse is shown to rely upon a very narrow conceptualisation of work and upon the universalisation of the experience of a very particular social subject: of waged labour that corresponds to the white, male, able-bodied worker of the post-war era. The view of both work and welfare that it presents is indebted to this image, which consequently sees this critical sociology reinforcing the very productivist tropes that it seeks to reject. This chapter argues that these shortcomings are reflected theoretically and ideologically in its reliance on humanist concepts. Its contact with the Young Marx ([1844] 1981) sees this discourse reproduce an essentially humanist critique of labour under the guise of a technologically advanced postcapitalist vision, in which key social relations of work are necessarily mystified in order to secure the functionality of the discourse as a whole. These ideological roots allow this discourse to justify and side-step the limitations that it reinforces, by subsuming the social relations rendered-invisible by these limitations beneath an ideological analysis of human alienation.

Chapter Four engages in a Marxist-feminist analysis of humanist ideology, arguing that humanism further prevents a fuller understanding of reproduction and reproductive labour in the twenty first century. The contemporary landscape of reproduction is one in which reproductive labour has migrated its traditional foundation within the family unit and has been opened onto international labour markets through the emergence of a host of new globalised 'trades': domestic labour, sex work, tissue donation and surrogacy, for example. In response to this, an emerging humanist discourse has arisen which argues that the contemporary instances of gendered violence and harm evident in these emerging industries stems from a process of heightened human alienation facilitated by the structure of contemporary capitalism, where innate human values, human emotions and human relationships can be commodified and made available for sale. However, this humanist framing of the problem, by locating its critique of capitalism within an ideological analysis of human alienation, forbids a fuller understanding of the precise nature of gendered class exploitation in the twenty first century and how this is reflected in contemporary reproductive relations. This emerging

humanist tendency and its observation of critique within the tendency of capitalism towards heightened human alienation, mystifies the new regimes of primitive accumulation – and the re-orientations of gendered class struggle reflected therein – that are implicated in these contemporary formulations of reproductive labour. This emerging humanist tendency leaves these social relations of capitalism generally unthought, preventing a fuller understanding the precise nature of gendered violence in the twenty first century, but also reinforcing the precise ideological schemas on which capitalism has historically relied in exercising this gendered violence. In moving towards a Marxist-feminist analysis of ‘Clinical Labour’ (Cooper & Waldby, 2014), this chapter stresses the necessity of revisiting the critique of humanist ideology for feminist sociological critiques of reproduction in the twenty first century.

Finally, Chapter Five critically analyses the impact of humanist ideology in the context of a developing social scientific paradigm set by the urgencies of potential ecological catastrophe: collected together under the notion of ‘the Anthropocene.’ This chapter pinpoints the figuration of labour within this emerging paradigm, exposing the centrality of labour as the pivot of an emerging theoretical humanism at the core of this paradigm. The proponents of the Anthropocene discourse rely upon a humanist conceptualisation of labour in order to describe the way in which the human subject, by virtue of its labour, has in effect *made* history, producing through its labour upon the planet the contemporary conditions of climatological instability that today confront it. In order to problematise this, the theorists of the Anthropocene depend upon a theory of alienation, arguing that the unstable conditions of the Anthropocene are the product of two centuries of alienated human labour: an alienation upheld and reinforced by modernity. However, this theoretically humanist configuration of labour and its reflection in a problematic of alienation produces severe ideological effects, mystifying the relationship between capitalist social relations and the conditions of ecological instability that define the ‘Anthropocene.’ This chapter demonstrates that the Anthropocene discourse – by virtue of its humanism – again prevents a fuller understanding of the nature of work in the twenty first century, particularly in the context of ecological catastrophe. This chapter argues that thinking work in a way that is sensitive to the planetary conditions that define this contemporary geo-historical epoch demands an alternative theoretical approach which centralises the critique of humanist ideology: focusing less on the Anthropocene and more on a Marxist world-ecological approach to the ‘Capitalocene’ (Moore, 2015). If unable to distance itself from this ideological trend in the social scientific interaction with the Anthropocene, the sociology of work, instead of a transformative discourse, risks spiralling into obscurity as one of many ideological voices to uncritically welcome the world into the ‘Era of Man.’

The sociology of work is met with an urgent set of challenges in the twenty first century. The crisis of work, the globalisation of reproduction and impending ecological

catastrophe each present serious and immanent problems with which the sociology of work must come to terms. However, the adequacy of this sociological discourse in so doing depends upon the primacy of an ideological struggle against an old foe: that of humanism. Despite the legacy of Althusser and his contemporaries on the sociological discipline, humanism continues to present a persistent problem to the sociology of work in fundamentally limiting both its explanatory and transformative potential. There is, it would seem, *power* in the sociology of work: the power both to dominate, but also to liberate. The sociology of work is important because it provides a unique opportunity to *know* this power: however, this knowledge can only be produced “on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes” (Althusser, 1996, p.229).

## CHAPTER I

# Althusser and the Humanist Controversy

This chapter will define and problematise ‘humanism’, looking first at the broader critique of humanism within the social sciences and secondly at the position of Louis Althusser’s specific contribution within this critique. Though humanism as a term has long been associated with the universalisation of human knowledge and human liberty, critical approaches to humanism have argued that humanism has in fact facilitated the entrenchment of numerous social inequalities. The ‘human’ of the human subject is not a diverse figure inclusive of differing social experiences but, on the contrary, a narrowly defined figure, embodying only a very particular social experience corresponding to the white, male, European and non-disabled human. Moreover, in embodying this narrow social experience, humanism is also mobilised to reproduce and justify the structures of domination and exploitation which benefit this particular social subject: capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism and ableism. In order to position what exactly is meant by ‘humanism’ in this thesis and why it is to be considered a problem, this chapter will first engage with these critiques in more detail.

Through the work of Louis Althusser, the critique of humanism becomes available for thinking about work and class in much greater detail. For Althusser, humanism complements the structures of exploitation vital to the functioning of capitalist society, by providing an ideological obstacle behind which these structures can remain hidden: both in knowledge and in society itself. Marxism, for Althusser, recognises these ideological properties of humanism and arrives at the critique of capitalist society through an initial deconstruction of its humanist mystification in theory. For Althusser, humanism is a problem insofar as it hides the class character of capitalist society, meaning that the explanation of capitalist society – and its expression in key social relations, such as those of work – depends upon a deconstruction of this humanist ideology. Althusser’s contribution is not without inconsistencies and certainly not without its critics. This chapter will engage critically with Althusser’s contribution, assessing it in the context of his larger body of work and isolating the key components of his critique which will be useful for the remainder of this thesis.

## HUMANISM

Humanism is a multi-faceted and often contested set of ideas, beliefs and values that emerge in ethical, philosophical and even political forms. It is perhaps, as Davies (2008) argues, not appropriate to speak of humanism but of *humanisms*, as the definition of such a term is “never a matter for lexicography alone” (p.6), but “tied inescapably to the linguistic and cultural *authority* (real, absent, wished-for, or fought over) of those who



use it” (p.6, original emphasis). It can be conceived of as a set of values, organised around common human experience; as a standard of enquiry, prioritising science and rationality over faith or spirituality; as a philosophical method, usurping previous theological explanations of the world and its phenomena. Perhaps at its basis it is, as Fons Elders outlined in his introduction to the 1971 debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault (2011) on the subject, “the question of whether...in spite of our differences, we have something we could call common human nature, by which we can recognise each other as human beings” (p.2).

Popular considerations of humanism tend to link the term with a certain set of values and ideas which emphasise human scientific curiosity (rationality, discovery, inquisitiveness and contemplation, for example) as well as certain social and political values concomitant with this (liberation and autonomy, freedom of speech, freedom of thought and freedom of religious affiliation). Within the history of Western knowledge, a number of significant periods tend to re-emerge as pointing towards the foundations for humanism and humanist thinking. In Ancient Greece and through the philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Protagoras and Epicurus, the social, political and cultural experiences of human civilisation were looked towards as the foundation for the human condition, challenging more theological interpretations. Between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Renaissance is celebrated as a period of scientific discovery and cultural advancement. Key technological inventions such as the telescope and the printing press coincided with the contributions to human knowledge of Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo and Isaac Newton, challenging the dogmatic teachings of the Church regarding the universe and its creation. The period of the Enlightenment is one celebrated for its major social and political advancements – cemented by key events such as the American (1765-1783) and French (1789-1799) Revolutions – in which the divine right of Kings to rule was challenged through the formation of republics, centralising key democratic freedoms of speech, association and religious affiliation. These important historical events, though different in their own ways, signal the movement towards scientific and philosophical enquiry grounded primarily in *human experience*, where rational human approaches to society and to the world begin to give shape to things once left to religion and to God to explain and justify.

At its most simplistic theoretical level, humanism is the advancement of knowledge from the perspective of human experience. It emerges alongside an important philosophical moment in Western thought, wherein religion comes to be usurped by the concept of *history*. The cornerstone of modern philosophy is that reality is dictated not by divine will or by acts of God, but through *historical development* or *unfolding* (Feenberg, 2014). Humanism as a philosophy emerges in tandem with this historicism, as *human action* is identified as the motor of this historical unfolding: “For this philosophy, ‘reality’ is historical, and history itself is to be understood as in essence an object of human

practice” (Feenberg, 2014, p.5). The conceptualisation of history in this way makes necessary the production of a *human subject*, imbued with very particular qualities and characteristics that allow it to make history in this way. It is here that philosophy produces a taxonomy of concepts through which to describe how this subject makes history, such as ‘labour’, ‘essence’, ‘nature’ and ‘subjectivity’. In this way, “the constitutive dynamic of a conscious (if often misguided) human development is therefore the crux of historical change” (Del Valle Alcala, 2013, p.74-74). In short, humanism and the historical human subject – as they are predominantly understood in their modern philosophical context – are the product of the confrontation of philosophy with theology, of history with religion, where the divine figure of God was replaced by the historical figure of ‘Man.’

Humanism is not easily identifiable within a specific school of thought. Rather, humanism has intersected with a number of other considerations across multiple disciplines in the production of a patchwork of modern European philosophical interjections. Perhaps the most influential humanist thinkers were those which belonged to the school of German idealism such as Immanuel Kant (1781), G.W.F. Hegel (1821) and Ludwig Feuerbach (1841). German idealism is largely credited as providing the foundation for modern humanist and historicist philosophy, arguing that that which is transcendental or essential belongs not to God but to Man, with history the observed development and attainment of these transcendental human qualities. The human subject itself becomes the motor of history, opening it up to change and adaptation that was previously forbidden by more theological interpretations. There are of course other notable philosophical contributions to humanism which do not belong to this school of German idealism. Spinoza’s (1677) contribution pre-dates German idealism and is often credited as foundational to humanist thinking: Spinoza forwarded a monist philosophy, arguing that human beings and nature shared the same essential foundations. In Britain, David Hume’s ([1738] 2014) philosophical contribution advanced an empiricist understanding of human nature, that proved influential in the formation of British political economy and political theory thereafter.

This image of an historical human subject becomes absolutely crucial for the functioning of theory across a number of disciplines in modern social science. Early political scientific theories of power and the state depended upon the existence of a human subject in order to function. Thomas Hobbes’ ([1651] 2008) theory of power and the state depended upon the existence of a human subject whose life was spent in perpetual conflict with other humans. The sovereignty of the state was derived from the necessary relinquishing of autonomy by these warring subjects, trading the ability to self-govern for a more civilized way of existing (Hobbes, 2008). In argument with Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([1762] 2008) mobilised a more moralistic human subject as a way of advancing his theory of the social contract. According to Rousseau (2008), the institutions of industrial society and the division of labour it inaugurated encouraged the development

of a civil society locked together through a social contract between its members, ensuring the triumph of innate human morals over the state of nature within modern politics.

Sociologically, a different human subject emerges as an important theoretical pivot. For Émile Durkheim ([1893] 1964), the establishment of a human subject with distinct values and characteristics was important for his explanation of industrial society. Echoing Rousseau's approach to politics, Durkheim (1964) argued that the institutions of industrial society – in particular the workplace and the family – and the distinct division of labour it necessitated, were directly compatible with a civilised and moralistic human society. The division of labour in industrial society fostered an “organic solidarity” (Durkheim, 1964, p.69) between its members, emanating from a relationship between the institutions of society and the innate moral behaviours of the human subject: a relationship to which Durkheim (1964) would prescribe sociology the task of studying. In Max Weber's ([1905] 2012) sociology, the human subject is less pronounced. However, rationality as a key humanist concept is particularly important in Weber's (2012) explanation of the emergence of capitalism and bureaucracy, with the Protestant Ethic considered to be the product of a rationalist and more humanist shift towards Calvinism: a strand of Christianity which encouraged worldly salvation, emphasising a link between human actions in this life and divine salvation in the next.

Modern contributions to political economy relied on a productive and consuming human subject as a standard measure for economic calculation. For Adam Smith ([1776] 1991), the human subject was the cornerstone of his calculation of value. For Smith (1991), the exchange-value of all commodities was derived from the value of the labour invested into their production: “Labour...is the real measure of the exchangeable value of all commodities” (p.26). The value of this labour is determined, for Smith (1991), by the cost of reproducing the human labourer themselves: that is, the cost of feeding, housing and reproducing the human labourer so that they may return to work the next day to labour again. In this way, Smith's (1991) calculation of value – which would go on to influence future political economic contributions such as those of David Ricardo (1817) – was dependent upon the centrality of a human subject capable of measurable production and consumption.

In each of these instances, the human subject appears slightly differently and with a different function. Some discourses emphasise the transcendental characteristics of the human subject, focusing on essence in some form or another. Others claim to understand the ‘nature’ of this subject, necessarily measuring the naturally productive or consumptive habits of this subject and how these are organised. Be it through its experience, essence or nature, the human subject is repeatedly relied upon as a way of bridging the gap between the philosopher, the political scientist, the sociologist or the economist and the object of their knowledge: that is, that which they are trying to produce knowledge of.

Importantly, it is *this* reliance on the human subject and on the construction of its nature or essence that is here codified as *humanism*.

At first glance, the orientation of knowledge around a human subject appears progressive, attempting to universalise social, political and economic experience on the basis of characteristics shared by everybody by virtue of their simply 'being human.' However, critical analyses of humanism have indicated that what is universalised is in fact the social experience of a very specific image of humanity. What becomes apparent is that the experiences of certain groups of people – people of different classes, different genders or different races, for example – are unaccounted for in the hegemonic image of the human subject that emerges out of these discourses. Moreover, there is a troubling correlation between this exclusion and the material social exploitation of these excluded groups.

## THE CRITIQUE OF HUMANISM

Importantly, this recurring humanist ideology has not passed without criticism. The essence of this criticism is that this human subject and the humanist values to which it corresponds, speak only to the experience of a very narrowly defined human subject: normally an experience enjoyed by a white, male, European, heterosexual and non-disabled subject. Humanism is therefore criticised as exclusionary, as its functioning requires the mystification of social experiences that differ from those of the hegemonic human subject to which it corresponds. More dangerously, the establishment of a hegemonic human subject and human experience allows for the development of hierarchies and structures of domination, where certain social experiences – those of different races, genders, sexual orientations or abilities from the assumed human subject – are justifiably suppressed by virtue of their difference or divergence from this hegemonic form. In many cases, the material forms of oppression and domination experienced by particular groups of people – racism, sexism, homophobia or ableism – find their theoretical expression in discourses of knowledge that have continued to mark their bodies (and the social experience that corresponds with these bodies) as a deviation from a normative standard, set by the modern human subject and its humanist values.

In her text *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti (2013) provides a strong introduction to the terms of this critique. Braidotti (2013) argues that rather than providing a basis for inclusivity, humanism and the human subject have served to provide a lever of *exclusion*, functioning as a hegemonic standard against which difference is recognised and separated out. As Braidotti (2013) writes,

The human of Humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of

Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location (p.26).

In this way, humanism provides a basis both for segregation (the separation of difference from sameness) but also hierarchy (the placement of sameness *above* difference). In this way, as Braidotti (2013) continues, “to be ‘different from’ came to mean to be ‘less than’” (p.28). Thus, with the birth of humanism comes a new and more useful vocabulary through which to justify the existence of social hierarchy and the exploitation inherent to it. The language of humanism, in producing the hegemonic human subject, at precisely the same time produces those subjects which are ‘sub-human’, ‘non-human’ or ‘in-human’, conveniently attaching these labels to those exploited within these social hierarchies (Braidotti, 2013). The exploitation of the working class at work, of women in the household and of people of colour in the colonies is organised and articulated through the language of dehumanisation, with the establishment of the difference of these social groups from the hegemonic human standard providing the justification for their subjugation (Braidotti, 2013). In this way, humanism and the figure of the human subject in theory, “goes hand in hand with the recognition of the real-life violence which was and still is practised against non-human animals and the dehumanized social and political ‘others’ of the humanist norm” (Braidotti, 2013, p.30).

Friedrich Nietzsche is often looked towards as one of the first philosophers to launch this critique of humanism: albeit without the sensitivity to issues of gender and race brought later to this critique by feminist and postcolonial theory. The essence of Nietzsche’s proclamation of the death of God was the recognition that a new figure had emerged to take its place as an organising principle of human behaviour, that is, the figure of ‘Man.’ According to Nietzsche ([1901] 2017), the attachment of consciousness, autonomy and free will to the human subject becomes the standard against which human beings are controlled, judged and punished in modern society. The fiction of “‘the doer’ (spirit, ego, rational actor, will), is used to attach a conscious intention to our actions in order that we may be held accountable for our behavior” (Weeks, 2018, p.33). In this way, so Weeks (2018) continues, “the pre-existing self is a point of access which is exploited by outside forces; the ideal of the self-constituting individual is one means by which we are enslaved” (p.33). The values of humanism come to replace the Ten Commandments, with pre-existing subjectivity replacing divine intervention as the source of morality but also the access-point of power. The correspondence of the modern subject to these humanist values forms the basis of their social acceptance and vindication, with the phenomenon of nihilism central to Nietzsche’s work often conceptualised as the product of a contradiction between these values and the realities of modern society for human beings (Weeks, 2018).

The initiation and development of this critique of humanism has been an essential component in the emergence and establishment of both feminist and postcolonial theory.

Simone de Beauvoir's ([1949] 2011) *The Second Sex* is a foundational text in feminist theory, which launched a sophisticated critique of the modern human subject from the standpoint of a feminist existentialism. De Beauvoir (2011) tracked the production of the female subject and its position in relation to the dominant, normative, masculine interpretations of subjectivity that had accompanied the production of modern knowledge. For de Beauvoir (2011), the category of Woman was a necessarily gendered one, produced as a result of hegemonic patriarchal considerations of subjectivity concomitant with modern knowledge. In this sense, female subjectivity had never been defined on its own terms, but always in reference to the masculine standard, which produced a deeply problematic conceptualisation of modern femininity, often complementary of existing patriarchal social structures (de Beauvoir, 2011). As de Beauvoir (2011) wrote, "Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being" (p.5).

This critique of humanism is further echoed in key contributions to postcolonial theory. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon ([1952] 2008) recognised the way in which the concept of Man and of the human subject emerged as a pivot of colonial domination. The modern human subject emerges as the reference point of being for both the white coloniser and the black colonised subject: the coloniser, in dominating man and nature alike seeks to embody the ideals of modern Man; and the colonised, convinced of its own inferiority in the wake of this image, strives toward 'whiteness' as a way of compensating for this inferiority (Fanon, 2008). As Fanon (2008) wrote in the opening pages of his text, "The black man wants to be white. The white man is desperately trying to achieve the rank of man" (p.XIII).

Humanism and dominant assumptions surrounding the human subject and its values and characteristics have long been problematic by virtue of the ways in which this image helps to reinforce and reproduce particular social inequalities. However, this critique is by no means one only of the past. In recent years, this critique has been reanimated as a way of making sense of emerging social inequalities. From a sociological perspective, Imogen Tyler's (2013) *Revolting Subjects* explains the relationship between the material conditions of society and the invocation of stigma and the notions of disgust, deviancy and revulsion used to separate specific social groups away from dominant conceptions of humanity. According to Tyler (2013), neoliberalism in Britain and its attendant social consequences – the dismantling of workers' rights, the constriction of the welfare state and the criminalisation of immigrants and other racialised groups – is facilitated by a machinery of "social abjection" (p.19) which facilitates the social oppression of particular groups of people through their marking as 'other' from normative conceptualisations of human subjectivity. The social injustices wrought upon marginalised social groups such as the unemployed, young people, single mothers, immigrants, refugees and travellers is justified on the basis of the subjective juxtaposition

of these groups against the normative construct of the ideal human subject: a juxtaposition facilitated by notions of disgust, revulsion, uncleanness, infection and inhumanity (Tyler, 2013). For example, Tyler (2013) explains the connection between key neoliberal policies such as the strengthening of border policy and the shrinking of the welfare state in Britain and the development of a “rhetoric of disgust” (p.89) surrounding the figure of the ‘asylum-seeker’, which sought to position this figure as distinct from the general population through the repetition and reproduction of dehumanising tropes: tropes worthy of punishment through stricter immigration and welfare laws.

In his text *Mistaken Identity*, Asad Haider (2018) demonstrates this problem in the development of “racial ideology” (p.42). For Haider (2018), racial ideology is a product of the attachment of social hierarchies and social structures to particular biological qualities: such as, for example, skin colour. The position of certain groups of people within social hierarchies is justified on the basis of biological characteristics, with those at the top corresponding more closely to a normative standard of ‘human’ and those below positioned on the basis of their deviation from this normative standard. As Haider (2018) explains, racial ideology was particularly important in the development of capitalist social relations. Imperialism and the necessary establishment of social hierarchies through which to appropriate and exploit both land and labour abroad, was reflected in the development of a racial ideology that attached the now subservient social position of colonised peoples to very particular biological characteristics, ‘justifying’ imperial expansion by juxtaposing the civilised, rational white European subject with the barbarous, uncivilised and uneducated colonial subject (Haider, 2018). As Haider (2018) writes of racial ideology within the British Empire, “the early forms of English racial ideology represented the Irish as *inferior and subhuman*, and this ideology was later repeated word for word to justify both the genocide of Indigenous people in the Americas and the enslavement of Africans” (p.52, emphasis added).

This critique is particularly acute within contemporary feminist theory too, with the social subjugation of women linked to the deviation of women from normative human standards in various ways. Through the example of sex work and the figure of ‘the prostitute’, Juno Mac and Molly Smith (2018) demonstrate how these ideas have re-emerged in the contemporary oppression of women. According to Mac and Smith (2018), the crushing of attempts made by sex workers to organise in unions, the denial of various rights to sex workers to work and live and the criminalisation of sex workers through policing and border control are reflected (again, ideologically) in the notions of disgust, degradation and disease that are often attached to bodies of sexually promiscuous women, marking them not simply as a deviation from a normative human subject, but as threatening to *contaminate* this image. As Mac and Smith (2018) write in relation to the patriarchal dehumanisation of women’s bodies, “Ugly, stretched, odorous, unclean, potentially infected, desirable, mysterious, tantalising – the patriarchy’s ambivalence

towards vaginas is well established *and has a lot in common with attitudes around sex work*” (p.23, emphasis added). Mac and Smith (2018) here acknowledge a link between this process of dehumanisation and the material working conditions of sex workers today.

From a perspective in critical studies in disability, Bill Hughes (2012) argues that modern approaches to the disabled can be conceptualised in terms of a process of ‘civilisation’, where bodies that are considered to deviate from a normative human standard are either cured or killed. Hughes (2012) argues that modern conceptualisations of human subjectivity have been used to treat disabled people in either ‘anthropoemic’ (where the purity of the original human subject is preserved through the elimination or removal of disabled people from society) or ‘anthropophagic’ (where medical science has attempted to correct or cure disabled people to more closely mirror the norms and values embodied in the modern human subject) ways, both of which have reinforced social inequalities between disabled and non-disabled people. In this way, dominant normative conceptualisations of human subjectivity “transmit the same core cultural message: disabled people represent ‘what not to be’ and are, therefore, ontologically invalid or ‘uncivilised’” (Hughes, 2012, p.18). Crucially, this ontological invalidation – possible only against the backdrop of a normative human image – reflects the material social inequalities faced by disabled people in the workplace, the community and in other important social institutions and spaces.

As is evident across these critiques, humanism and its mobilisation of historical human subjectivity are problematised as entry-points to power and domination within modern society. In these different instances, humanism is critiqued because it both brackets and reinforces particular social inequalities and experiences. In modern conceptualisations of historical human subjectivity, there is little room for the experiences of women, of people of colour, of the disabled and of a number of other groups whose social experience differs from that of the hegemonic subject. However, it is not only that humanism in this way can be ignorant of these perspectives, but that it can also be used as a way of reinforcing the inequalities that emerge out of this ignorance. Humanism has been shown by these authors to be a co-conspirator in the deployment of racist, patriarchal and ableist social structures that deploy social violence upon these groups: often necessarily as part of contemporary capitalist accumulation strategies.

For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to locate a critique of humanism which is useful for thinking about class and work. For such a critique, the thesis turns to the critique of humanism found in the works of Louis Althusser. For Althusser ([1972] 2008), the language of humanism was precisely the language of capitalism and capitalist exploitation. Althusser (2008) argued that humanism provided the logic and justification for the exploitation of the working class, providing the bourgeoisie with a useful taxonomy beneath which to mystify the cruelty of class domination. As Althusser (2008) wrote, humanism “serves *those* whose interest it is to talk about ‘man’ *and not* about the masses,



about ‘man’ *and not* about classes and the class struggle” (p.98, original emphasis). This use of the critique of humanism in thinking about class – and work as a reflection of class struggle – will be of particular use for the development of this thesis and its argument. In what follows, the chapter critically explores Althusser’s critique of humanism and some of those who have engaged with it in order to isolate the useful concepts from this critique and justify their position in this thesis.

## ALTHUSSER AND THE HUMANIST CONTROVERSY

Louis Althusser’s critique of humanism has been the subject of celebration and significant critique both during his life and in the years after his death. Althusser was a problematic philosophical character, whose ideas have often been enjoyed vicariously in the work of more palatable names such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. However, Althusser’s work provides particular conceptual resources which are useful for thinking about the problems imbued in the relationship between humanism and conceptualisations of work and class. From the expansive and important collection of concepts produced by Althusser, this thesis singles out an important pair of concepts which Althusser brings together in his critique of humanism and which will be of particular importance for the critique developed in this thesis. The first of these concepts is the concept of ‘humanism’ itself, which allows for a description of the precise characteristics of the problem with which this thesis deals. The second concept is the concept of ‘ideology’, which allows for a description of *how* humanism becomes problematic and what humanism ‘does’ to the sociology of work, which this thesis sets out to observe and analyse. This section of the chapter will critically isolate, explain and position these conceptual resources in Althusser’s work and therefore justify their positioning within the thesis.

Althusser’s work, the most important examples of which emerged between the early 1960s and late 1970s, covered a number of topics and disciplines and attracted equally fervent support and criticism with each production. The targets of Althusser’s critique have included humanism and historicism and its emergence in German idealist philosophy, classical political economy and contemporary ‘communism’ (Althusser [1964] 1996, [1965] 2015a, 2015b); the role of the state in the capitalist mode of production (Althusser [1969] 2014); the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan ([1964] 2008); the role of philosophy and ideology in the natural sciences (Althusser, [1967] 2011); and the political theory of Montesquieu (Althusser, [1959] 2007) and Niccolò Machiavelli (Althusser, [1971-72] 1999). Despite this corpus of work, Althusser has been declared something of a “dead dog” in philosophical terms (Lipietz cited in Elliot, 2009, p.XIII). His work received notable criticism and dismissal from a number of places. John Lewis (1972) likened Althusser’s work to “a voice crying in the wilderness” (p.25) who was

“highly polemical...arraigning in the dock the enemies and heretics which it is his responsibility to expose and denounce” (p.25). E.P. Thompson (1978) penned one of the most influential critiques of Althusser’s work in *The Poverty of Theory*, in which he described “Althusserianism as a manifestation of a general police action within ideology, as the attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory” (chapter XIII, para.46). Raymond Williams ([1977] 2009) also implicitly critiqued the “relatively powerless” (p.129) ability of ‘Althusserian’ Marxism to comprehend the role of human cultural activity under capitalism, citing “one dominant strain in Marxism, with its habitual abuse of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘personal’” (p.129) as the prime suspect of this charge.

Despite this extensive criticism, the critique of humanism in Althusser’s work found salience in the philosophical works of many of his contemporaries and has gone on to inspire numerous mainstream contemporary contributions to philosophy and social science. Michel Foucault – a heavily-cited author within sociology and student of Althusser – made the critique of humanism and the human subject central to his deconstruction of Western knowledge and modern subjectivity. Particularly in texts like *Madness and Civilisation* (Foucault, [1961] 2001), *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault [1975] 1991) and Volume One of *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, [1976] 1998), Foucault tracks how humanism and ideas surrounding human subjectivity develop as ideological supplements to modern structures and institutions of power. The family, the prison, the hospital and the factory as key institutions of capitalist society, produce an ideological “machinery” (Foucault, 1998, p.69) through which humanist discourse is produced and reproduced in the service of power. These ideas have been continued in updated critiques of humanism, particularly those by Donna Haraway (1991) and Rosi Braidotti (2013) in their development of ‘posthumanist’ theory. For them, humanism remains an anachronism of modern patriarchal capitalism, crucial for the ongoing division of labour between genders, races and species in the face of social developments in globalisation and technology which continue to blur the lines between these categories. From the perspective of Marxist theory, Althusser’s critique of humanism is echoed in the works of popular interlocutors such as Étienne Balibar (2017), Fredric Jameson (2016), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001), Alain Badiou (2012) and Slavoj Žižek (2008). Furthermore, a new collection of essays curated and edited by Nick Nesbitt (2017) has been recently published, dedicated to a re-reading of Althusser’s *Reading Capital* (in which Althusser’s critique of humanism finds a central place) from a variety of standpoints and in the context of twenty first century capitalism and its discontents.

Although these authors have all moved beyond Althusser in some way, it is not because they reject the Althusserian critique of humanism. On the contrary, this critique maintains a central place in these contributions. For Foucault (1970), it was the critique of Marxist-humanism that permitted his exposure of how traditional Marxism and the ‘bourgeois’ political economy it was supposed to oppose in fact shared the same “condition

of possibility” (p.262): a condition rooted in humanist ideology and the historical image of ‘Man.’ For Braidotti (2013), the Althusserian critique of humanism opened a challenge to “the humanistic arrogance of continuing to place Man at the centre of world history” (p.23) that persisted at the core of Marxist philosophy at the time, showing how “different and sharper power relations emerge, once this formerly dominant subject is freed from his delusions of grandeur and is no longer allegedly in charge of historical progress” (p.23). Jameson (2016) argued that Althusserian anti-humanism “thematized the attack on metaphysics – in a kind of search-and-destroy offensive which tracked its enemy into the most unlikely corners, with often deadly results” (p.70), challenging the notion that the “(bourgeois) ideal of human nature was somehow eternal and permanently defined the species as such” (p.70). For Žižek (2008), Althusser’s contribution to philosophy demarcates the “real break” (p.XXIV) with how subjectivity was considered theoretically, as Althusser argued that “a certain cleft, a certain fissure, misrecognition, characterizes the human condition as such: by the thesis that the idea of the possible end of ideology is an ideological idea par excellence” (p.XXIV).

Whilst Althusser and his work have therefore enjoyed serious and sustained criticism, the continued salience of his critique of humanism in these popular contributions is indicative of its explanatory force in the context of emerging social developments. Moreover, it is Althusser specifically who teaches his readers how to deploy the critique of humanism in the context of capitalism and class struggle. It is in this way that the re-visiting of Althusser’s critique is here justified. As a Marxist philosopher, Althusser argued that the precise philosophical method which allows Marxism to make sense of class struggle and its expression in the various social relations of society (especially those of ‘work’) emanates primarily from the *critique* of humanist ideology. By re-visiting the works of Marx, Althusser demonstrates how Marx’s dissection of the capitalist mode of production is firmly anchored in both an implicit and explicit critique of humanism, where ideological assumptions around human subjectivity are left behind in favour of a ‘scientific’<sup>1</sup> analysis of society, social relations and social structures. “It is against the general background of this history,” so Althusser ([1967] 2003) wrote in his essay on *The Humanist Controversy*, “that we can bring out our carefully considered reasons for defending the thesis of *Marx’s theoretical anti-humanism*” (p.232, original emphasis).

Firstly, it is important to set about defining ‘humanism’ as a theoretical problem. Althusser’s references to ‘humanism’ were references to representations of human subjectivity *in theory*. In his critique of humanism, Althusser was targeting these theoretical representations of concrete human subjectivity and their reflection in a

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<sup>1</sup> Althusser mobilised the ‘scientific’ qualities of Marxism in order to pronounce its opposition to ‘ideology.’ Althusser was here playing into the debate between science and ideology that persisted in the social sciences at the time, evident *par excellence* in the ‘Positivist Debate’ between Karl Popper and Theodor Adorno in 1961 (see Jeffries, 2017).

number of different conceptual devices. Althusser (2003) here pointed towards the various ways in which these concepts manifest themselves theoretically:

The notion of Man (the essence or Nature of Man); The notion of the human species or Human Genus (Man's generic essence, defined by consciousness, the heart, inter-subjectivity, etc.); The notion of the 'concrete,' 'real', etc., individual; The notion of the subject ('concrete' subjectivity, the subject constitutive of the specular relation, the process of alienation, History, etc.); The notion of consciousness (for example, as the essential defining feature of the human species, or as the essence of the ideological); The notion of labour (as the essence of man); The notion of alienation (as the externalization of a Subject); The notion of dialectic (so far as it implies teleology) (p.273).

Across numerous contributions, Althusser tracks and exposes the persistence of these theoretical concepts across various discourses of knowledge. In modern political theory, Althusser (2007) demonstrated how modern conceptualisations of law upon which these political theories were based were "steeped in exigencies arising from human relations. Law thus presupposed human beings, or beings in the image of man, even if they surpassed it" (p.31). In philosophy – particularly German idealism – this humanism emerges again, in the consideration of history as the expression of the struggle of the human subject against alienated reason: "At the end of history, this man, having become inhuman objectivity, has merely to re-grasp as subject his own essence alienated in property, religion and the State to become total man, true man" (Althusser, 1996, p.226). Althusser (2015b) also observes this humanism in theories of political economy too, arguing that "Political Economy relates economic facts to their origin in the *needs* (or 'utility') of human *subjects*" (p.314, original emphasis), where "it is the need (of the human subject) that defines the *economic* in economics" (p.315, original emphasis).

Through these examples, it is possible to infer a very specific definition of humanism in Althusser's work. It is a distinctly theoretical problem for Althusser, relating to the ways in which discourses of knowledge rely on various assumptions surrounding human subjectivity in order to draw conclusions about their object of study. Though the distinction was not always convincing, Althusser (1996) took steps to distinguish this observation of theoretical humanism from the values of human freedom and human liberation often characterised as 'humanist.' As Althusser (1996) conceded in the opening passages of his essay *Marxism and Humanism*, "the objective of the revolutionary struggle has always been the end of exploitation and hence the liberation of man" (p.221). For Althusser (1996) as a Marxist, humanist values themselves were not the problem: rather, the problem was these humanist theoretical tropes which obfuscated the class struggle necessary for achieving this human emancipation. Though human liberation was

the desired outcome of every revolutionary struggle, “as Marx foresaw...this struggle had to take the form of the struggle between *classes*. So revolutionary humanism could only be a ‘class humanism,’ ‘proletarian humanism.’ The end of the exploitation of man meant the end of *class* exploitation” (Althusser, 1996, p.221, original emphasis). In other words, in order to understand how to liberate human individuals, it was important to theorise the social (class) structures responsible for this unfreedom, rather than the individuals themselves.

In order to articulate humanism as a problem, Althusser relied on another concept: the concept of *ideology*. Althusser ([1970] 2008) defined ideologies as “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (p.36). In Althusser’s writings, the concept of ideology can be seen to have two different (but not unrelated) positions (Montag, 2013). In later works – particularly in his theorisation of the role of the state under capitalism – ideology was conceptualised by Althusser (2008) as a set of ideas and cues through which the capitalist state interpellates individuals into their role as *subjects*. Through key capitalist institutions such as the workplace, the school and the family, these ‘ideological state apparatuses’ continue to produce and reproduce ideas which transform individuals into the capitalist subjects which correspond to these different institutions and the roles expected of them: as workers, as students and as housewives, for example (Althusser, 2008). In earlier works however, ideology was conceptualised by Althusser (2003) in terms of a theoretical ‘obstacle’, as a false theoretical representation behind which the *real* is hidden. In theory, ideology provides the scientist with a false representation of that which they are seeking to produce knowledge of. As Althusser (2003) wrote, theories travel along a path towards the object of their study, however “at some point, this path is blocked by an *obstacle* that prevents the theory from approaching and attaining its object” (p.271, original emphasis). This obstacle is ideology, which “blocks a path and hides objects *that are in some sense behind it*” (Althusser, 2003, p.271, original emphasis). It is this more theoretical conceptualisation of ideology which is useful for this thesis.

As a Marxist philosopher, it is in this way that humanism serves as an ideological problem for Althusser (1996). Humanism is a problem insofar as it serves as a theoretical obstacle in discourses of social science, behind which the realities of class struggle and its allegories in capitalist society are hidden (Althusser, 1996). Where humanism emerges in theory, it has the ideological effect of removing class struggle from view by reducing structural social phenomena down to mere relations between concrete individuals (Althusser, 1996). In this way, humanism does not serve as an adequate basis for the construction of a critique of capitalist society: on the contrary, it provides the precise ideological covering behind which class exploitation is repeatedly hidden and justified (Althusser, 1996). As Althusser (1996) wrote,

When, during the eighteenth century, the 'rising class,' the bourgeoisie, developed a humanist ideology of equality, freedom and reason, it gave its own demands the form of universality, since it hoped thereby to enroll at its side, by their education to this end, the very men it would liberate only for their exploitation (p.234).

Humanism as an ideology provides individuals with the specular relation between themselves and their material conditions of existence. Reproduced across various discourses of knowledge – discourses whose formation accompanied the formation of capitalist social relations themselves – humanist ideology mystifies the class character of various social phenomena, representing these phenomena in more humanist forms at every turn (Althusser, 1996). For example, rather than presenting labour and work as an activity in class exploitation, bourgeois political economy mystifies the class character of the social phenomenon of work, hiding the material conditions of work behind humanist appeals to the supernatural and transcendent qualities of human labour: “And why does the bourgeoisie want to keep quiet about the natural-material conditions of labour? Because *it controls them*. The bourgeoisie knows what it is doing” (Althusser, 2008, p.98, original emphasis).

In order to demonstrate the ideological qualities of humanism in this way, Althusser (1996) developed his most influential – and indeed, most controversial – theory: that of the *epistemological break* between the works of 'Young' and 'Mature' Marx. Althusser (1996) developed the distinction between the early works of the 'Young Marx' and the more sophisticated political economy of the 'Mature Marx' in order to highlight how the ability to theorise class struggle and society was possible only on the *critique of humanist ideology* as an absolute precondition. Althusser (1996) argued that whilst the mature political economy of Marx critiqued capitalism through particular concepts which allowed him to think about the primacy of class struggle in the capitalist mode of production, the works of the 'Young Marx' were much less sophisticated, relying on humanist ideology in order to construct this critique of capitalism. Therefore, Althusser (1996) argued that the sophistication of Marx's mature political economy (and the development of the concepts that defined it) was anchored fundamentally in the deconstruction of humanism as a theoretical obstacle in the move between the 'Young' and 'Mature' Marx, with the disappearance of humanism in his works the *sine qua non* of the emergence of Marxist philosophy. The concepts of Marx's mature political economy and the theory of society driven by historical class struggle there developed, emerged “because of his ferocious insistence on freeing himself from the myths which presented themselves to him as the *truth*” (Althusser, 1996, p.84, original emphasis) in the form of the humanist ideology of his youth.

According to Althusser (1996), the early works of the 'Young Marx' (those texts written before 1845 such as *The Holy Family* and *The Economic and Philosophic*

*Manuscripts of 1844*) critiqued capitalism on the basis of a fundamentally humanist problematic, which Marx “borrowed” (p.46) from the German idealism of Ludwig Feuerbach. In his critique of religion, Feuerbach (1841) argued that religion was the manifestation of an alienated human reason, obstructing the human subject’s full attainment and enjoyment of its human capacities. Althusser (1996) argued that this central humanist problematic was traced by the Young Marx into his critique of capitalism. The Young Marx argued that capitalism is but the manifestation of alienated human reason, reflected in the alienation of human labour in private property. Communism, for the Young Marx, was therefore no more than the human overcoming of this alienated condition, as the process through which “the proletariat will negate its own negation and take possession of itself” (Althusser, 1996, p.226). In analysing these early works, Althusser (1996) argued that the central theoretical problematic of the Young Marx was not society, but Man. Althusser (1996) charges the Young Marx with “merely applying the theory of alienation, that is, Feuerbach’s theory of ‘human nature’” (p.46) to political economy, in which he does not espouse his own original theory of society but “literally espoused Feuerbach’s problematic” (p.46) of human nature and its alienation in society. Crucially, the theoretical consequences of this predominant humanist ideology in the work of the Young Marx were that it acted as a theoretical obstacle in Marx’s political economy, mystifying the role of class struggle and its reflection in the relations of society. In these early works, the critique of capitalism through the lens of class struggle and social structure is silenced by the persistence of humanist ideology throughout his analysis:

Marx could not state what he was trying to say – not only because he did not yet *know* how to say it, but also because he prevented himself from saying it by dint of the simple fact that he began his first sentence with the phrase ‘the *essence of Man*’ (Althusser, 2003, p.254, original emphasis).

The developed concepts of class struggle and its reflection in the social relations of capitalism for which Marx’s political economy would become well-known remain silent in the works of the ‘Young Marx’ because they are hidden behind the theoretical obstacle of humanist ideology. Althusser (1996) here demonstrated how the Feuerbachian ideological problematic of human nature and the Marxist problematic of class struggle cannot coexist and instead compete with one another in these early works, with the former decisively silencing the latter to the detriment of the sophistication of Marx’s political economy.

The sophisticated critique of capitalism that Marx developed in his mature political economy – where the capitalist mode of production is shown by Marx to be the reflection of historically determined class struggle in both the forces and relations of production – emerged with the abandonment of humanist ideology and the replacement

of the humanist problematic for one of class struggle and social structure (Althusser, 1996). The analytic method of the mature Marx “does not proceed from *man* but from a given economic period of society” (Marx, 1881, para.82, original emphasis), critiquing capitalism not as the alienation of human reason but as the product of an historically determinant class struggle. For Althusser (1996) this fundamental break with humanist ideology is specifically responsible for the emergence of class struggle at the forefront of Marx’s political economy and thus responsible for all the concepts Marx provided to his readers in order to understand it. As Althusser (1996) wrote, “Marx established a new problematic, a new systematic way of asking questions of the world, new principles and a new method” (p.229). In replacing humanist ideology with this new set of theoretical postulates organised around class and society, “Marx did not only propose a new theory of the history of societies, but at the same time implicitly, but necessarily, a new ‘philosophy’, infinite in its implications” (Althusser, 1996, p.229). This epistemological break in Marx’s work was a formative development in his critique of capitalism and of political economy. As Althusser (2015a, 2015b) went on to demonstrate in *Reading Capital*, not only did Marx recognise the role of humanist ideology in his own work, but he also recognised it as the foundational ideology of classical political economy as well. By pulling at the thread of humanist ideology in the works of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, Marx “rejected the very structure of the object of Political Economy” (Althusser, 2015b, p.319), exposing the inaccuracies of classical political economy by showing how “the social relations of production do not bring *men alone* onto the stage, but the *agents* of the production process and the *material conditions* of the production process, in specific ‘combinations’” (p.328, original emphasis).

Althusser (1996) positioned the critique of humanism to demonstrate not only the originality of Marx’s individual contribution, but also to demonstrate the origins of the explanatory power of Marxist philosophy itself, which would be taken up by many long after Marx. Despite the novelty of Althusser’s (1996) argument, significant critiques of this particular theoretical contribution emerged at the time and have been revised in recent years, that have disputed the accuracy of Althusser’s claims. One of the more influential critiques of Althusser’s theory comes from István Mészáros (1970) in his text *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*. Mészáros (1970) disputed the severity of the ‘break’ between the Young and Mature Marx stressed by Althusser and argued that humanism maintained its place as a continuous and necessary theoretical component of Marx’s work, even in his mature political economic works. Mészáros (1970) argued that the explanatory power of Marx’s philosophy was not derived from a break with humanism but from the continuity of humanism throughout his work. Mészáros (1970) demonstrated this by focusing on the concept of alienation in Marx’s work: though Althusser (1996) had dismissed alienation as a humanist inflection that Marx had borrowed from Feuerbach, Mészáros (1970) argued that, on the contrary, human alienation was “the *basic* idea of the Marxian system”



(p.93, original emphasis). For Mészáros (1970), the theory of alienation provided Marx with the conceptual tools to think about how the social position and experience of the working class is reified in the structures and social relations of society and, more importantly, also provided Marx with the teleology through which the proletariat would overthrow these conditions. Attempts to think about Marxism in terms of an epistemological break with humanism deprive “the Marxian system of its revolutionary meaning and converts it into a dead butterfly-collection of useless pseudo-scientific concepts” (p.96). In this way, the originality of Marx’s contribution emerges not out of a break with humanism, but with its continuity across his corpus of work (Mészáros, 1970). This critique has been updated in recent years, in texts such as Andrew Feenberg’s (2014) *The Philosophy of Praxis*. Feenberg (2014) argues that the humanism of Marx’s early works provided the basis for the originality of his philosophy, transforming the concept of alienation from one merely of idealism to one of political praxis: for Marx, “The *ordre des raisons* must be reversed: when alienation is overcome in real life, then and only then will it be possible to overcome the alienation of reason” (p.15).

Though Mészáros (1970) prompts a reconsideration of the severity of the proposed ‘break’ between the two versions of Marx, he does not convincingly allay fears as to the ideological problem of humanism in Marx’s work more generally. In fact, in order to justify the theory of alienation as *the* defining concept of Marxism, Mészáros (1970) was forced to concede the central Althusserian point: that humanism acts as an ideological obstacle which must be transformed by Marxist philosophy in order to reveal the class relations and social structures that lie behind it. In thinking about social transformation and the struggle against capitalism, Mészáros (1970) was in agreement with Althusser (1996), arguing that ‘bourgeois’ humanism remains an obstacle to emancipatory thinking that must be overcome. For example, Mészáros (1970) argued that the humanism of German idealism and classical political economy *did* in fact conceal the class relations of capitalist society and that Marx deals with a *different* humanism, to which the social and historical context is necessarily added. As Mészáros (1970) wrote,

If by ‘man’ one means, as Marx’s opponents did, ‘abstract man’ or ‘man in general’ who is ‘abstracted from all social determinations’, then this is completely beside the point. He was, in fact, *never* interested in this ‘Man’, not even *before* 1843, let alone at the time of writing the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. On the other hand ‘real man’, the ‘self-mediating being of nature,’ the ‘social individual’ *never* disappeared from his horizon (p.221, original emphasis).

The ‘epistemological break’ to which Althusser (1996) points is used in his work to demonstrate the *workings* of Marxist philosophy when confronted with the ideological problem of humanism. The severity of the break itself is subject to debate, but where it is

relied upon in this thesis, it is done so to serve this demonstrative purpose alone. Though Mészáros (1970) provides an influential critique of the concept of epistemological break, his work appears to concede the point that humanism as an ideology was a problem for Marxist philosophy and by extension a problem for social scientific considerations of class struggle and its reflection in social structure.

Althusser's critique of humanism is forceful but not without criticism. However, it provides a useful framework for thinking the problematic relationship between humanism and class struggle, which even its critics cannot help but concede. It is important in progressing further to ask to what extent Althusser's critique of humanism helps to think *specifically* about class struggle and capitalism in the context of work. In the following section this chapter poses this question, taking leave from Althusser's own considerations of work and labour in the context of his critique of humanism and ideology.

### 'THE IDEOLOGY OF WORK'

In his text *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, Althusser ([1969] 2014) cited a manuscript that he had intended to attach to the final version of his text, but unfortunately remains lost or was never completed. The proposed title of this manuscript was 'The Ideology of Work' (Althusser, 2014, p.139). This is significant because, though it remains missing, it indicates that Althusser (2014) believed work to be, in some form or another, an important site to which this critique of ideology ought to have been extended. Clues as to how this critique would have been structured can be found in the existing writings that Althusser dedicated to the topic of work and ideology. In this final section, this chapter looks more closely at these examples in order to better understand how Althusser's critique of humanism and ideology can be useful for thinking about work.

Through the example of work, Althusser (2014) demonstrated the extent to which humanism, rather than simply a neutral set of ideas, was an ideological weapon wielded by the dominant class to facilitate the exploitation of those who laboured in its service. In the opening chapters of *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, Althusser (2014) described the landscape of work with which he was faced at the time: a landscape emblematic of the post-Fordist shift to 'white-collar' work, expressed in a peculiar and more detailed division of labour of "workers and diversely qualified technicians on the one hand and, on the other, the whole hierarchy of managers, administrators, engineers, upper-level technicians, supervisors, and so on" (p.35). Signified by this contemporary landscape of work was, for Althusser (2014), a very peculiar set of *class relations*: the division of labour inherent to the post-Fordist workplace signified a *social division of labour*, stratified along class lines. As Althusser (2014) wrote, "the division [of society] into social classes is thus present in the division, organization and management of the process of production, *by virtue of the distribution of posts on the basis of the class affiliation* of the individuals

who hold them” (p.37, original emphasis). In this instance, work was a useful area of study precisely because it held clues as to the composition of class antagonism in wider society: and it was precisely, therefore, through the primacy of class struggle (and the social relations of work that reflected this struggle) that work itself was to be understood at all.

Crucially, Althusser (2014) identified humanism as a vital ideological tool in the maintenance and mystification of this class division at work. Humanism emerged as an ideological tool of class domination at work because it presented this division of labour to the consciousness of the worker, not as the result of a socially reproduced class antagonism, but as the ‘natural’ outcome of specific differences between individuals. Althusser (2014) exposed the existence of an “economistic-humanist” (p.36) ideology of work – reproduced through the bloviations of “an ‘ultramodern’ staff trained in the pseudo-scientific techniques of ‘human-resources’ [and] ‘social psychology’” (Althusser, 2014, p.39) – which mystified the class character of this division of labour by asserting that it was a division of labour stratified not along lines of class, but along lines of education, technical know-how, skill and work-ethic. Humanism was not used to invisibilise the division of labour (for this division was in no way denied), but humanism allowed for this division to be *represented* in a mythical form, expressed not as the direct result of class positioning in capitalist society, but as an expression of the differing capabilities and personalities of individual workers, that *anyone* could traverse providing they had the right attitude. As Althusser (2014) wrote,

As for the worker who becomes an engineer or even a manager, he is, in our society, a museum piece exhibited to encourage belief in the ‘possibility’ of the impossible and the idea that there are no social classes or that someone born a worker can ‘rise above his class’. Plain, unvarnished reality cries out against these disgraceful exhibitions (p.37).

According to Althusser (2014), this ideological operation, rooted firmly in humanism, was an integral part of the social mechanics of capitalist exploitation that existed in the workplace at the point of production. The mystification in this way of the social relations of work and of the class character of these relations was an important ideological precondition for the justification of exploitation and all its related exercises: the interpellation, motivation, reward and repression of workers on the production line. Exploitation at work did not, for Althusser (2014), *simply* operate through the ownership of the means of production, or the appropriation of surplus-value, but “also ‘works’ thanks to *the bourgeois ideology of work*. The workers are the first to be subjected to its effects because it is an ideology of the capitalist class struggle” (p.42, original emphasis).

Althusser (2014) therefore identified the synonymity between the Marxist critique of work and the critique of ideology (particularly humanist ideology) as both were part of

the same theoretical movement: the critical analysis of capitalism and its social manifestations demanded, at the same time, a critical analysis of ideology. However, in his essay on *The Humanist Controversy*, Althusser (2003) demonstrated how this crucial theoretical lesson of the Marxist tradition was repeatedly being forgotten, as ‘Marxist’ critiques of labour began to emerge which attempted to sharpen their analytical edge on humanist ideology. The result, so Althusser (2003) described, was the emergence of a ‘Marxist’ theoretical critique of labour in which these social relations of work were being moved to the background of analysis, in favour of recurring ideological themes regarding alienation and the struggle for human autonomy. In this way, humanism was not amplifying Marxist theory: it was *foreclosing* it (Althusser, 2003).

Analysing these emerging theoretical discourses focused upon the problem of labour, Althusser (2003) identified an “ideological enterprise” (p.286) at their heart, which turned “either [on the notion] of labour (the essence of Man is labour) or the apparently more ‘Marxist,’ but in fact equivalent notion of ‘social labour’” (p.286). With appeals to the political economy of the Young Karl Marx, these theoretical discourses constructed a critique of work under capitalism – with particular focus on the tendency of the division of labour toward an individualisation of the worker – through the centralisation of the humanist notion that in labour exists the ‘natural’ propensity towards the social cooperation of the human species and that capitalism depends upon the alienation of the human worker from this essential life-activity (Althusser, 2003). It was a theoretical approach that turned on the notion that “man...is essentially a social animal who becomes himself in society by accepting its obligations to create, serve and maintain the human fellowship” (Lewis, 1972, p.18), with the critique of work under capitalism observed in the propensity of the capitalist social formation to alienate human workers from this essential life-activity that defines their very species.

For Althusser (2003), the centrality of humanism in this critique rendered it particularly unhelpful in making sense of work under capitalism. The fact that it accepted from the beginning that society is the product of Man’s conscious activity rather than the social expression of particular class relations, rendered its interpretation of contemporary work severely limited (Althusser, 2003). This humanist critique was unable to adequately explain the contemporary division of labour as an expression of the division of society into classes, instead more convinced by the explanation of the division of labour as the product of an essential alienation of the human worker. Classes, suddenly, disappeared from the stage under this humanist critique of work and with them so too did the social relations that explain the mechanics of contemporary work (Althusser, 2003). As Althusser (2003) wrote of this ideological critique, “everything that is ‘social’ designates, not the structure of social *conditions* and the *labour-process* or the process of the realization of value, but the externalization/alienation (via as many mediations as you like) of an originary essence, that of Man” (p.288, original emphasis). Not only did this humanist ideological

approach to labour immediately preclude the existence of class and therefore of social relations but, in so doing, settled accounts precisely to the benefit of capitalism itself, by reproducing the precise ideological tropes on which its exploitation had relied. As Marx ([1875] 1945) himself wrote, “the bourgeois have very good grounds for falsely ascribing *supernatural creative power* to labour” (p.18, original emphasis), centralising it as the motor of societal development (*instead* of class), because from here it follows that “the man who possesses no other property than his labour power must...be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour” (p.18). Marxist theory, in constructing a critique of work under capitalism, cannot begin from the notion of ‘Man’, but must set out from the view of work’s inherent social relations: “In order to think the nature of ‘labour’, *one has to begin by thinking the structure of the social conditions (social relations) in which it is mobilized*” (Althusser, 2003, p.290, original emphasis).

From this analysis of Althusser’s (2003, 2014) theory and of his interjections into Marxist theoretical critiques of labour, there is an evident justification for the extension of the Marxist critique of ideology to the sociology of work. The problem here identified by Althusser (2003, 2014) is not one of the past, but one very much of the present, with which the contemporary sociology of work must necessarily get to grips. In much the same way as it had for these Marxist theorists, humanist ideology has the effect of obstructing the sociological analysis of its object, in this case preventing a fuller understanding of the nature and character of work under capitalism. It is the argument of this thesis that *this* ideological problem is the most pressing one with which the contemporary sociology of work is today faced. The explanatory capability of the sociology of work in the twenty first century depends upon, so this thesis argues, the centralisation of the critique of ideology as a fundamental theoretical task. These humanist ideological tendencies, according to Althusser (2014), demanded immediate attention, for “if they are not seriously criticized and corrected, and very soon at that” (p.45-46), then this critical discourse would end up “trapped” (p.45-46) as nothing more than an artefact itself of the bourgeois *ideology of work*.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated how Althusser’s critique of humanism allows for thinking about humanism as a problem within the sociology of work. Humanism presents a particular problem when it comes to thinking about work, as it hides from view the class antagonisms reflected in the social relations of work. It mystifies the exploitation inherent in these social relations, reducing these relations to individual interactions as opposed to structural occurrences. Though Althusser’s work has enjoyed significant criticism, it is clear that the critique of humanism found in his work is still powerful and provides a set

of conceptual devices which, when applied, expose the limitations of critical discourse still dependent upon humanism as a normative theoretical framework. Althusser reveals a tension between humanist ideology and the analysis of society which cannot go unresolved, observing the persistence of this tension in considerations of work and labour. Examining the extent to which this tension persists today in contemporary analyses of work and society will be the objective of this thesis, with the conceptual devices provided by Althusser's critique serving an important role in so doing.

In the following chapter, the thesis will begin this examination by looking more closely at contributions to the Marxist sociology of work, analysing key themes within this discourse and exposing the reliance of these contributions upon humanist ideological concepts. Marxist contributions have provided the sociology of work with a number of frameworks and ideas through which to think critically about the nature of work in capitalist society. However, as this next chapter shall demonstrate, closer examination of these themes reveals their repeated reliance on humanist ideology and its provision of a normative theoretical framework from which to advance the critique of work. The chapter does not say that this reliance removes all value from these critiques. Rather, by exposing the role of humanism in these formative and influential contributions, the chapter seeks to establish a genealogy of the development of humanist ideology within the sociology of work, which will help in the explanation of its continued evolution within the more contemporary contributions to this discourse analysed in later chapters.

## Humanist Ideology in the Sociology of Work

This chapter of the thesis critically analyses predominant theoretical approaches to labour and their translation into sociological analyses of work across the twentieth and early twenty first centuries. The chapter exposes the persistent reproduction of humanist ideological tropes that has underwritten the unfolding of the sociology of work during this period, demonstrating the limitations presented by these ideological reproductions. The chapter focuses on critical analyses of work inspired primarily by Marx and Marxism, focusing specifically on five key concepts that have come to form the bedrock of Marxist sociological understandings of work: 'labour'; 'alienation'; 'degradation'; 'knowledge'; and 'refusal.' Despite Althusser's (1996) important interjection into Marxist theory in the twentieth century, the production of critical analyses of work under the aegis of Marxism throughout this period are shown here to have relied on and reproduced humanist ideological tropes in order to articulate their critique. Consistently, this pervasive humanism has reproduced a sociological critique of work in which critical analysis is not observed in the social relations of work and in the class struggle reflected in these social relations but instead is observed primarily in the historical human struggle against alienation and against a social formation that repeatedly separates human beings from labour as their essential activity. In various formulations – and to varying degrees – the sociology of work is here shown to reproduce this ideological formula, observing work as a phenomenon not of antagonistic social relations but of human alienation and the conscious struggle of the human subject against it.

The chapter begins its analysis with a critique of the humanism of the Young Marx, in particular of his humanist framing of labour in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx [1844] 1981). It is noteworthy that the ideas contained within these manuscripts are the result of Marx's initial interaction with one of the first and most comprehensive examples of empirical sociology: that of his friend Friedrich Engels ([1844] 2009) in his text *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Liedman, 2018). In his text, Engels (2009) revealed a contradiction in the cities of the Industrial Revolution, where the workers who had produced vast amounts of wealth through their labour at the same time found themselves living in the most miserable and impoverished conditions, where disease, addiction and premature death among children and adults alike was rampant. It was to these conditions of work under capitalism, exposed by Engels' (2009) sociology, that Marx (1981) would apply the conceptual repertoire he found in the philosophies of Hegel and Feuerbach, to produce his first notable contribution to political economy and with it the concepts that would define this contribution: those of *labour* and *alienation*. The contradiction highlighted by Engels (2009) in his sociological

investigation could only be explained, according to Marx (1981) in terms of alienation, where the control and autonomy of labour had been removed from the humans who undertook this labour and placed instead in the hands of another, alien power: namely, the property-owning capitalist. Capitalism, for Marx (1981) was not merely a system of social exploitation but of essential human alienation, which, at its core, demanded a process of dehumanisation, the results of which were laid plain on the pages of Engels' (2009) sociological work.

This chapter explores the theme of alienated labour in the Young Marx (1981) and his approach to the problem of work. The chapter then tracks and exposes the persistence of these humanist ideas within more contemporary Marxist contributions to the sociology of work, exploring the extent to which this humanism of the Young Marx is foundational to the theoretical functionality of these contemporary contributions. Specifically, the sections of this chapter will analyse the role of humanism in the following contributions to the Marxist sociology of work: how humanism framed the theories of alienation developed by those like E.P. Thompson ([1968] 1991) and Raymond Williams (1968); the role of humanism in the theory of the degradation of work forwarded by Harry Braverman (1974); the humanism imbued in the conceptualisation of knowledge as production by those like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001); and the humanism that underwrote the theories of the refusal of work found in the writings of those such as André Gorz (1983). Across the range of Marxist sociological contributions covered in this chapter, the extent to which the humanist ideas of the Young Marx persist in the way that work and labour are framed and thought about are here highlighted and analysed. Sometimes this occurs as a result of a direct citation of and interaction with the works of the Young Marx and the *Manuscripts* in particular. In other cases, the relationship is indirect, but through analysis this chapter demonstrates how these ideas stem from one and the same theoretical principle. In each case, this chapter agrees with Althusser (1996) and argues that the persistence of this humanism has the effect of foreclosing the sociological investigation of social class by reducing work and labour to a relationship of and between concrete individuals. With each production of humanist ideology, this chapter demonstrates how class struggle and its manifestation in the social relations of work is mystified beneath this humanism, diluting the social character of work and labour with moralistic or anthropological explanations.

## LABOUR AND THE YOUNG MARX

To speak of 'labour' is to speak of a concept rooted in modernity and in the modern epistemological arrangement: Michel Foucault (1970) described the concept of labour as one of the vital "empiricities" (p.250) that underpinned modern knowledge. Labour as a modern concept is descriptive not merely of an activity, but of a *distinctively human*



activity, a specifically creative activity rooted in the human interaction with nature. Labour is descriptive of the human interaction with the objective world, through which they not only produce the resources on which to subsist, but create commodities, society and history itself (Foucault, 1970). It is, as Adam Smith ([1776] 1991) wrote, the “consequence of a certain propensity in human nature...common to all men, and to be found in no other race of animals” (p.12). As hinted in Smith’s (1991) words here, the modern concept of labour also implicated the existence of a *modern subject*, a particular and exceptional human subject who was capable of engaging in this labour. The concept of labour dictates that human society – and indeed, human history itself – is powered by the confrontation of this human subject with their own finitude and their consequent struggle to circumvent this finitude for as long as possible by solving the problems of scarcity presented to them by their world. As Foucault (1970) wrote,

History exists (that is, labour, production, accumulation, and growth of real costs) only in so far as man as a natural being is finite: a finitude that is prolonged far beyond the original limits of the species and its immediate bodily needs, but that never ceases to accompany, at least in secret, the whole development of civilizations (p.259).

In this modern formulation, human societies and history itself are considered as the product of human labour, the product of the very efforts of the human subject as a finite natural being to attempt to escape this finitude for as long as possible and circumvent the harsh realities of the natural world with which they are faced. As Foucault (1970) continued, “it designates in labour, and in the very hardship of that labour, the only means of overcoming the fundamental insufficiency of nature and triumphing for an instant over death” (p.257).

Crucially, this modern concept of labour was entirely compatible with the set of social relations emerging at the same time: namely, those of capitalism. This concept of labour was vitally important in the justification of capitalist social relations as the expression *par excellence* of human civilisation, as capitalism was justified as the most rational organisation of human labour and thereby the most competent social arrangement in allowing human beings to escape their finitude and overcome the problem of scarcity. In this way, the concept of labour underpinned political economic discourse and its justification of capitalism. As Foucault (1970) wrote,

The economists of the eighteenth century...thought that land, or labour applied to the land, made it possible to overcome this scarcity, at least in part: this was because the land had the marvellous property of being able to account for far more needs than those of the men cultivating it (p.256).

By virtue of the concept of labour, capitalism approaches the political economist as a homogenous space of economic laws, which correspond not to particular social relations (and certainly not to class struggle) but to the requirements and wants of this finite human subject: “The homogenous space of economic phenomena implies a determinate relationship with the world of the *men* who produce, distribute, receive and consume” (Althusser, 2015b, p.314, original emphasis). In this way, capitalism is not only justified but is not even up for debate, as it confronts its observer as the *only* socio-economic system capable of rationally organising human labour and solving the problem of scarcity.

There is a clear problem here indicated, in that this modern humanist concept of labour entirely mystifies the social relations in which it is mobilised from view. Labour is not here considered a social expression of the capitalist social relations of private property or of wage-labour; its value is not considered a product of social exploitation, underpinned by inherent inequalities; nor are the class antagonisms inherently reflected in these relations visible either. Instead, labour here corresponds to the inherent, ‘natural’ activity of the human subject, of which capitalism is considered simply the most rational expression. Despite these clear problems, the unspoken ideological limitations of this humanist concept of labour are silent enough to pass quietly in the early political-economic works of the Young Marx (1981). Rather than refuting this humanist conception of labour, the Young Marx (1981) takes up his critique of capitalism from the same ideological ground as his adversaries, which prevents the Young Marx (1981) from obtaining a fuller understanding of the nature of labour under capitalism.

The humanist critique of labour inherent to the work of the Young Marx is best expressed in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Marx, 1981). For Marx (1981), the modern humanist conception of labour was absolutely central to his critique. Labour was descriptive of the “continuous interchange” (Marx, 1981, p.67) between Man and nature, in which the human individual must necessarily engage in order that they could survive. Labour, this interchange, defined what Marx (1981) called the “species-being” (p.68) of the human animal, that is the very quality that marked them as human from other animals. As Marx (1981) wrote,

In creating a *world of objects* by his practical activity, in his *work upon* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species-being (p.68, original emphasis).

Crucially, Marx (1981) argued that it was the ability to consciously engage in this labour that separated human beings from animals. Whereas animals only interacted with nature in order to secure the means of their immediate subsistence and reproduction, human

labour differed because it could be engaged in spontaneously and *freely*: the animal “produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom” (Marx, 1981, p.68). Human society was therefore viewed by Marx (1981) as a product of this conscious activity, as the very objectification of this species-being.

Marx (1981) used this concept of labour as the pivot for his critique of capitalism. For Marx (1981), capitalism was a system of production that depended inherently upon an interruption of this continuous interchange between humans and nature. Capitalism, so Marx (1981) argued, *alienated* the human worker from both the product and process of this activity, transforming its nature from one of universal human production into an activity productive of private wealth alone. Marx (1981) argued that capitalism depended fundamentally upon both an interruption and, crucially, an alienation of labour as the continuous interchange between Man and nature, a fact that was mystified by discourses of political economy: “Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labour by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production” (Marx, 1981, p.65). For Marx (1981), this alienation of labour explained the inherent inequalities of production under capitalism:

It is true that labour produces wonderful things for the rich – but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces – but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labour by machines, but it throws one section of the workers back to a barbarous type of labour, and it turns the other section into a machine. It produces intelligence – but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism (p.65).

For Marx (1981) all the elements of capitalist society – private property, the price of wages, profits and class divisions – stemmed from this initial alienation of the human species-being from the activity that defined its being: that is, its labour. Under capitalism, “labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself” (Marx, 1981, p.65, original emphasis).

For Marx (1981), the crime of capitalism was that in order to direct the labour of human beings towards the ends of accumulation, it must transform this process from one of social praxis, to one of alienated production. The problem of alienation under capitalism was thus twofold in relation to the human subject: firstly, the worker was alienated from labour as their essential species-activity (as that which allowed them to transcend nature); secondly, the social relations that were produced out of the process of labour under capitalism were thereby relations of alienation themselves (workers under capitalism *reproduced* their own alienation) (Marx, 1981). For example, the primacy of

alienated labour was used by Marx (1981) to explain the origins of private property as a social institution. If labour was a distinctively human process that was conducted both collectively and universally, then the establishment of private property required an interruption and enclosure of this process (Marx, 1981). Private property relied upon the alienation and enclosure of the products of what was, essentially, a universal process. Private property (1981), that is, the privatisation of the products of labour, thus confronted the worker as an *external* or *alienated* product. Rather than intelligible as products of the human world, generated through the dialectical process of labour with the natural world, private property was totally unintelligible as something belonging to the worker: “*Private property* is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of *alienated labour*, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself” (Marx, 1981, p.72, original emphasis).

Alienated labour was also reflected in the proletarian’s experience of work under capitalism. That which the worker came to understand as ‘work’ was essentially the systematic organisation of their alienation into a labour process that produced wealth for the capitalist and misery for the worker (Marx, 1981). The concepts that Marx ([1867] 2013) would later use to describe how this production of wealth functions – for which concepts such as ‘surplus-value’ and ‘surplus labour’ are important – were not here forthcoming, because Marx (1981) had not yet discovered them. Instead, Marx (1981) pronounced exploitation through this discourse of alienation, locating its roots in the separation of the human subject from the object of their labour. For example, in describing work under capitalism, Marx (1981) wrote,

This relation is the relation of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him; it is activity as suffering, strength as weakness, begetting as emasculating, the workers *own* physical and mental energy, his personal life – for what is life but activity? – as an activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him (p.66-67, original emphasis).

This tendency is reproduced right throughout this early set of manuscripts produced by Marx (1981). Marx (1981) recognised that *something* was occurring under capitalism that was producing such profound inequalities. There was *something* which produced the appearance of the labouring masses in such beleaguered and beaten form. But precisely *what* produced this was still missing, that is the precise social relations and the class struggle reflected in these relations that facilitated this mass exploitation. Every time Marx (1981) was faced with this something, he expressed it through this humanist prose, in discourses of alienation, problematising capitalism in the only way available to him: as a problem of the alienation of the human subject.

It is reproduced in Marx's (1981) thinking beyond capitalism too. Marx (1981) centralised labour in order to express the origins of revolutionary potential in the working class and to describe the development of communism as the society that would follow this revolution. The achievement of communism was no less than the re-introduction of the human species-being to their life-activity, of the labourer to the product of their labour (Marx, 1981). Communism was an exercise in the "complete re-winning of Man" (Marx, [1844] 2012, p.12). As Marx (1981) wrote,

This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and a fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species (p.90, original emphasis).

In the works of the Young Marx (1981), the critique of labour was saturated with humanism. The critique of capitalism and the imagination of life beyond it was articulated through the concept of labour, descriptive of the human species-being and its relationship with the natural world. In Marx's (1981) early critique of political economy, labour was not expressive of particular social inequalities expressed in the commodification of labour as labour-power, the arrangement of the labour process or the production of capital out of its exploitation. Rather, Marx (1981) reproduced a humanist problematic in relation to labour as the expression of human activity and productivity that was not so much the kernel of his own discovery but was in fact a problematic borrowed from the very modern epistemological landscape – and its reflection in classical political economy – that he set out to critique. Through this humanist framing, Marx (1981) convincingly articulated human harm under capitalism but provided little conceptual material through which to *know* or *understand* this harm in its social context: something that would emerge fundamentally out of his break with this humanist problematic.

## ALIENATION, CAPITALISM AND DEHUMANISING WORK

This humanist critique found in the works of the Young Marx (1981) was reproduced in Marxist sociological analyses of work, particularly those developed in the second half of the twentieth century. The middle of this century saw the widespread publication and translation of many of these early works of the Young Marx in Europe and the United States, including the *Manuscripts of 1844*. Disillusioned with the Soviet Union and the 'sanctioned' Marxism of its allied Communist Parties in Europe, the publication of these early works had a particular resonance with disaffected Marxist intellectuals at the time.

Whilst texts such as *Capital* were associated with the dogmatism and economic determinism of the Soviet Union, these early texts provided a more fluid, interpretive and communicable version of Marx, less interested in economic structure, instead valorising themes of human essence, human liberation and human autonomy. This newly available version of Marx would come to form the bedrock of an intellectual movement commonly referred to as the 'New Left.' As Stuart Hall ([1958] 2017), pre-empting the English translation of these early works wrote, "it would be of immense value if the whole body of the earlier studies – particularly the untranslated and, one suspects, unfashionable *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* – were restored to their proper place" (p.45). Of particular interest to Hall (2017) were Marx's writings on *alienation*, which Hall (2017) argued offered "a body of analytic concepts and not a sealed house of theory" (p.45).

The second half of the twentieth century was witness to a fundamental re-organisation of work in Western Europe and the United States: a re-organisation famously characterised by C. Wright Mills (1951) as the shift from 'blue-collar' work (manual, industrial labour based primarily in manufacturing) to 'white-collar' work (post-industrial, managerial and clerical work based in emerging service-industries). As Althusser (2014) pointed out in his own analysis of this shift, it inaugurated not just a re-orientation of production but, by consequence, a re-orientation of capitalist social relations. For example, it made necessary a new and more detailed division of labour, the erection of more substantial workplace hierarchies, the widening of inequalities between different workers as well as the introduction of greater quantities of more advanced forms of machinery. However, the analysis of these new developments and their reflection in contemporary class struggle is mystified in the critique of work evident in the 'New Left', as this analysis was shielded behind a more central ideological fascination with the particular forms of human alienation evident in these developments. The concern of the historical separation of Man from their activity took priority in this emerging sociological discourse, tending to overlook the social relations of work and their reflection of class struggle in capitalist society.

The concept of alienation of course has not been limited to this time period and has enjoyed consistent consideration in the context of changes to work in the twenty first century. For example, in Peter Fleming's (2017) text *The Death of Homo Economicus*, Fleming (2017) argues that the development of work in capitalist society has been accompanied by the reification of a false, alienated economic subjectivity to which human beings have always been encouraged to aspire. The lack of meaning found in the work of twenty first century society, so Fleming (2017) argues, places the survival of this image in peril. In his text *Class Matters*, Charles Umney (2018) relies on the conceptualisation of "alien powers" (p.34) as a way of pronouncing the problem with work today as culminating in the "tension between...a worker's entirely human desire to control their own activity and use their own initiative, and...the need for capital to make a profit which is dictated

by the alien power of competition” (p.83). Umney (2018) utilises the concept of alienation as a way of articulating the contradiction between human labour and its manifestation in the contemporary economy, in a way that seeks to demonstrate how the technologies and working patterns that might signal liberation (more flexible work and advanced productive technologies, for example) have in fact resolved themselves in greater levels of exploitation. The concept of alienation has also framed more empirically grounded sociological analyses of work. Looking at the experience of academics working in higher education, Richard Hall (2018) uses alienation as a way of describing the re-organisation of work within this sector, arguing that the greater flexibilization and digitalisation of academic work is grounded in “a process of dispossession of time, agency and autonomy for academics and students” (p.101). The concept of alienation has been central in contemporary studies of the experiences of social workers (Lavalette & Ferguson, 2018; Yuill, 2018), with interviews with social workers in Britain revealing that such workers “are not free to realise their human nature in the form of the compassionate self” (Lavalette & Ferguson, 2018, p.286), but instead, “become estranged from it as their labour is not working with people in need of help, but rather the technocratic and reductive reports that seek to rationalise and discipline” (p.286-287) this work and its participants. It also figures prominently in contemporary studies of workplace management and control (Azambuja & Islam, 2018; Finney et al., 2018), where the experiences of an expanding layer of middle-management workers is one defined by a tension between autonomy and alienation at work.

The humanist ideological pivot of the critique of work within the ‘New Left’ was also the concept of *alienation*. It was argued that the alienation of the human subject from their labour was the definitive outcome of capitalist social relations. However, this alienation was not only the precondition for the exploitation of the worker: rather, the ‘New Left’ concentrated on developing the notion that alienation was the necessary precondition for class struggle and for the eventual emancipation of the worker. Developing the Young Marx’s (1981) observation of human historical development as the subjective overcoming of this alienation, “as the negation of the negation, and hence...the *actual* phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and rehabilitation” (p.101, original emphasis), this emerging intellectual movement observed the formation of class and class struggle in the human historical push against their own alienated condition. Work and labour under capitalism became centralised as important sites of this historical struggle, however the humanist parameters of their investigation reinforced numerous theoretical limitations.

According to this line of critique, class and class struggle was catalysed by, fundamentally, the human experience of alienation. The antagonistic social relations that reflect class positioning within a capitalist society are here bracketed and moved aside, as class is instead interpreted as an *experience* (Middleton, 2016), as something which comes

into being through human confrontation with the conditions of their own existence. It is an interpretation described succinctly by Foucault (1970) in his critique of Marx's humanism:

Thrust back by poverty to the very brink of death, a whole class of men experience, nakedly as it were, what need, hunger, and labour are. What others attribute to nature or to the spontaneous order of things, these men are able to recognize as the result of a history and the alienation of a finitude that does not have this form. For this reason they are able – they alone are able – to re-apprehend this truth of the human essence and so restore it (p.261).

As Foucault (1970) here pointed out, the exceptionalism of class and of the proletariat as a revolutionary agent is located fundamentally in their experience of alienation. It is this experience that *defines* their class character in this interpretation, not their proximity to the means of production. In this formulation, “the penetration of philosophy into the proletariat will be the conscious revolt of the affirmation against its own negation, the revolt of man against his inhuman conditions” (Althusser, 1996, p.226). This is the interpretation of alienation that forms the bedrock of this emerging intellectual movement collected together as the ‘New Left’.

This ideological emergence was particularly strong in British Marxism, evident in the works of E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Eric Hobsbawm, among others. For example, John Lewis (1972) – a noted British adversary of Althusser's and key contributor to this ‘New Left’ tradition – wrote in reply to these criticisms of humanist revisionism, that “to strip Marxism of its concern for man, for human interests, for the fulfilment of human aspirations and the human personality would be to deny everything that Marx, and after him Lenin, stood for” (p.19). For Lewis (1972), history – and therefore, class struggle – was to be viewed in the historical struggle of the human subject against its alienated condition, drawing attention to this internal human struggle, identified by the Young Marx (1981), which is consistently agitated at the base of capitalism: “Man's making of his world is at the same time his making and re-making of himself and his achievement of his own full development as man” (Lewis, 1972, p.20). For Lewis (1972), labour was an important manifestation of this struggle. The struggle of human beings over the control and direction of their own labour was the expression *par excellence* of this historical fight for self-affirmation: “Man *knows* what he *makes*, and changes his environment by the knowing and activity which is his life” (Lewis, 1972, p.21, original emphasis). Crucially, the struggle by the human subject over the control of labour is made equivalent, as it was in the Young Marx (1981), with the acquisition of the class-consciousness necessary for the overthrow of these alienated conditions. As Lewis (1972) wrote,



For Marx capitalism does not break down and transform itself into socialism automatically. Men have to discover what has gone wrong, how the internal contradictions arise, and why they cannot be finally overcome unless they set to work and change the pattern of society. Once again *Man* re-makes Society (p.23, original emphasis).

Here, as Lewis (1972) made plain, class struggle did not correspond to the confrontation of workers with the social conditions of their means of existence but was in fact reflective of this internal human struggle against the alienation of their inherent capacities. The overthrow of the social structures of capitalism was to be preceded by the attainment of a “higher level of consciousness” (Lewis, 1972, p.24) by the working class of their alienation, which catalyses a historical struggle against it.

The role of alienation in the explanation of human historical development was particularly prevalent in the historical analyses of class and the labour movement produced by the likes of E.P. Thompson ([1968] 1991) and Eric Hobsbawm (1964). Both Thompson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1964) produced influential historical accounts of the history of class struggle in Britain, analysing the socio-political underpinnings of British labour movements and developing the ways in which these movements translated into historical class struggle. However, closer examination reveals that these authors were dealing with a very particular definition of ‘class’ that corresponded to a more humanist theoretical framing, in which class was considered not as a social expression of a particular actor’s proximity to the means of production, but as a *human experience*, developed in the subject’s interaction with its conditions of life and its activity in the context of these conditions. As Thompson (1991) wrote, in the preface to his influential tome, *The Making of the English Working Class*,

By class, I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness, I emphasize that it is a *historical* phenomenon. I do not see class as a ‘structure’, nor even as a ‘category’, but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships (p.8, original emphasis).

This conceptualisation of class was reflected in the historical works of Hobsbawm (1964), particularly in his considerations of ‘tradition’ and ‘custom’ in the context of the labour movement. Hobsbawm (1964), for example, juxtaposed the characteristics of the labour movements in France and in Britain by analysing the class traditions that had pervaded the histories of these nations, arguing that the historical trajectory of particular labour

movements could be analysed as the reflection of particular traditions or customs of radicalism in the consciousness of the worker (Hobsbawm, 1964). For example, Hobsbawm (1964) identified the prevalence of a 'revolutionary' tradition in French labour movement as the cause for its greater advancement and success, in contrast to the "radical non-conformist traditions" (p.372) of the British labour movement.

It is not that these analyses are without truth or unworthy of consideration. Rather, the humanist framing of class as an experience between human beings dilutes the social character of the wage-labour relation and thrusts a particular human subject (and its particular *experience* of class) to the forefront of examination and making it the determinant factor in the character of social relations, rather than the other way around. Culture, tradition and even religion came to define class experience for Thompson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1964), in a way that moved historical shifts in the material conditions of production to the background, as the theatre on which these cultural experiences were played out as opposed to the defining conditions of this experience itself. As Thompson (1991) wrote,

The making of the working class is a fact of political and cultural, as much as of economic, history. It was not the spontaneous generation of the factory system. Nor should we think of an external force – the 'industrial revolution' – working upon some nondescript undifferentiated raw material of humanity, and turning it out at the other end as a 'fresh race of beings'. The changing productive relations and working conditions of the Industrial Revolution were imposed, not upon raw material, but upon the free-born Englishman – and the free-born Englishman as Paine had left him or as the Methodists had moulded him (p.213).

Thompson (1991) and Hobsbawm (1964) asserted a particular human subject at the centre of economic history, examining how the history of capitalist development and of the labour movements that arose to meet these developments, had always to be viewed in the context of the cultural human experiences of class and the historical human subject to which these experiences gave rise: "Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is the only definition" (Thompson, 1991, p.10). However, where the particular *experience* of a defined human subject becomes the determinant factor in the definition of class *rather* than the social relations themselves, this can lead to the exclusion of other human subjects from this definition of class. As Marxist-feminists like Selma James ([1972] 2012) have noted, such exclusions have particularly harmed women as workers, whose experience of class differed from their male counterparts, for which they suffered an exclusion from working-class politics ("For those of us who are deprived of wages for our work...unions don't know we exist" [p.66]).

This trend spread beyond historical sociologies of work to more contemporary sociological analyses of the experience of work at the time. For example, Ronald Fraser (1968) edited a volume of first-hand accounts from a collection of workers across a number of industries, collating them into a sociological account of work in the mid-to-late twentieth century. The theoretical parameters of this project were set from the beginning, rooted in the humanist considerations of class, history and labour already discussed. As Fraser (1968) wrote in the introduction to this collection, the objective of this project was not to discuss the structural realities of work and employment, but to better interrogate the *human experience* of work at this particular historical juncture: “We talk shop, yet we rarely say what we intimately feel about work” (p.7). Citing Marx’s (1981) *Manuscripts of 1844*, Fraser (1968) echoed the ideological framing of the analysis of work that is now familiar: the notion that work was not just an activity, but a conscious experience of historical and societal development. As Fraser (1968) wrote, “by work, by the transformation of the environment through work, we produce the society we live in, produce ourselves” (p.7).

At the end of this collection, Raymond Williams (1968) offered an essay on ‘The Meanings of Work,’ arguing that the sociological analysis of work should be observed through the meaning that human individuals ascribe to the work that they do. Williams (1968) argued in his essay that the conventional description of ‘class’ was rigid and often limiting, instead arguing that ideas of ‘meaning’ might provide a better starting point, as they centralise human beings as actors: “If, as I believe, the conventional class description conceals and is sometimes meant to conceal as much as it illuminates, then to start from actual men and women is right” (p.283). Williams (1968) reproduced a number of the humanist tropes already discussed here, particularly in the way that he argued that labour or work had a particular correlation to inherent human values or desires and provided a common denominator beneath all human individuals: “This is the meaning of human work, as distinct from the energy of animals: an articulation of need, a definition of co-operative means, in what is felt and known to be a common condition” (p.280). Williams’ (1968) critique of capitalism here took place in his identification of the way in which capitalism necessitated a separation between workers and this activity, divorcing the link between labour and the fulfilment of desire: “Even when we are doing what is socially recognized as work, in the conventional sense, many of us...would hesitate before calling it giving human energy to a personally desired end” (p.287). In his essay, Williams (1968) celebrated the personal accounts from workers that preceded his own contribution, insofar as the discussion and communication of the ‘meaning’ of work, more so than any structural analysis, provided knowledge and a consciousness of this reproduced gap in capitalist society. By talking about the meanings of work, workers were able to acknowledge the reality of the gap between what they do and their own desires: a form of

class-consciousness that must necessarily precede the change of society. As Williams (1968) wrote,

There may, indeed, be work fit only for fools, but it is being done, at an unknown cost, by actual men and women; many of them aware of this situation, though to make this awareness common, and to carry the response right through, would be to revolutionize a whole social order (p.289).

The discussion of the meanings of work, developed out of the first-hand confrontation of workers with their own conditions of existence, was, for Williams (1968), the necessary first step in taking “back from the activity not only the physical means to live but also a confirmation of significance, of the process of being oneself and alive in this unique way” (p.291). However, in this quote, as well as in Williams’ (1968) entire approach, the idea of class struggle as a reflection of particular social realities gives way to a notion of class struggle as motivated by human experience, the revolutionary potential of which could be formed in the confrontation of the human subject with the meaning of their work (or its lack thereof).

For other critics such as Stuart Hall (2017), the specific characteristics of work in the second half of the twentieth century saw this gap between labour and human desire heightened to an almost irreversible degree. Though authors such as Williams (1968) celebrated the development of automation and machinery as offering a potential escape route from work devoid of meaning (“If they are used to reduce not cost but labour, that is to relieve and release human energy for our own purposes, they are the means of liberation which has often seemed only a dream” [p.297]), Hall (2017) argued that the technological advancements that were changing the workplace at this time, signalled the coming of a more severe form of alienation than had been experienced by the working class before: “It may have been just possible to ‘humanise’ a nineteenth-century textile shop: it is impossible to ‘humanise’ a computing machine” (p.35). According to Hall (2017), the contemporary conditions of production – signalled by a shift from industrial working patterns and manual labour, towards post-industrial working arrangements in clerical, managerial and service-based industries – inaugurated a heightened form of alienation: unlike the factory worker who could see the crystallisation of their alienated labour move up the assembly line, alienated labour in contemporary production is often manifest “in the form of pieces of corporate property, shares in the anonymous, complex, modern industrial firms which spawn across the face of modern business” (p.32). Hall (2017) reproduced the humanist notion that class-consciousness arises in the confrontation of alienation, as the pivot of his argument was that alienation in contemporary production becomes sublime, built into contemporary production in such

a way as to present workers not simply with an alienated condition, but with a “false-consciousness” (p.35), which seeped into the labour movement itself:

It is part of the new ‘class consciousness.’ It makes people more responsive to the managerial patter about ‘productivity’ and ‘the responsibility of the firm’, and thus leads even the organised trade union movement to a greater involvement with ‘keeping the firm competitive’ (p.32).

For Hall (2017), contemporary work presented a danger insofar as it muddied the potential for class-consciousness by inaugurating a more sublime form of alienation. For Hall (2017), the structures of capitalist production – the machines and automation it made available – were there for the taking and could potentially revolutionise society. The problem, for Hall (2017), was not a problem first and foremost of the social re-organisation of capitalist production. Rather, the problem was that the sublime nature of this alienation and its reproduction not only through work but through the consumer society, meant that “the structure of human, social and moral relationships are in complete contradiction” (p.42): a contradiction that risked the foreclosure of effective class struggle. It is only through the absolute restructuring of this relationship, of this experience of class itself, that the consciousness of this class could become a force for emancipatory potential. Until then, “the working class will be men as things for other people, but they can never be men for themselves” (Hall, 2017, p.42).

In each example here analysed, key social relations of work and capitalism have been shown to have moved to background of sociological analysis due to the reliance on alienation and the humanist framing of the social relations of work that it provides. The social relations of production inaugurated in the work of second half of the twentieth century – replete with an expansion of consumerism, the proliferation of automation, widening global inequalities and post-industrial working patterns – were interpreted as reflective of class struggle only to the extent that they were reflective of a heightened alienation of the human subject. These authors traced and reproduced many of the same limitations experienced by the Young Marx (1981) in his own humanist framing of the problem of work under capitalism: a convincing articulation of the experience of work but an inadequate conceptual framework for understanding it. This inadequacy is consistently reflected in the humanism of this emerging intellectual movement as the historical alienation of the human subject was centralised as the prism through which to observe class struggle, rather than an observation of the material changes inaugurated by developments of work in this post-industrial era. As Althusser (1996) argued, in his critique of this emerging intellectual movement, “the shadow of the Young Marx is no longer projected on to Marx, but that of Marx on to the young Marx” (p.54).

## DEGRADATION, THE LABOUR PROCESS AND HUMANIST IDEOLOGY

One of the foremost Marxist contributions to the sociology of work has been the development of labour process theory from the mid-to-late twentieth century onwards. Labour process theory is the study of how labour-power “enters a production process in which labor is realized to produce a concrete commodity or service that contains a use and exchange value (and surplus value that the employer or capitalist takes as reward)” (Smith, 2015, p.224). Labour process theory has often been celebrated for providing a concrete and even ‘scientific’ (Ackroyd, 2009) analysis of how human labour is exploited under capitalism. However, closer analysis demonstrates that the mobilisation of humanism in the deployment of a moralistic critique of capitalism has resolved itself in a number of shortcomings within labour process theory. In particular, this section will focus on the link between the humanism mobilised by Braverman (1974) in his critique and the invisibilisation of questions of gender and reproduction from his work as one of its most sustained critiques.

The defining contribution to this school of knowledge was Harry Braverman’s (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, in which he forwarded an analysis of the historical development of strategies deployed by capitalism to structure, control and adapt the labour process, culminating in his thesis that the history of the labour process was one of the ‘degradation’ of work: where the worker continues to lose autonomy over their work to a growing echelon of managers, supervisors and technicians. Braverman’s (1974) contribution was built upon by a number of other sociologists at the time including Michael Burawoy (1979), Andrew L. Friedman (1977) and Richard Edwards (1979). It was updated again in the late twentieth and early twenty first century by scholars such as Paul Thompson (Thompson, 1990; Thompson & Smith, 2010). The salience of labour process theory has continued in contemporary sociological analyses of work, even as the labour process has shifted from firm roots within the factory and the office, to more flexible and ill-defined locations concomitant with the contemporary ‘gig’ economy (Gandini, 2019; Moisander et al., 2018; Morris et al., 2016).

In his text *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman (1974) set out to produce an historical analysis of the capitalist labour process and how capitalists had used technology, hierarchy and ideology in order to exercise control over the labour process in different ways and to different degrees. Whilst theorists like Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy (1968) had developed a theory of the exploitation of labour from an economic perspective (through the exploration of the labour theory of value found in Marx’s political economy), Braverman (1974) added significantly to this by exploring the social mechanisms through which surplus-value was exploited by capitalists, arguing that it was through the *labour process* and through the realisation of labour in commodities that capitalism was able to produce and capture this surplus-value. Through his focus on the labour process,

Braverman (1974) set out to understand, sociologically, how capitalist accumulation functioned at the level of the workplace.

Key to understanding this was Braverman's (1974) theory of the 'degradation' of work. Braverman (1974) argued that in order to exploit greater amounts of surplus-value from the labour process, the worker must be relieved of as much autonomy over their work within that labour process as possible. The less control that the worker has over the pace, direction and object of their labour, the more control the capitalist has over the labour process and, crucially, the surplus-value that it produces. As Braverman (1974) wrote,

The unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind, which capitalism threatened from its beginnings, is now attacked by a systematic dissolution employing all the resources of science and the various engineering disciplines based upon it. The subjective factor of the labor process is removed to a place among its inanimate objective factors. To the materials and instruments of production are added a 'labor force', another 'factor of production', and the process is henceforth carried on by management as the sole subjective element (p.171).

For Braverman (1974), the development of technology is crucial in this historical process of degradation. It is the greater inclusion of machinery and other technologies within the labour process that facilitates the degradation of work, as the greater automation of tasks on the production line reduces the autonomy that the human worker has over the process and relegates the worker into a passive supervisory role as opposed to an active, productive one. As Braverman (1974) wrote, the development of machinery is not a source of liberation for workers but of enslavement and degradation as machinery ensures "the confinement of the worker within a blind round of servile duties in which the machine appears as the embodiment of science and the worker as little or nothing" (p.194-195).

Braverman (1974) produces a history of the labour process, demonstrating how developments in productive technology have *always* been accompanied by developments in strategies for controlling the labour process by the capitalist class. Braverman (1974) points towards Taylorism as the example *par excellence* of this relationship between technology and control within traditional industrial production. Taylorism was expressive of a labour process in which productive technologies allowed for a very detailed division of labour, where workers were made responsible for the repetitive completion of one or two tasks which contributed to the eventual production of a larger commodity. Through the tactical deployment of technology and the division of labour in this way, the managers of the Taylorist labour process were able to exact control over individual parts of the process, tweaking each division through the measurement of workers' movements or the greater introduction of machinery in order to create the most efficient labour process

possible. The result, however, was an intense degradation of human labour where the human worker was stripped of all autonomy and control over the labour process, reduced to the attendant of a machine or responsible only for the completion of small, servile tasks that enjoyed a significant separation from the realisation of the finished product (Braverman, 1974). Under Taylorism, “not only do the workers lose control over their instruments of production, but they may lose control over their own labor and the manner of its performance” (Braverman, 1974, p.116).

In the movement from ‘industrial’ to ‘monopoly’ capitalism – an era of capitalist development that begins at the close of the nineteenth century, in which “huge firms exerted dominance over the markets” (Renton, 2004, p.130) and “generated surpluses which could be reinvested on a layer of technicians who were not directly employed in production” (p.130) – this relationship changes and, in Braverman’s (1974) view, becomes heightened. The advent of monopoly capitalism sees an expansion of more professional and clerical occupations such as technicians, school teachers, salespeople and service workers. The labour process shifts away from the traditional factory, towards new locations in offices, restaurants and shop floors. However, even though the labour process shifts into these new locations, the strategies of division and control perfected in industrial production find themselves reproduced in the workplace of monopoly capitalism (Braverman, 1974). New divisions of labour emerge, new workplace hierarchies involving technicians and middle-managers develop and, crucially, new technologies such as computers, telephones and other communication technologies become embedded within the labour process, cementing the ability of the capitalist class to maintain its control over this process and further degrade the work of the labourer. As Braverman (1974) wrote,

Just as in manufacturing processes – in fact, even more easily than in manufacturing processes – the work of the office is analyzed and parcelled out among a great many detail workers, who now lose all comprehension of the process as a whole and the policies which underlie it (p.314).

The successful development of monopoly capitalism and the continued ability of capitalists to accumulate capital under these new conditions of production depends, so Braverman (1974) argued, upon the ability of capitalists to innovate in new ways to degrade workers and their work, to continue to remove as much as possible any autonomy that the worker has over their activity. New developments in technology, new market structures and a re-orientation of the state and its institutions around this market all, for Braverman (1974), serve the end goal of degrading work in this way, which is visible most clearly at the level of the labour process.

Through the development of this theory, Braverman (1974) provided sociology with an important conceptual repertoire through which to analyse the social relations of



the workplace and how they materially function in the production of capital. Importantly, a closer analysis of Braverman's (1974) theory also reveals that it is couched quite significantly in a humanist ideology. It is clear that Braverman (1974) finds consensus with the thesis of the Young Marx (1981): that the alienation of labour by capitalism is not simply a matter of social exploitation but one of ontological separation. Echoing a Marxist-humanism, Braverman (1974) argued that the capitalist labour process requires a "subdivision of the individual" (p.73) as well as a social division of labour: a subdivision, which "when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity" (p.73). What is evident is that the social process of the degradation of work is at all times accompanied by a subjective *dehumanisation* of the worker.

Braverman's (1974) theory of the degradation relies on a humanist formulation of labour found in the Young Marx (1981). In texts like the *Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx (1981) distinguishes between the activity of animals whose purpose is to satisfy only the immediate need of survival and reproduction and the autonomous and conscious activity of human beings that transcends this immediate need and provides the universal foundation for human society. As Marx (1981) wrote,

An animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom (p.68).

Braverman (1974) relies significantly on this humanist ideological conceptualisation of labour in order to articulate his thesis on degradation. For Braverman (1974), the capacity of productive technologies to degrade work and reduce the autonomy of workers over the labour process is not simply a social process (the product of unequal class relations), but is fundamentally a subjective process facilitated by the reduction of universal human labour to its animalistic functions. The degradation of work through technology, is at the same time a *dehumanisation* of labour:

This dehumanization of the labor process, in which workers are reduced almost to the level of labor in its animal form, while purposeless and unthinkable in the case of the self-organized and self-motivated social labor of a community of producers, becomes crucial for the management of purchased labor (Braverman, 1974, p.113).

What is clear here is that Braverman's (1974) thesis of degradation *is not enough* to accurately describe what takes place in the labour process of capitalist society. Capitalism is not able to produce and capture surplus-value through the degradation of work alone.

Rather, it also relies on the *dehumanisation* of the worker, on the separation of the human worker from the activity that corresponds to its life and on the reduction of the universal activity of human labour to an animalistic satisfaction of immediate need. The introduction of productive technologies to the labour process is but a material reflection of the dehumanisation of human labour, of the separation of the qualities of conception and execution that make human labour distinct and unique, with this dehumanisation providing the anchor for the social degradation of work thereafter (Braverman, 1974). As Braverman (1974) wrote, “the separation of hand and brain is the most decisive single step in the division of labor taken by the capitalist mode of production” (p.126).

It is important to ask, therefore, precisely what social process or operation this thesis on dehumanisation compensates for in Braverman’s (1974) analysis. One of the starkest oversights in Braverman’s (1974) analysis of the labour process was the lack of serious and sustained engagement with the social relations of *reproduction* which operate outside of the labour process (normally within the family and the household) but nonetheless contribute materially to the production of surplus-value (Renton, 2004; West, 1990). Though labour process theory has paid attention to the social division of labour on the production line, it has paid less attention to the *gendered* division of labour, maintaining a silence regarding the reproductive labour of cooking, cleaning and child-rearing that takes place in the household and is completed predominantly by women workers (Mohandesi & Teitelman, 2017). In the case of Braverman (1974), the humanist ideology of dehumanisation allows his theory of the degradation of work to side-step the social relations of reproduction. The question that social reproduction theory answers is that of precisely how the worker arrives at the gates of the factory each morning and therefore how their labour-power becomes available for the capitalist to exploit every day (Bhattacharya, 2017). For theorists of social reproduction, the answer to this question is through the exploitation of reproductive labour, mediated through patriarchal social relations within the family unit. However, the thesis of dehumanisation in Braverman’s (1974) theory provides a different answer to this question, arguing that the arrival of labour-power for exploitation each day is a product of *subjective alienation* as opposed to gendered social exploitation. This can be observed in Braverman’s (1974) writings on ‘skill’ towards the end of his work, the closest that Braverman (1974) comes to addressing the question of reproduction. For Braverman (1974), the process by which human labour-power becomes available to capitalists for exploitation is not the social process of gendered exploitation within the household, but rather the ongoing reproduction of *alienation* through the ‘education’ of children and the ‘training’ of workers. For Braverman (1974), it is the processing of workers through more intricate regimes of training and education that prepares them for exploitation at the workplace each day: regimes of which the specific function is the *dehumanisation* of the worker and the subsequent degradation of their work. As Braverman (1974) wrote, the greater amount

that the worker 'learns' through training and education, the less that they know of *themselves* and of their own labour: a contradiction which "prefers to leave the worker ignorant despite years of schooling, and to rob humanity of its birthright of conscious and masterful labor" (p.446). The sole aim of these regimes of training and education for Braverman (1974) is the continued dehumanisation of the worker and the alienation of workers from autonomy over their own labour: however, this ontological answer to the question of reproduction mystifies its social explanation, as one of patriarchal relations of exploitation within the family unit.

The framing of Braverman's (1974) analysis around a very particular human subject – the productive labourer, subject to the forces of alienation at the gates of the factory – reinforces the oversight he makes with regards to the gendered social relations of reproduction. Braverman (1974) relied on humanism in order to address the question that social reproduction theory had already answered: however, because the reproductive labourer does not correspond with the alienated human subject of the capitalist labour process, it finds itself (and the unique social relations in which it is mobilised) rendered-invisible. In this way, the humanist ideology and the largely productivist interpretation of labour at the heart of labour process theory work together to support one another: but this is at the expense of certain social relations – namely, the social relations of reproduction (and the gendered class struggle reflected in these relations) – being bracketed and moved to one side.

## KNOWLEDGE AND WORK IN 'POST-MODERN' CAPITALISM

The ability of Marxist theories of the labour process and of value to explain exploitation under capitalism find their sharpest criticism in emerging analyses of the role of knowledge within contemporary work and capitalism. According to key Marxist theorists like Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2001) and the school of thought they spearheaded in the early twenty-first century (see Berardi, 2009; Boutang, 2011; Lazzarato, 2014; Virno, 2004), the centrality of knowledge and information within contemporary forms of production culminates in a crisis of measurability and fundamentally undermines traditional and even Marxist theories of value in explaining the nature of exploitation under capitalism. Subsequently, these theorists observe substantial changes to the nature of work and the appearance of the contemporary workplace, as productive activity is no longer confined to the walls of the traditional factory but finds itself metered out across the 'social factory', completed everywhere and at all times across a broad range of social institutions. Not only have these developments provided capitalism with new tactics in exploitation, but these theorists also argue that these developments present new opportunities for liberation and revolution.

Within more contemporary contributions to the sociology of work, these ideas have found salience in considerations of 'immaterial labour' and the increased prevalence of information and digital labour within contemporary capitalist production (Brown, 2014; Farrugia, 2018; Gill & Pratt, 2008; Harvie & De Angelis, 2009; Pitts, 2018; Thompson et al., 2015). These interventions speak to an observable shift in the way that work is organised in the context of new digital technologies and knowledge-work, "from the static hierarchies of industrial modernity to the flexible production networks and precarious employment conditions that now exist across the class hierarchy of contemporary capitalist societies" (Farrugia, 2018, p.514). Fundamentally, these contributions build on the theories of Hardt and Negri (2001), who argued that the defining characteristic of contemporary capitalist production is the movement from the material to the immaterial and the central position of knowledge and information as the raw material of productive activity today.

The argument made by these theorists is that this contemporary arrangement of capitalist production inaugurates a new era: that of post-modernity. 'Knowledge' emerges as the key concept through which these authors justify the description of this apparent epochal shift. However, criticisms of this theoretical discourse target the ambiguity surrounding this concept. What is consistently unclear is the precise set of social relations reflected in the concept of 'knowledge' and how they constitute a marked break with the way that capitalism functioned in its 'modern' form (Caffentzis, 2013). Further analysis shows that beneath this critical discourse focused upon a break with modernity and its limiting assumptions, the concept of 'knowledge' itself is in fact a humanist ideological one, essentially reproducing the modern and theoretically humanist interpretations of labour and alienation found in the Young Marx (1981). In this way, the limitations of this discourse find themselves once again reflected in the reproduction of humanist ideological tropes. Humanism provides the explanatory framework and the critical edge for this discourse in the wake of its sociological and theoretical weaknesses.

For Hardt and Negri (2001), the contemporary experience of work under capitalism is expressive of a completely new paradigm of power within the capitalist mode of production: a paradigm they have described as the power of Empire. For Hardt and Negri (2001), the Imperial characteristics of contemporary power see capitalist domination no longer exercised through separate and unique institutions or apparatuses, but instead deployed with fluidity, encompassing all areas of social life indiscriminately and consistently. Work itself becomes expressive of this Imperial power, as labour is no longer an activity completed within the parameters of a definite labour process (often supervised under a particular institutional space such as the factory) but is more fluid, completed everywhere and at all times in what Hardt and Negri (2001) describe as the contemporary "factory-society" (p.247). For Hardt and Negri (2001), this conceptualisation of the new Imperial power of capitalism denotes an epochal shift from

modern to post-modern forms of power. This observation of post-modern power has built upon the theories developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari ([1980] 2007, [1972] 2013). Differing from critiques of power that limit the observation of its exercise to certain institutional structures (for example, that of Foucault [1991]), Deleuze and Guattari (2007, 2013) described power as having a much more liquid character, flowing through and in-between institutional settings, indistinguishable from one institution to the next. For Deleuze and Guattari (2007, 2013), power in post-modernity was defined precisely by the evanescence of the dividing lines between once-separate institutional settings, presenting a much 'smoother' exercise of power:

The factory was a body that contained its internal forces at the level of equilibrium, the highest possible in terms of production, the lowest possible in terms of wages; but in a society of control, the corporation has replaced the factory, and the corporation is a spirit, a gas (Deleuze, 1992, para. 6).

For Hardt and Negri (2001), this post-modern interpretation of power traces itself onto contemporary forms of capitalist production, as value-producing activity could no longer be observed within the institutional space of the workplace alone but was the product of a class struggle that was played out in every institutional and social space across the edifice of the capitalist social formation. Where once work was defined by a strict separation between the private and public spheres – between the household and the factory as separate disciplinary spaces – this power was now exercised uniformly and without visible parameters *between* the various social spaces of the capitalist mode of production: “The concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality, or really that rules over the entire ‘civilized’ world. No territorial boundaries limit its reign” (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.XIV). For Hardt and Negri (2001), this liquidity is reflected in the characteristics of ‘knowledge’ as *the* raw material of contemporary production, as it transcends the limitations of other material goods, in that it is shareable, communicable and indefinite with the ability to cross institutional boundaries.

For Hardt and Negri (2001) the prominence of knowledge in production is sociologically manifest in a number of ways. Firstly, traditional explanations of labour, labour-power and value became inadequate in describing the experience of work under contemporary capitalism. The Marxist critique of value – dependent upon the observation of the way in which labour-power is mobilised through a definite labour process – was an inadequate explanatory framework for the description of exploitation in the factory-society of post-modern capitalism. This point was made primarily through the centralisation in contemporary production of what Hardt and Negri (2001) called “immaterial labour” (p.289): “That is, labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication” (p.290). Traditional value

theories were, according to Hardt and Negri (2001), totally incapable of sufficiently measuring this immaterial labour in terms of its value, as immaterial labour routinely divorced the link between concrete labour-time and the exchange-value of a given commodity. As Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote,

As labor moves outside the factory walls, it is increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction of any measure of the working day and thus separate time of production from the time of reproduction, or work time from leisure time. There are no time clocks to punch on the terrain of biopolitical production; the proletariat produces in all its generality everywhere all day long (p.402-403).

This not only forms the basis of their critique of the theory of value, but also provides the foundations for their considerations of emancipation: capitalism, faced with this crisis of measurability, tends towards a potentially terminal crisis of value, unable to control the forces of production that outpace the relations designed to control it: “Labor was measure – a measure that was not measurable other than by Power, a measure of exploitation. *Now labor can become value without measure, as power*” (Negri, 2009, p.71, original emphasis).

For Hardt and Negri (2001), immaterial labour was visible in two main transformations of work. Firstly, increasing levels of contemporary labour-power were involved in the production and manipulation of data and information in the form of communication and knowledge production. This was particularly evident in the emergence of a contemporary service-sector, based fundamentally upon the manipulation and exchange of information and data in the delivery of clerical, administrative and other knowledge-based services. As Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote, “the service sectors of the economy present a richer model of productive communication. Most services indeed are based on the continual exchange of information and knowledges” (p.290). The centrality of information and knowledge in production reduces the heterogeneous character of concrete labour across different industries: recalling Marx’s (2013) discussion of the concrete differences between tailoring and weaving in *Capital*, Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote that “the labor of computerized tailoring and the labor of computerized weaving may involve exactly the same concrete practices – that is, manipulation of symbols and information” (p.292). This is further enforced by Berardi (2009) who wrote that “the digitalization of the labor process has made any labor the same from an ergonomic and physical point of view since we all do the same thing: we sit in front of a screen and type on a keyboard” (p.75-76). Moreover, the informatisation of contemporary work removes the necessity of its concentration and surveillance within a definite institutional space such as a factory or office. As workers are bound to their employers by way of simple access to computer networks, surveillance and discipline can be exacted remotely and on-

demand: “Laboring processes can be conducted in a form almost entirely compatible with communication networks, for which location and distance have very limited importance. Workers can even stay at home and log onto the network” (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.295-296).

The second instance of immaterial labour was in the proliferation of affective labour based upon the production of emotional satisfaction of human service-users through the provision of services, gratification and culture. As Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote, “this labor is immaterial, even if it is corporeal and affective, in the sense that its products are intangible, a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion” (p.292-293). Much like its communicative counterpart, this form of labour does not demand strict concentration to a definite labour process but can be completed anywhere and perfected in all aspects of the subject’s social life: “The cooperative aspect of immaterial labor is not imposed or organized from the outside, as it was in previous forms of labor, but rather, *cooperation is completely immanent to the laboring activity itself*” (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.294, original emphasis).

Therefore, the predominant nature of immaterial labour as the expression of the centrality of knowledge in contemporary production inaugurates the new era of capitalist development and its post-modern appearance. The factory and the office as the traditional sites of class struggle in production have given way to a structure of production more closely resembling a *network* (Hardt & Negri, 2001). As Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote, “the assembly line has been replaced by *the network* as the organizational model of production, transforming the forms of cooperation and communication within each productive site and among productive sites” (p.295, original emphasis). On the one hand, this has implicated new forms of social control, class domination and exploitation, metered out beyond the boundaries of particular institutional spaces. But on the other hand, the networked linkages between workers in this new form of production have offered new and potentially revolutionary forms of social cooperation between subjects who find themselves inextricably linked through this network (Hardt & Negri, 2001).

Not only does this constitute a change in the nature of work, it also constitutes a change in the nature of the worker too. The worker whose productive activity starts and ends with the labour process within the factory walls is no longer applicable to the image of contemporary networked production. This post-modern form of capitalism inaugurates a post-modern form of subjectivity, whose every social act contributes to their productive output (Hardt & Negri, 2001). As Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote, “just as modernization did in a previous era, postmodernization or informatization today marks a new mode of becoming human” (p.289). This new human subject is one inextricably linked through the networks and information with which they come into contact. The network does not simply define their working patterns but constitutes the entire social edifice with which this subject is faced: “Interactive and cybernetic machines become a new prosthesis

integrated into our bodies and minds and a lens through which to redefine our bodies and minds themselves” (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.291). In this way, the modern productive subject becomes an increasingly inadequate descriptor of the contemporary worker, who is constantly productive, constantly connected to the network, in all spheres of life. Whilst this new, networked subjectivity is certainly more readily exploitable under contemporary capitalism, it also contains within it particular latent characteristics that make it potentially revolutionary: “This increased socialization...is a process that no doubt benefits capital with increased productivity, but is one that also points beyond the era of capital toward a new social mode of production” (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.259).

‘Knowledge’, in its expression in the ‘immaterial labour’ of the twenty first century has come to underpin the fundamental transformation of the world of work for Hardt and Negri (2001) and, importantly, point towards new ways of interpreting capitalist exploitation in the workplace. However, questions must be asked regarding the theoretical and sociological strength of this vision, particularly given the ambiguity surrounding this concept of ‘knowledge.’ In centralising the concept of knowledge, it is not exactly clear what social relations of production this new concept reveals that marks it as a different, ‘post-modern’ form of capitalism. Moreover, the concept of knowledge in fact mystifies a number of key social relations of work that betray this apparent break: a mystification essential for the functionality of this discourse. These concerns are expressed in critiques such as that developed by George Caffentzis (2013). In his critique, Caffentzis (2013) identifies three fundamental shortcomings reflective of the centrality of ‘knowledge’ as a concept. First, it is not clear what social relations make the exploitation of labour-power that is productive of ‘knowledge’, or that which utilises ‘knowledge’ as its raw material, different from the exploitation of other types of labour-power (Caffentzis, 2013): a lack of clarity that betrays the epochal break on which this discourse is based. Second, the so-called ‘crisis of value’ that stems from the apparent immeasurability of immaterial labour entirely mystifies the social relations of the labour process that have emerged with the precise aim of measuring the completion of these immaterial labours (Caffentzis, 2013). If anything, affectual labourers in the service industries or workers whose work is organised through smart-phone applications have their labour-power subject to *heightened* measurement and scrutiny: “Although the techniques used to control labor-time and to impose speed-ups differ from the assembly lines, workers...are routinely given task-specific contracts with temporal deadlines” (Caffentzis, 2013, p.111). Thirdly, the social relations of reproduction are again entirely mystified in the theoretical calculations of Hardt and Negri (2001). Whilst they cite the heightened technological character of immaterial labour as the reason for its expression in higher wages, Caffentzis (2013) points out that this can just as easily be located in the greater investment by capital of the reproduction of the worker, not only through their home life but through their schooling and training: “This increased training of the contemporary worker...adds additional value



to the average labor-time, similar to the constant capital transferred to the product” (Caffentzis, 2013, p.113).

In this way, the concept of ‘knowledge’ appears to limit the sociology of work through the mystification of a number of key social relations of work. Though it does well in pointing to the inadequacy of earlier critiques, it reproduces many of these inadequacies in its own formulations. Importantly, closer analysis shows how these inadequacies are reflected in a persistent humanism that underwrites this concept of ‘knowledge.’ As Caffentzis (2013) wrote, “though it looks like the machines are eliminating the humans in this period of capitalism...a new ‘humanism’ arises from these antihumanist Marxists claiming the renewed indispensable importance of knowledge in humans” (p.111). The attachment of ‘knowledge’ to humanist ideological concepts allows for its presentation as markedly different from types of production that went before, but also allows for this discourse to implicate knowledge as a potentially revolutionary social ingredient. The reality, however, upon closer inspection, is that this discourse reproduces – with all its limitations – the Marxist-humanist analysis of labour and alienation repeatedly covered in this chapter.

This begins from the outset, as Hardt and Negri (2001) described how the centrality of knowledge in post-modern capitalism differentiates it from those forms of industrial production that preceded it. Whilst industrial production relied on the exploitation of an alienated activity, Hardt and Negri (2001) argued that the foundations of post-modern capitalist production are much less stable because they rely on the alienation of knowledge as something that is fundamentally the product of human social interaction and cooperation. As Hardt and Negri (2001) wrote,

In effect, the object of exploitation and domination tend not to be specific productive activities *but the universal capacity to produce*, that is, *abstract social activity and its comprehensive power*. This abstract labor is an activity without place, and yet it is very powerful. It is the cooperating set of brains and hands, minds and bodies; it is both the non-belonging and the creative social diffusion of living labor; it is the desire and the striving of the multitude of mobile and flexible workers; and at the same time it is intellectual energy and linguistic and communicative construction of the multitude of intellectual and affective laborers (p.209, emphasis added).

Therefore, knowledge as an important and central component of contemporary production finds its value not in its measurability (as in traditional labour theories of value) but in the way that it is the constant product of an inherent human cooperativity that extends beyond the immediate labour process and the wage-labour relation (Hardt & Negri, 2001). This idea is developed further elsewhere in this theoretical discourse,

particularly in Franco Berardi's (2009) text *The Soul at Work*. Speaking more specifically to the workplaces of contemporary capitalism, Berardi (2009) denoted the marked difference of the post-modern workplace in its implication of this essential human cooperativity in production:

The investment in desire comes into play at work since social production has started to incorporate more and more sections of mental activity and of symbolic, communicative and affective action. What is involved in the cognitive labor process is indeed what *belongs more essentially to human beings*: productive activity is not undertaken in view of the physical transformation of matter but communication, the creation of mental states, of feelings, and imagination (p.84, emphasis added).

What marks post-modern capitalism (or "semicapitalism" as Berardi [2009, p.116] codifies it) as different from other types of capitalist production is that instead of merely putting labour-power to work, "the soul itself is put to work" (Berardi, 2009, p.116): that is, the inherent sociality of human workers, manifest in communication and knowledge, is what is mobilised, without measure, into the contemporary labour-process.

On the one hand, these humanist ideological concepts are important here because they pronounce the heightened form of exploitation that is inaugurated in post-modern capitalism and stretches beyond the comprehension of the economic attitudes of the value theorists. This humanist ideological vision is important because it stresses the fact that work under contemporary capitalism is not the product of a simple mobilisation of labour-power through a definite labour-process, but of a severely heightened form of alienation, combined with the exercise of Imperial power that takes place in every walk of social life (Hardt & Negri, 2001). Under post-modern capitalism "all of nature has become capital, or at least has become subject to capital" (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.272) as "mechanical and industrial technologies have expanded to invest the entire world...[and] formal subsumption of the noncapitalist environment has reached its limit" (p.272). However, this description of heightened exploitation and of the immeasurability of this exploitation works *only* with this essential humanist foundation, that stresses the fact that knowledge as the component of contemporary production is something that fundamentally escapes its subsumption under capitalist production, with the crisis of value resulting from capitalism's own attempt to measure that which it did not create. Where 'knowledge' and the immaterial is formulated as the product of spontaneous human relationships in production, its exploitation by capitalism therefore demands a heightened human alienation, that stretches across the edifice of human society both in the workplace and outside of it.

On the other hand, and more importantly, these humanist concepts are essential for Hardt's and Negri's (2001) description of the emancipation of workers and their pushing of history into a new era. Not only does the concept of knowledge underpin a heightened exploitation of contemporary workers: its centrality also inaugurates particular social forces within its production process that capitalism itself is unable to control. By fostering and setting in motion knowledge as the inherent cooperativity of human workers, it sets in motion incredibly powerful forces, in direct contact with the means of production, with the control of these forces belonging inherently not to capital, but to labour (Hardt & Negri, 2001). Therefore, contemporary capitalism in effect produces its own grave-diggers, as in the process of exploitation it constructs and sets in motion a form of commonality and human cooperation that exceeds its direct control: "It seems to us, in fact, that today we participate in a more radical and profound commonality than has ever been experienced in the history of capitalism" (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.302).

This is manifest *par excellence* in what Hardt and Negri (2001) described as the formation of a 'general intellect' within the capitalist mode of production: a concept lifted from Marx's (1974) 'Fragment on Machines' in the *Grundrisse*. The argument is that contemporary capitalist production, by virtue of the mobilisation of knowledge within technologically and cybernetically enhanced labour processes, produces a general intellect among the working class, as workers find themselves inextricably linked together by the implication of their inherent cooperative abilities within systems of production (Hardt & Negri, 2001). This established general intellect, once workers find their consciousness of it, has a potentially revolutionary implication:

General intellect is a collective, social intelligence created by accumulated knowledges, techniques, and know-how. The value of labor is thus realized by a new universal and concrete labor force through the appropriation and free usage of the new productive forces. What Marx saw as the future is our era. This radical transformation of labor power and the incorporation of science, communication, and language into productive force have redefined the entire phenomenology of labor and the entire world horizon of production (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.364).

Echoing the Marx (1974) of the 'Fragment' but also the Young Marx (1981) of the *Manuscripts*, Hardt and Negri (2001) here argued that this general intellect, and the becoming-conscious of workers of their own transformative power (inherent to their own cooperation) will pave the way towards revolutionary action. It is the production of this new "multitude" (Hardt & Negri, 2001, p.394) that underpins the crisis of capitalism, as it invents something beyond its own control and whose productive activity is beyond measurability: "Social subjects are at the same time producers and products of this unitary

machine. In this new historical formation it is thus no longer possible to identify a sign, a subject, a value, or a practice that is ‘outside’” (p.385).

What is clear, however, is that Hardt and Negri (2001), despite their citation of technological, cybernetic and post-humanist lexicon, essentially reproduce the Marxist-humanist theory of labour and alienation. The multitude as *the* revolutionary culmination of humans and machines, bound together by knowledge, is nothing more than the social subject willed into action by the alienation of their inherent productive activity. The re-assertion of the general intellect into production is nothing more than the class-consciousness of this alienated subject, taking advantage of the systems of production responsible for its alienation and turning them on their head. It is in this way that even Hardt and Negri (2001) describe their emancipatory project as “humanism after the death of man” (p.92): however, though modern Man may have died, his theoretical project remains fully intact. This theoretical humanism is problematic because it has been shown to reflect severe theoretical shortcomings at the heart of this critique. The reliance on humanism by Hardt and Negri (2001) to describe the unique exploitation of contemporary capitalism and the unique opportunity for revolution, allows for the leaving-out of key social relations that beg questions of the rigorous nature of this concept of ‘knowledge’ and its ability to mark a decisive and epochal shift in the capitalist mode of production (Caffentzis, 2013). But what is clear, therefore, is that the humanism inherent to Hardt’s and Negri’s (2001) critique further obfuscates an inherent theoretical weakness at the heart of the discourse in a way that is recurrently familiar within the critical sociology of work.

## REFUSAL AND HUMANISM IN A LIFE WITHOUT WORK

Whilst Hardt and Negri (2001) saw work appearing everywhere across society, other Marxist sociologists were theorising its disappearance. In the mid-to-late twentieth century, André Gorz (1983) bid *Farewell to the Working Class*, as he theorised the possibility of the transition into a world without the burden of paid work, buoyed by the social and productive developments of post-industrial capitalism. Gorz’s (1983) thesis rejected traditional Marxist considerations of alienation, arguing that the working class’ experience of work had not produced them as a revolutionary force but as a weakened and downtrodden collective incapable of historical resistance against capitalism. Power, Gorz (1983) argued, lay only in the ability of the proletariat to discover their subjectivity in the world *outside* of work, by virtue of reclaiming the self-affirming qualities of human labour in the act of refusing its expenditure in the heteronomous wage-labour relation. For Gorz (1983), revolutionary potential lay not with the working class, but with that class able to transcend the boundaries of industrial production and build solidarity and autonomy in the spaces outside of the factory walls.

In recent years, the idea of ‘refusing’ work and the imagination of alternative social arrangements on the basis of this refusal has enjoyed increased salience within contemporary sociological contributions (del Valle Alcala, 2016; Fleming, 2014, 2015; Frayne, 2015, 2018; Graeber, 2018; Mudu, 2018; Standing, 2016; Weeks, 2011). David Frayne (2015) has built heavily on Gorz’s (1983) ideas of refusal in his empirical investigations into the experiences of British workers, observing the social struggle for human autonomy in the various strategies of refusing work deployed by today’s workers:

For all the propaganda we hear about work as a source of good health and a way to ‘meet potential’, work so often seems to stand in the way of people realising what they are capable of in terms of their capacities for creation and co-operation (Frayne, 2015, p.215).

Frayne (2015), alongside Fleming (2014, 2015) and Standing (2016) have all integrated this idea of refusal of work into their imagination of a fairer and more equal society, arguing that the development of social and political arrangements in the space outside of work is crucial in the context of contemporary shifts in labour market conditions towards greater precariousness, greater informality and rising automation. This notion of refusal and its attachment to such forms of sociological imagination, is indebted to the writings of Gorz (1983).

Gorz’s (1983) thesis was a fundamentally humanist one, based around the qualities of self-affirmation and autonomy inherent to the completion of human labour. Humanism provided the conceptual underpinning of Gorz’s (1983) emancipatory vision, culminating in the establishment of a ‘politics of time’, facilitated through the production of a ‘dual society’ based upon the re-configuration of the division of labour in society. Despite his valorisation of an end of work as the answer, Gorz’s (1983) emancipatory vision relied upon many of the institutions reflective of the social relations of capitalism that forbid this abolition. This is particularly evident in Gorz’s (1983) valorisation of the state as the cornerstone of societal reconfiguration, and the valorisation of the sphere of autonomy as a sphere free of social relations of capital by virtue of its existence outside of the wage-labour relation. These oversights are reflected in the humanist ideology at the heart of Gorz’s (1983) theory, in which the motor of historical development and social change is located in the valorisation of the autonomy and inherent cooperativity of free human labour. The abolition of work is observed by Gorz (1983) in the production of a society based upon the free and self-fulfilling activity of autonomous human labourers, rather than in a fundamental break with particular social relations of capital.

Gorz set out his critique of work across a number of important texts, including *Farewell to the Working Class* (Gorz, 1983), *Paths to Paradise* (Gorz, 1985) and *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology* (Gorz, [1991] 2012). Of fundamental centrality to Gorz’s

(2012) consideration of work was the Marxist-humanist concept of labour found most prominently in the work of the Young Marx (1981). Gorz's (2012) critique of work rested on the assumption that human labour was the inherently cooperative and historical activity through which human beings not only constructed the societies around them but also confirmed themselves as individuals and members of that society. As Gorz (2012) wrote,

It is, admittedly, undisputable that 'work' in the sense of *poiesis* is a historical-fundamental need: the need the individual feels to appropriate the surrounding world, to impress his or her stamp upon it and, by the objective transformations he or she effects upon it, to acquire a sense of him- or herself as an autonomous subject possessing practical freedom (p.55).

The cornerstone of Gorz's (2012) critique, however, ran contrary to other Marxist-humanist critiques. Whereas many of the discourses of alienation that have been analysed in this chapter have seen this alienation as providing the catalyst for human historical action and for the re-discovery by the human individual of these qualities of labour, Gorz (2012) argued that the experience of alienation felt by the working class in post-industrial forms of capitalism was so severe, that the prospect of any historical action emerging from it were simply impossible. It was in this way that Gorz (2012) argued that the only strategies capable of securing these inherent qualities of labour for the human individual must be devised in those spaces that escaped the wage-labour relation and therefore undermined traditional socialist strategies of industrial proletarian resistance.

For Gorz (2012), the post-industrial organisation of work saw the total alienation of workers not only from the products of their work, but from the very act of working itself. For Gorz (2012), this catalysed what he called a 'crisis of work': "The old notion of work is no longer valid, the subject assumes a critical distance not only from the product of his work but from that work itself" (p.59). The proliferation of mass unemployment, the deployment of machinery and automation across the labour process and the global division of labour inherent to this particular stage of capitalist development not only signalled a 'crisis' of work in the context of its declining availability, but also a crisis insofar as work itself was becoming an increasingly unsuitable foundation for historical class action. As Gorz (1983) explained, "this is the situation: work now exists outside the worker, reified to the extent of becoming an inorganic process. Workers are there and fall in with the work that *is done*. They do not *do it* themselves" (p.38, original emphasis). Gorz (1983) argued that the participation of workers in their work provided absolutely no sensuous experiences, no feelings of 'natural' resistance or any impetus to act against the conditions of life with which they were faced. In this way, the traditional industrial

working class became an increasingly inadequate subjective vehicle in which to observe social and historical change:

If we accept the principle that ‘employment and work essentially determine the horizon of my way of seeing the world,’ *who* is there who can transform work into fulfilling *poiesis*, *who* can liberate it in a society where ‘the way of seeing the world’ is ‘determined’ by work that is de-materialized and cut off from sensory experience? Surely not the immense majority of the wage-earning classes (p.58, original emphasis).

If labour is to be the motor of social change and human self-affirmation, it cannot, for Gorz (1983) take place on the traditional terrain of the industrial proletariat: that is, in the factory or in the office itself. Rather, as Gorz (1983) argued, the proletariat must find its revolutionary subjectivity in the act of *refusal* rather than resistance: “The working class must act as a force refusing, along with its class being, to accept the matrix of capitalist relations of production of which this being bears the imprint” (p.43).

The valorisation of refusal in this way as an emancipatory strategy depended upon a distinction, constructed and reproduced by Gorz (2012) between the work completed by the worker as part of the wage-labour relation and the work that underpinned human society. Gorz (2012) was not advocating a post-activity society: on the contrary, Gorz (2012) insisted that social change would occur through the activity of the human subject, only separated from its completion within wage-labour settings. In making this separation, Gorz (2012) relied on humanist ideological concepts. Gorz (2012) argued that in contrast to the highly alienating activity of work as wage-labour, society ought to centralise a conception of work that is understood “as the activity by which the human being externalizes his being – that is to say, produces it as a being which exists objectively outside oneself, as ‘sensuous-practical activity’, as ‘appropriative shaping of one’s own objective world’” (p.55). Gorz (2012) defined this type of work as autonomous work or “work-for-oneself” (p.57), completed not by the imperatives of survival or material satisfaction, but as labour that is immanent to human desire and human self-fulfilment. The societal problem was, for Gorz (2012), that work as wage-labour had predominance in society, leaving no space for the fruition of this more autonomous form of work. As Gorz (2012) wrote,

There is no social space in which ‘true work’ – which, depending upon circumstances, I prefer to call ‘work-for-oneself’ or ‘autonomous activity’ – can deploy itself in such a way to *produce society* and set its stamp upon it. *It is this space we have to create* (p.57, original emphasis).

Emancipation, for Gorz (2012), rested in the construction and centralisation of this space for autonomous work. Importantly, for Gorz (1983), autonomous work was not merely freely-directed activity or simple leisure. It was, as the Young Marx (1981) argued with regards to labour itself, an activity through which the human subject comes to realise, recognise and in effect *know* themselves. As Gorz (1983) writes, autonomous activity includes “communication, giving, creating and aesthetic enjoyment, the production and reproduction of life, tenderness, the realisation of physical, sensuous and intellectual capacities, the creation of non-commodity use-values...in short, *the whole range of activities that make up the fabric of existence*” (p.80-81, emphasis added). For example, Gorz (1983) turns against the emerging feminist movements at the time that argued that housework, child care and reproductive labour ought to be waged the same as other forms of work. Gorz (1983) argues that rather than included in the logic of capital, these activities should be valorised precisely due to their distinctly individual and autonomous qualities and their inability to be reduced to abstract social labour. These distinctly individual activities and the affective and sensuous qualities they generated are the activities of human life itself: in seeking to include these amongst other types of work, “the last enclave of individual or communal autonomy would disappear; socialisation, ‘commodification’ and pre-programming would be extended to the last vestiges of self-determined and self-regulated life” (Gorz, 1983, p.84).

In the realisation of this goal, Gorz (2012) argued for the organisation of socialist thought behind what he called a ‘politics of time’ (p.61), based upon the radical re-thinking of the societal division of labour and its extension into all areas of social and political life. Such a political project would concentrate, according to Gorz (2012), on

The reshaping of the urban and natural environment, cultural politics, education and training, and [reshaping] the social services and public amenities in such a way as to create more scope for self-managed activities, mutual aid, voluntary co-operation and production for one’s own use (p.61).

Gorz (1983) argued that forward movement towards this goal lay in the reorganisation of the spheres of labour within society: namely an augmentation of the sphere of autonomous labour with the shrinking as small as possible the sphere of necessary labour synonymous with the experience of wage-labour (what Gorz [1983] calls “heteronomous sphere” [p.97] of labour). This conception of a dual society in terms of labour forms the basis of Gorz’s (1983) imagination of social transformation, in which the spheres of heteronomy and autonomy co-exist, but with the former subservient to the latter. Gorz (1983) imagined the organisation of society into these two spheres, with the shrunken heteronomous sphere ensuring the “planned production of everything necessary to individual and social life, with the maximum efficiency and the least expenditure of effort



and resources” (p.97), with the now-larger autonomous sphere focused on the production of “non-necessary material and non-material goods and services, outside of the market” (p.97), with individuals producing these goods “by themselves or in free association with others, and in conformity with their own desires, tastes or fantasies” (p.97). Gorz (1983) here imagined the proliferation of “repair and do-it-yourself workshops in blocks of flats” (p.87) as well as “libraries, places to make music or movies, ‘free’ radio and television stations, open spaces for communication, circulation and exchange” (p.87) which would all facilitate the completion of autonomous work on behalf of human individuals and would begin to see a social fabric woven around its completion.

Therefore, rather than relying on the experience of wage-labour, Gorz (1983) argued that emancipation lay in the ability to use the products of capitalist development to shrink necessary labour as small as possible, thereby enlarging the opportunities for engagement in autonomous activity and for the construction of a society based fundamentally upon the free and sensuous activity of human subjects. As Gorz (1983) wrote, “the point, then, is not to abolish heteronomous work, but only to use the goods it supplies and the way in which they are produced in order to enlarge the sphere of autonomy” (p.101). Gorz (1983) cited the development of technology and automation as one such development, able to remove the “crippling, exhausting and brutalising” (p.98) effects of work from the shoulders of human workers. Fundamentally, Gorz’s (1983) critique of work culminated in the necessity of the augmentation and expansion of human autonomy outside of the wage-labour relation, permitting the construction and development of a human society based on inherent cooperativity and human sociality.

However, there are particular theoretical shortcomings evident in Gorz’s (1983) theory. This is particularly evident in the theories of emancipation offered by Gorz (1983) culminating in the ‘dual society’ and its attendant ‘politics of time.’ Despite his repeated insistence upon free human activity as the motor of social progress, it is not clear the extent to which it figures in his consideration of the ‘dual society.’ Rather, Gorz (1983) finds himself heavily reliant on the valorisation of the state as the political cornerstone of this societal re-organisation. As Gorz (1983) wrote on the role of the state in the vision of this ‘dual society’, “it alone is capable of protecting society against the domination of giant tools; it alone is capable of ensuring that the means of producing necessities are not monopolised by a social class for the purposes of domination” (p.115). In this instance, social change is not so much the product of class struggle but of central planning by the state as the state is centralised as the only political entity capable of maintaining this ‘dual society’ based on the subservience of heteronomous work to autonomous work. However, Gorz (1983) here produces an argument that betrays a fundamental Marxist scepticism of the state as an artefact of the social (that is, class) domination that he warns against. As Althusser’s (2014) own analysis of the role of the state in the reproduction of capital has demonstrated, the state and the ideological state apparatuses crucial to its functioning

have been largely responsible for the *enforcement* of heteronomous work regimes and discipline in the post-industrial era, rather than for their abolition. Moreover, Gorz's (1983) valorisation of a 'politics of time' based upon the centralisation of autonomous work overlooks the fact that the wage-labour relation alone is not indicative of capitalist social relations. The sole reduction of the sphere of wage-labour is not enough to abolish the capitalist social relations of work, as these social relations branch beyond the wage-labour relation into relations of reproduction that exist everywhere outside of the workplace. This oversight is exposed in Gorz's (1983) consideration of the family as "the last enclave of individual or communal autonomy" (p.84), rather than "a center of conditioning, of consumption and of reserve labor" (Dalla Costa & James, 1975, p.10). The social relations of reproduction inherent to the family institution, and the relationship of these relations to the reinforcement of the wage-labour relation is here overlooked by Gorz (1983) in his valorisation of the 'autonomous' spaces outside of waged work.

The persistence of humanist ideological tropes throughout Gorz's (1983) critique of work, however, allow him to side-step these limitations. By valorising the human discovery of autonomy and self-fulfilment inherent to their labour as it is freed from the constraints of the wage-labour relation, the mechanics of social change upon which the refusal and eventual abolition of work would be facilitated are obfuscated, as the human struggle for autonomy becomes the defining act of class activity. The role of class struggle is reduced to this humanist mission of self-discovery, which becomes entirely compatible with Gorz's (1983) considerations of refusal. The primacy of this observation of autonomy and self-fulfilment precludes the analysis of the social relations incubated in both the state and in social institutions beyond those of the workplace responsible for the reproduction and enforcement of the very relations of work with which Gorz (1983) seeks to break. Once again, theoretical limitations find themselves reflected in the centrality of humanist ideology in the critique of work.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the extent to which sociological discourses of work within the Marxist canon have relied upon humanist ideology has here been made clear. Problematically, the Marxist sociology of work has found itself repeatedly united not through an analysis of the social relations of work under contemporary capitalism, but rather through humanist ideology, relying in various ways upon the centralisation and valorisation of the human subject in order to function. The concept of labour developed by the Young Marx (1981) – the idea that labour is a collective action by which human beings render both their world and themselves, intelligible – has proven a crucial ideological construct running throughout the accounts here discussed. This is problematic as the failure to break with humanism sees Marxism here reproduce the very ideologies responsible for the

normalisation or mystification of the capitalist social relations they seek to critique. What has been made clear is that there is a specific limitation to the sociology of work that prevents even its Marxist contributions – the defining theoretical exercise of which should be the break with and deconstruction of humanist ideology – from resisting the ideological temptations of humanist concepts. The remainder of this thesis is dedicated to the exploration of the extent to which this fundamental limitation still persists in the contemporary sociology of work.

The Marxist sociological accounts here set out have had a significant influence upon the construction of contemporary critiques of work, even those which sit outside of the Marxist canon. Problematically, it is these non-Marxist accounts that set the intellectual agenda in twenty first century critiques of work. Whilst there are strengths to these contemporary accounts, the role of Marxism in the context of these developments should be to expose the ideological assumptions that underlie these critiques and frame them in such a way as to both acknowledge and avoid the subsumption of these ideological formations in the development of sociological analysis. In initiating this task and learning the lessons of Marxist development here set out, this thesis begins with a critique of the zeitgeist of the sociology of work in the twenty first century: ‘postcapitalism’, automation and the post-work imaginary. The twenty first century presents an image of work drastically different from that ever imagined even by the authors discussed here. But what is made evident is that it remains afflicted by precisely the same ideological malaise. Humanism presents a significant and unique problem to the sociology of work: the first act in the struggle against it, is its exposure.

## The Humanist Ideology of the Contemporary Post-Work Imaginary

*Here the imaginations of our utopian thinkers, apologists for neo-capitalism and reformists start churning and promise us the moon (either the disappearance of classes or communism) just as soon as automation becomes universal...because automation will put an end, 'to all intents and purposes', to nearly every intervention by labour-power...and, consequently, to the exploitation of labour-power! Let us be serious (Althusser, 2014, p.30).*

This chapter confronts the emergence of a contemporary post-work imaginary within the sociology of work, demonstrating how its limitations stem fundamentally from a persistent and pervasive humanism that consistently underwrites its critique. This contemporary post-work imaginary – which argues that the technological development of contemporary capitalism provides the historical conditions for the abolition of work and the transition into a ‘postcapitalist’ society – presents a fundamentally limited critique of work, in which key social relations of work are bracketed or mystified. Whilst the post-work imaginary operates under the aegis of a radical, transformative and even utopian consideration of work, in reality it reproduces the precise productivist tropes from which it seeks escape. Rather than breaking with the traditional parameters of work and wage-labour, the post-work imaginary complements them: a consequence observable in the absence of important social relations from its considerations. In its thought about post-work futures, key social relations in the character and position of machinery and technology, the class character of money, wages and income and the social relations of capitalism that escape but nonetheless inform the wage-labour relation find themselves overlooked. The chapter argues that the roots of this problem are ideological in nature, anchored specifically in a pervasive humanism that consistently animates the discourse. Analysis shows that the post-work imaginary is essentially a Marxist-humanist analysis of ‘social labour’ (Althusser, 2003), where emancipation is considered not in the observation of class struggle and of social structures, but as the inherent quality of naturally cooperative human beings now freed from the obligation of alienating work by the possibilities presented by automation. It is in this recourse to humanist ideological analysis (often produced through direct contact with the works of the Young Marx) that the limitations of the post-work imaginary find their root, for it relegates social relations to their position as nothing more than a backdrop to the historical negation by human beings of their own alienation.

The sociologists and theorists of this contemporary post-work imaginary are faced with a situation in which the disappearance of work is not simply a utopian vision, but a present and dangerous reality. The post-work imaginary appears alongside an emerging

crisis of work which has seen global unemployment levels soaring, the mobilisation of global populations in search of income and the potential for even greater levels of unemployment caused by the development of automation. Moreover, the work that is available does not carry the traditional characteristics of stability, formality and regularity but is in fact increasingly precarious, characterised by the proliferation of low-waged and low-skilled jobs often tendered out on zero-hours contracts. In the face of this reality, these sociologists argue that instead of resisting this inevitable wave of unemployment, it should be embraced and directed towards emancipatory ends. The contemporary crisis of work and the material conditions associated with it present the opportunity for the radical re-imagining of work and its centrality within contemporary society. As Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2013) wrote in their 'Accelerationist Manifesto',

Accelerationists want to unleash latent productive forces. In this project, the material platform of neoliberalism does not need to be destroyed. It needs to be repurposed towards common ends. The existing infrastructure is not a capitalist stage to be smashed, but a springboard to launch towards post-capitalism (para. 18).

The latent productive forces of contemporary capitalism, stored in the vast quantities of knowledge and information deployed in contemporary capitalist production and in the machines that crystallise this knowledge, provide the precise foundation for the contemporary post-work imaginary: "Freedom is highly dependent upon the historical conditions of scientific and technological development" (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p.82).

## A BRAVE NEW WORLD OF WORK

At the turn of the twenty first century, Ulrich Beck (2000) described and predicted the emergence of a *Brave New World of Work*: one in which globalisation and advancing technological development has created a condition of precariousness and vulnerability among the workers of the Western world. As Beck (2000) wrote of this new world of work, "for a majority of people, even in the apparently prosperous middle layers, their basic existence and lifeworld will be marked by endemic insecurity" (p.3). Everywhere, the availability of secure, regular and formal employment opportunities is disappearing, with the contemporary employment market dominated by jobs that prioritise 'flexibility' and 'self-employment.' Technological advancements are heightening these conditions of insecurity, as "rising unemployment can no longer be explained in terms of cyclical economic crises; it is due rather to the successes of technologically advanced capitalism" (Beck, 2000, p.2). Almost twenty years on from Beck's (2000) predictions, the world of work he envisaged appears to correlate ever-more accurately to the contemporary

landscape of work. Contemporary statistics have brought Beck's (2000) brave new world to life, presenting a world of work with increasingly mobile working populations, vast unemployment and a heightened experience of precariousness and risk: all inaugurated by the productive and technological development of capitalism.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has shown global populations of unemployed people to be swelling, with this trend predicted to continue right through until the end of the present decade (ILO, 2016). According to the ILO, "In 2015, total global unemployment stood at 197.1 million – 27 million higher than the pre-crisis level of 2007" (2016, para. 5). Moreover, the ILO (2015) has revealed this swelling unemployment to be a dominant factor in the increased migration of global populations, with trends indicating high levels of migration from the global South into Western economies, almost half of whom migrate into North America and Europe in search of an income. However, employment prospects in these 'advanced capitalist' economies of the West are increasingly dire themselves. In 2015 the British poverty think-tank the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) concluded through its research that more than half of those in poverty in Britain were in households in which at least one member of the family was employed (MacInnes et al., 2015). In Britain, statistics reveal that 1.7 million workers are employed on zero-hours employment contracts (Lewis, 2017), on which workers are not guaranteed a set number of hours per week and thus are subject to drastic income changes depending often on the demands of the businesses for which they work. This is corroborated by statistics released by the *Financial Times* which demonstrate that between 2015 and 2016, the number of workers employed in Britain on zero-hours contracts increased by a fifth, with half of those workers aged over 25 (dispelling the myth that only students and young people are affected by these contracts) (O'Connor, 2016). In the United States, 94% of the net employment growth between 2005 and 2015 has been in jobs that offer 'alternative work arrangements' (Lewis, 2017). This is exacerbated further by developing technologies and encroaching automation. It is estimated that up to 49% of the world's activities in work could be automated immediately with technology that is currently available (Cole, 2017). Moreover, by 2030, 30% of all jobs in Britain are predicted to be at risk of automation and 38% of jobs in the United States (Cole, 2017). Even Mark Carney (2016) – Governor of the Bank of England – recognised how "every technological revolution mercilessly destroys jobs and livelihoods" (p.8).

There have been a number of contemporary sociological interjections into this discussion of an emerging crisis of work, particularly from those rooted in the sociology of work, employment and industrial relations. Changes in the labour market conditions have often been positioned in the context of developing economic trends, collected in discussions of the 'gig economy' (Schroeder et al., 2019), the 'platform economy' (Forde et al., 2017) or 'crowdworking' (Howcroft & Bergvall-Kåreborn, 2019). Inaugurated within these economic shifts have been shifts in the characteristics of work and employment in

advanced capitalist economies, including the emergence of more informal working arrangements (such as part-time, zero-hours and fixed-term employment) (Borghi et al., 2016; Bessa & Tomlinson, 2017; Oliver, 2012) and the rise of self-employment (Umney, 2016; Wall, 2015) among contemporary workers. Alongside this has been the charted development of ‘involuntary’ (Kautonen et al., 2010) or ‘false’ (Cruz et al., 2017) self-employment, where the risks normally shouldered by employers are transferred onto individual workers, but these workers do not enjoy the autonomy of the traditionally self-employed, with their work still controlled by an employer. Though often couched in the language of ‘autonomy’, ‘freedom’ or ‘flexibility’, the proliferation of informal working arrangements such as these “allow organizations to shift the costs of employment and economic risk onto their workers, all the while removing them from important employment-bound social security benefits and social insurance programs” (Moisander et al., 2018, p.393).

“Are we headed for freedom or hell?” This was the question Stanley Aronowitz et al. (1998, p.33) posed in their confrontation of these emerging trends in their ‘Post-Work Manifesto.’ The disappearance of work was not only compatible only with a workless utopia, but also a workless nightmare of endemic poverty and precariousness. This question still haunts the considerations of the contemporary post-work imaginary. For worklessness is not immediately resolving itself in emancipation but is in fact crystallised in statistics such as those discussed above. As Srnicek and Williams (2015) – two of the most prominent contributors to this contemporary post-work imaginary – indicate,

There is a growing population of people that are situated outside formal, waged work, making do with minimal welfare benefits, informal subsistence work, or by illegal means. In all cases, the lives of these people are characterised by poverty, precarity and insecurity. Increasingly, there are simply not enough jobs to employ everyone (p.103-104).

This is echoed by Paul Mason (2015) – another leading contributor to this post-work imaginary – who acknowledges that the disappearance of work has led not only to a highly mobile global population moved by the desperate search for income, but also the proliferation of the very conditions of life from which these mobile populations have attempted to escape: poverty, yawning inequalities and endemic insecurity: “In the cities, many will join the world’s slum-dwelling population, which already stands at a billion – and increasing numbers will attempt illegal migration to the rich world” (p.257).

However, for these theorists of the post-work imaginary, there exist particular conditions that make this contemporary crisis of work an anchor of emancipatory action. For them, this crisis is indicative not simply of a hopeless situation, but of the early stages of a transition into a new historical period known commonly as ‘postcapitalism.’ As Mason

(2015) writes, “we lie at a moment of possibility: of a controlled transition beyond the free market, beyond carbon, beyond compulsory work” (p.290). The unique characteristic of this period of capitalist development is the centrality of information and of highly developed machinery in contemporary production. Though it is true that this new form of production exists at the epicentre of the contemporary crisis of work, it is also responsible for the development of new social forces that continuously escape its grasp. For the thinkers of the post-work imaginary, it is in the struggle over these social forces that the future will be written. For whilst technological advancement exacerbates global inequalities and the proliferation of poverty, it also produces the precise conditions through which the transition beyond these things is possible. As Srnicek and Williams (2015) write, “rapid automation, expanding surplus populations and the continued imposition of austerity all heighten the need to rethink work and prepare for the new crises of capitalism” (p.86). The contemporary post-work imaginary pivots on the idea that workers can take advantage of developing technologies, automate production and thus liberate themselves from the drudgery of work.

For Mason (2015), the anchor of the new post-work imaginary is the abundance and availability of *information* in the twenty first century. For Mason (2015), information fundamentally alters (and undermines) the mechanics of capitalist production in a way that it is unprepared for. According to Mason (2015), “information technology, far from creating a new and stable form of capitalism, is dissolving it: corroding market mechanisms, eroding property rights and destroying the old relationship between wages, work and profit” (p.112). This argument rests on the fact that unlike traditional forms of production which were based upon a principle of scarcity and were therefore dictated by the laws of supply and demand, contemporary production is anchored in information as a raw material that transcends the problem of scarcity (Mason, 2015). With traditional ‘material’ commodities, their consumption is often limited to one individual consumer at a time. The same, however, is not true with information. The ability to ‘copy and paste’ information means that information-based commodities have the potential to be enjoyed by multiple consumers at the same time without their supply ever diminishing (Mason, 2015). As Mason (2015) writes, “once you can copy and paste something, it can be reproduced for free. It has, in economics-speak, a ‘zero marginal cost’” (p.117). According to Mason (2015), the mechanics of capitalist production are set in motion by the laws of supply and demand governed by the problem of scarcity. With information-based production, this problem is transcended and the anchor of capitalist production is therefore in crisis: “Until we had shareable information goods, the basic law of economics was that everything was scarce. Supply and demand assumes scarcity. Now certain goods are not scarce, they are abundant – so supply and demand become irrelevant” (Mason, 2015, p.119).



The characteristic ability of information to transcend the problem of scarcity means that, according to Mason (2015), the social relations of capitalism encounter a severe difficulty in controlling it in the way that they had other resources. In relation to resources such as land or fossil fuels, it had been much easier for the capitalist class to maintain a monopoly over these resources, due in part to the scarcity of these resources. However, it has become increasingly difficult for capitalism to maintain control over information in the same way, due to its ability to transcend scarcity and be shareable in ways that other more 'material' resources could not have been (Mason, 2015). Despite attempts made by capitalism to control this new resource – such as the implementation of copyright law or the hiding of information behind paywalls for example – Mason (2015) uses the proliferation of peer-to-peer and open-access platforms, based fundamentally upon information, in order to describe capitalism's inability to control information as a resource. The emergence of websites such as Wikipedia and open-access operating systems such as Android, which are based upon the open sharing of information are evidence, according to Mason (2015), of the emergence of subversive forms of production taking place within the capitalist economy: "Decentralized action by individuals, working through cooperative, voluntary forms of organization. It is producing new forms of 'peer-to-peer' economics, in which money is either absent or not the main measure of value" (Mason, 2015, p.128). Crucially, these subversive forms of production fundamentally challenge the organisation of work under capitalism. The wage-labour relation disappears, as the free and open access to information subverts the economic necessity and coercion that previously guided the wage-labour relation of traditional capitalism: "It is not money the participants are exchanging. They are in effect exchanging gifts" (Mason, 2015, p.129). It is here that Mason (2015) locates the roots of a postcapitalist transition: in subversive forms of production anchored in a fundamental reorganisation of work.

The abundance of information not only facilitates cooperative working, but it also underpins the forward march of automation. Srnicek and Williams (2015) argue that information is the driving force of the contemporary machinery of capitalism: a reality which, they argue, has great emancipatory potential. Srnicek and Williams (2015) observe the historical development of capitalism in its tendency to continually automate ever-greater parts of its production process. From the mechanisation of agricultural labour and craftwork in the nineteenth century, the displacement of skilled workers in the twentieth century by machines and office technologies and the growing automation of mass-production thereafter signify the developmental stages of capitalist production. Today, the presence of information in production defines a new era of capitalist production, with automation markedly different from that which went before:

The most recent wave of automation is poised to change this distribution of the labour market drastically, as it comes to encompass every aspect of the economy:

data collection (radio-frequency identification, big data); new kinds of production (the flexible production of robots, additive manufacturing, automated fast food); services (AI customer assistance, care for the elderly); decision-making (computational models, software agents); financial allocation (algorithmic trading); and especially distribution (the logistics revolution, self-driving cars, drone container ships and automated warehouses) (Srnicsek & Williams, 2015, p.110-111).

Crucially, for Srnicsek and Williams (2015), the presence of information means that automation in the twenty first century has moved into jobs and employment sectors that would have otherwise been impossible to mechanise. Work once thought uniquely human, such as care work or work involving cognitive processing, is now, thanks to the abundance of information, potentially open to automation. As Srnicsek and Williams (2015) write, “complex communication technologies are making computers better than humans at certain skilled-knowledge tasks, and advances in robotics are rapidly making technology better at a wide variety of manual-labour tasks” (p.111).

This emerging tendency of capitalist development towards the automation of vast swathes of work, combined with the ability of information-machines to produce wealth without human labour, presents society with the foundation for the full abolition of work (Srnicsek & Williams, 2015). Whereas past movements have been founded upon the resistance to capitalist development, Srnicsek and Williams (2015) argue that “the tendencies towards automation and the replacement of human labour should be enthusiastically accelerated and targeted as a political project of the left” (p.109). According to Srnicsek and Williams (2015) the liberation of vast swathes of humans from work, combined with the proliferation of information sees capitalism incubate particular social forces that are beyond its control: “This is a project that takes an existing capitalist tendency and seeks to push it beyond the acceptable parameters of capitalist social relations” (p.109). Crucially, embracing automation alone is not sufficient for emancipation: rather, the free time that automation would inevitably open up, in order to escape the dystopia of perpetual poverty and precariousness, must be reinforced by a source of income untied from participation in wage-labour.

Srnicsek and Williams (2015) complement their demand for automation with a demand for the implementation of a universal basic income (UBI). As automation reduces the demand for human workers, Srnicsek and Williams (2015) argue that free time will surely increase, but that “this free time will be of little value if people continue struggling to make ends meet” (p.118). The concept of a UBI is premised on the payment to each individual, without means-testing, of a basic salary or income, regardless of the employment status of that individual (Srnicsek & Williams, 2015; see also Standing, 2016). According to Srnicsek and Williams (2015), it must fulfil three conditions: “It must provide

a *sufficient* amount of income to live on; it must be *universal*, provided to everyone unconditionally; and it must be a *supplement* to the welfare state rather than a replacement of it” (p.119, original emphasis). The fundamental aim of the UBI is not simply to provide an income for those liberated from work by machines, but also to necessarily alter the social position of work, decentralising it as the fundamental activity of societal value (Srnicek & Williams, 2015). The UBI will remove the tendency to value people only by virtue of the economic contribution that they make to society, allowing people both the time (thanks to automation) and now the resources (money through the UBI) to experiment with alternative social arrangements and activities: “It transforms precarity and unemployment from a state of insecurity to a state of voluntary flexibility” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p.121).

The abundance of information, the automation of the labour process and the implementation of a UBI form the ‘material’ bedrock of the post-work imaginary: that is, the strategy for physically reducing the amount of work completed by human beings and satisfying their needs thereafter. But accompanying these ‘material’ considerations are those that Srnicek and Williams (2015) identify as ‘political’ considerations: those which underpin not simply the appearance of the labour process, but the socio-political *positioning* of work itself. As Srnicek and Williams (2015) write,

The most difficult hurdles for UBI – and for a post-work society – are not economic, but political and cultural: political, because the forces that will mobilise against it are immense; and cultural, because work is so deeply ingrained into our very identity (p.123).

The discussion of the potential to automate production and thereby move into a post-work society has prompted further considerations of the role of work in society and culture which is a prominent but often under-discussed element of the contemporary post-work imaginary.

For example, David Frayne’s (2015) central problematic pivots on the fact that even in the midst of such technological possibilities, the compulsion to work remains central to people’s lives and to the orientation of society and politics more generally. For Frayne (2015), critical social theory has been preoccupied with “trying to figure out why, in a time of unprecedented technological possibility, people’s lives [are] still characterised by toil and repression” (p.34). For Frayne (2015), the freeing-up of greater amounts of time for people through automation can only be successful alongside a cultural struggle against the dogma of work and the idea that work should define an individual’s place in society and the value of their contribution to it. The value of the post-work imaginary, for Frayne (2015), is not just the struggle against the inherent inequalities crystallised by contemporary forms of work, but more importantly the struggle against “the celebrated

prominence of work in the cultural, ethical and political life of advanced industrial societies” (p.14). The ‘material’ elements of the post-work imaginary – full automation and the establishment of a UBI – are useful only in so far as they facilitate this cultural struggle.

This argument is echoed in other similar critical accounts such as those of Peter Fleming (2014, 2015, 2017) and David Graeber (2013, 2018). For Fleming (2017), any effective post-work imaginary must immediately combat the way in which work itself has come to animate the human body, dictating its behaviour in all walks of life: jobs “are detached from their basis in productive utility and work becomes the wandering reference point for everything else. Not a concrete activity but an abstract and diffuse prism through which all of life is myopically evaluated and managed” (p.154). By stressing this material detachment, Fleming (2017) does not discount the usefulness of automation and the UBI in the achievement of a post-work world, but stresses that their success is dependent upon the consideration of work as a cultural and psychological force as well as a material one. For Graeber (2013, 2018), this finds its crystallisation in the phenomenon of ‘bullshit jobs’: jobs so detached from any material utility that their meaning is unclear or non-existent. In fact, Graeber (2013) argues that these ‘bullshit jobs’ are the product of an ineffective cultural struggle against the dogmatism of work, as developing automation, rather than reducing the amount of ‘bullshit jobs’ available, has in fact led to their increase:

Rather than allowing a massive reduction of working hours to free the world’s population to pursue their own projects, pleasures, visions, and ideas, we have seen the ballooning of not even so much of the ‘service’ sector as of the administrative sector, up to and including the creation of whole new industries like financial services or telemarketing, or the unprecedented expansion of sectors like corporate law, academic and health administration, human resources, and public relations (para.4).

Set out here are the parameters of the contemporary post-work imaginary. Its material pillars appear to be the abundance of free information, the technological development of machinery and the establishment of a UBI, designed to replace the expenditure of human labour-power entirely within the labour process. It is complemented by a cultural and psychological struggle against the dogmatism of work in society and a reorganisation of the social principles that prioritise work as *the* valued human activity. Together, this post-work imaginary thinks it both possible and necessary to transition into a post-work, postcapitalist society where human beings are freed of the responsibilities of production and in which the social inequalities tied historically to this responsibility, are actively undermined.

## THE PROBLEM WITH POST-WORK

There is, however, a problem with the post-work imaginary. Despite its radical outlook and its attempt to undermine the socio-economic centrality of work within society, the post-work imaginary exhibits a tendency towards the reproduction of the very productivist tropes that it seeks to undermine. Rather than radically challenging the traditional parameters of work and workers, the post-work imaginary in fact reinforces traditional views of work as a manual factory-based activity, simultaneously reinforcing masculinised and Eurocentric images of working subjectivity too. It is a troubling tendency that Kathi Weeks (2016) recognises in her own critique of the post-work imaginary:

Although they may appear to be categories of nonwork, they fail to escape the imaginary of productivity or the models of the subject that would deliver it. My point is that because these notions of work's refusal are still under the sway of its ethics, the models of nonwork they generate are too locked within the orbit of work as we now know it to push us very far beyond its gravity (p.257-258).

In this way, the post-work imaginary does not do enough to confront the shared correspondence of its own vision to that of power itself: the precise power responsible for the enforcement of work's position within capitalist society. The post-work imaginary has been dogged from the beginning by the fact that it constantly had to tread the line between freedom and hell in advocating an abolition of work. What's increasingly clear is that the post-work imaginary does not adequately articulate the precise separation between itself and power, a shortcoming that sees it reinforcing the norms from which it seeks escape.

One of the first points of tension is the post-work imaginary's treatment of automation and technology. A prevailing critique of this post-work imaginary among a number of sociologists is that there exists a *tendency* within this post-work imaginary to forget the class character of technology, machinery and information and treat it as a neutral resource as opposed to a product of definite and unequal social relations (Pitts, 2017; Spencer, 2016; Thompson & Briken, 2017). It is not true to say that the class character of machinery and technology is totally ignored by the theorists of the post-work imaginary. For example, Srnicek and Williams (2015) argue that one of the fundamental failures of the Soviet Union was its lack of appreciation for the class character of the capitalist productive machinery that it attempted to repurpose for the construction of a communist society: "The ambitious plan to conquer the capitalist means of production ran aground on the reality that power relationships are embedded within technologies, which cannot therefore be infinitely bent towards purposes that oppose their very

functioning” (p.151). However, when it comes to the imagination of social futures based upon the emancipatory potential of productive technologies, this tendency emerges and the post-work thinkers forget their own lessons. Whilst there is a critical analysis of ‘traditionally’ capitalist technologies such as machinery, ‘new’ technologies such as data and information are treated as though they extend beyond the grasp of capitalist social relations and therefore provide a firm basis for social emancipation. For example, Mason (2015) discusses data and information in the context of “a revolution in the way we process, store and communicate information...[that] has started to corrode the traditional property relations of capitalism” (p.142). For a number of critics, such a position relies on a particular ignorance of the unequal social relations bound up in these new technologies. For example, Spencer (2016) writes that “the authors fail to recognize how digital technologies are themselves products of unequal power – they are not neutral as such, but rather created, harnessed and reproduced under conditions where power resides with capital, not labour” (p.145). Pitts (2017) further develops this critique, arguing that the fetishism of information and data in this way sees productive technology stripped of its class character and reduced to a set of quantitative economic exchanges: “Postcapitalists like Mason would have us believe value relates not to abstract social forms, but quantities of inputs and outputs. Indeed, their politics of the future depends upon it” (p.333). Tellingly, this is the precise criticism that Althusser (2014) made in his own confrontation of post-work thinkers in the mid-to-late twentieth century: “While the capitalist mode of production does indeed produce objects of social utility, it produces them only under the aegis of very specific relations of production...that simultaneously make them relations of *exploitation*” (p.30-31, original emphasis). Emerging here are the consequences of ideology upon the post-work imaginary (which will be explicated in due course), as key social relations of work are mystified for the benefit of a particular analytical direction.

This mystification is dangerous because it sees the post-work imaginary reproduce the productivist tropes from which it seeks a desperate escape. Despite Srnicek’s and Williams’ (2013) insistence that “there can be no return to Fordism...premised on the production paradigm of the orderly factory environment” (para.17), the stomping ground of the “white (male) workers” (para.17), it is precisely these parameters of productivism that the post-work imaginary reproduces and reinforces. Its disproportionate concentration on the forces of production “bears out a disavowed productivist temptation towards the factory” (Pitts, 2017, p.333) in the post-work imaginary. Here again, in the thinking of technology in relation to potential post-work futures, the relationship of class struggle to the appearance and deployment of machinery disappears and the post-work imaginary reproduces a productivist image of work as a set of value-producing material operations, with the social relations and other material operations that exist outside of this definition (but nonetheless contribute to its appearance) completely obfuscated from view. As Pitts and Dinerstein (2017) write,

The post-work literature is productivist insofar as it sees 'work' as the central relation of capitalist society and not as the antagonistic relations of property, ownership and subsistence that logically and historically precede a society in which most people are compelled to sell their labour to live, nor the specific kind of results assumed by the products of that labour in the market. In so doing it remains locked within a capitalist understanding of what is productive and what is not, despite professions otherwise (p.4).

Paradoxically, the post-work imaginary at once criticises contemporary capitalism for concretely deciding what is and is not productive (prioritising wage-labour activities over other activities of social utility such as poetry, art and care for example) and then, in the same movement, unwittingly emphasises that it is the productive forces of capitalism, in particular information and automation, that are the sole location of productive activity. It celebrates activity outside of work but overlooks its own reproduction of capitalist productivist ideology by fetishizing the forces of production as the most important site of productive activity. In this way, the post-work imaginary overlooks its own reinforcement of capitalist ideology: "Despite different politics, our present-day post-work dreamers desire much the same flat-white future as the so-called 'productivity ninjas' that spring from the Silicon Valley subculture of pop-optimism and personal optimisation" (Pitts & Dinerstein, 2017, p.7).

A feminist analysis further amplifies this point. The post-work imaginary does not have a great deal to say about the social relations of the family and the dialectical relationship between these and the workplace. Rather, patriarchal capitalist social relations are simply assumed to be cleared away with the abolition of work. For example, Srnicek and Williams (2015) write that the UBI is "a fundamentally feminist proposal" (p.122) because "its disregard for the gendered division of labour overcomes the biases of the traditional welfare state predicated upon a male breadwinner" (p.122). They continue, arguing that the provision of this income will enable "experimentation with different forms of family and community structure that are no longer bound to the model of the privatised nuclear family" (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p.122). However, Srnicek and Williams (2015) here overlook the fact that, though work and the family are certainly related, they each contain unique social relations that demand individual critique. By eradicating this difference, the post-work imaginary unwittingly reinforces the very ideology beneath which the feminist analysis of reproductive labour has historically been suppressed both by patriarchal capitalism but also by leftist critiques that did not adequately critique this ideology. The post-work imaginary here overlooks the central feminist argument that reproduction under capitalism cannot simply be 'included' in an analysis of work but demands a unique critique in the context of the wage-labour relation.

Weeks (2011) has drawn greater attention to this oversight, particularly in relation to key demands of the post-work imaginary such as automation and the UBI. For if a UBI is to be, as Srnicek and Williams (2015) argue, a ‘fundamentally feminist proposal’, then it cannot begin the question of ‘work’ but *must* begin with the question of reproduction. In her text *The Problem with Work*, Weeks (2011) argues that reproduction is not only missing from dominant post-work imaginaries but provides an altogether more useful starting-point for thinking about post-work society. Weeks (2011) shows that dominant post-work imaginaries struggle in their objective to trouble the ideological and cultural centrality of work in society, primarily because they reproduce these ideological notions by upholding the false separation between the relations inside work and those outside of it. A feminist consideration of reproduction, however, does a much better job at this, because it problematises this false division and forces attention towards the actual source of work’s cultural domination: namely its social relations, that extend *beyond* the factory walls. For Weeks (2011), this is the value of feminist campaigns in the mid-to-late twentieth century, such as the Wages for Housework Movement:

By naming part of what happens in the family as work, the demand for wages confounds the division between work as a site of coercion and regimentation and the family as a freely invented site of authentic and purely voluntary relations (p.129).

In drawing attention to the fact that the family and reproduction more generally is regulated by unique social relations, dominant pillars of the post-work imaginary such as the UBI suddenly become ineffective, as the problem with reproduction is not simply that it is unwaged but the fact that change to the relationship between capital and labour alone is insufficient in ending capitalist exploitation (Weeks, 2011). This argument comes to a head in Weeks’ (2016) other writings, in which the route to a post-work imaginary is argued to begin not with a cultural struggle against the imposition of work, but with a fundamental re-centring of the struggle against gender and gendered ideology.

Moreover, and staying with the concept of a UBI, it is not clear to what extent a UBI is radically incompatible with the aims and ends of a developing capitalist society. For example, in an analysis of UBI experimentation in Finland, Bruenig et al. (2017) argued that the UBI did not so much decouple income from work and alleviate the pressures of insecurity from the shoulders of workers but was in fact mobilised as a way of reducing state benefits even further and used as a disciplinary tool to continue to incentivise people into work. Moreover, it was in fact a convenient subsidy for low-paying employers, who felt justified in further withholding particular workplace benefits and in continuing to strangle wages (Bruenig et al., 2017). In this example, “what started as the dream proposal of left-leaning wonks everywhere had, once filtered through the political



process, mutated into the UBI-as-workhouse nightmare” (Bruenig et al. 2017, para.19). Others have echoed this, arguing that “the most viable forms of basic income would universalize precarious labor and extend the sphere of the market – just as the gurus of Silicon Valley hope” (Zamora, 2017, para.9). The UBI is not so much an adequate response to crisis but an indicator of its arrival. “It’s what botanists would call a ‘bioindicator’: it indexes neoliberalism’s progress. Support for basic incomes proliferates where neoliberal reforms have been the most devastating” (Zamora, 2017, para.8).

Building on this, it is important to trouble the notions of ‘precarity’ and precariousness that so often follow these discussions. For those like Guy Standing (2016), precariousness is the defining characteristic of the contemporary crisis of work, the reduction of which is centralised as one of the key aims of automation and the UBI. Standing (2016) uses precariousness as a way of defining the existence of an entirely new class in society. The ‘precariat,’ according to Standing (2016) is “a growing mass of people – potentially all of us outside the elite, anchored in their wealth and detachment from society – in situations that can only be described as alienated, anomic, anxious and prone to anger” (p.28). However, as Alberti et al. (2018) write, the description of class on the basis of precariousness alone precludes particular social relations and ideologies that ultimately define and describe class experience: “Class, however, is about more than classification. The relationship between labour and capital is a dynamic one: the imperatives of capital accumulation lead to new and constantly evolving demands on workers and governments” (p.449). In this way, precariousness is not a particularly helpful pivot of analysis because “there is no one group for whom precarity is a unique hallmark; precarity is instead theorized as inherent to all labour-capital relationships, to varying degrees” (Alberti et al., 2018, p.449).

This last point on ‘varying degrees’ of precariousness is important to stress as well, because the notion of precariousness as a new or unique phenomenon also precludes gendered and racialised voices for whom this condition has been the norm rather than the exception. In relying on precariousness as the defining characteristic of the crisis of work, it reproduces a particular Eurocentrism, focused on an immediate change in circumstances to an otherwise stable social norm. In other words, precariousness describes an aberration from the stable, secure and formal forms of employment that were predominant in Europe during the twentieth century. But this is precisely the point: these stable forms of employment were a European phenomenon not a global one and relied implicitly on the precariousness of other, much larger populations, such as women and those in the colonies. Contrary to the assertions of the post-work imaginary, “if we look at capitalism in a wider historical and geographical scope, it is precarity that is the norm and not Fordist economic organization” (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008, p.54).

Neilson’s and Rossiter’s (2008) argument precedes much of the literature discussed in relation to the post-work imaginary, but its argument is nonetheless

applicable to the problematisation of its discourse. Neilson and Rossiter (2008) acknowledge a disproportionate presence of the concept of precariousness and precarity in the development of Western social science, emerging particularly in the early twenty first century, in which it is valorised as the defining concept of contemporary considerations of work and subjectivity within sociological analyses. As Neilson and Rossiter (2008) write in relation to this emerging discourse, “at base was an attempt to identify or imagine precarious, contingent or flexible workers as a new kind of political subject, replete with their own forms of collective organization and modes of expression” (p.52). The problem with this discourse is that the concept of precariousness is not centralised in the same way in sociological critiques developed outside of North America and Western Europe, as ‘precariousness’ does not present itself as a discernible and unique characteristic of work in other parts of the world (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Neilson and Rossiter (2008) argue that this is because ‘precariousness’ is a fundamentally Western phenomenon that describes a deviation from a brief period of stability in the history of Western capitalism, whilst precariousness never came and went for the rest of the world: rather, it was described simply as *work*. As the post-1945 welfare state disintegrated in Western Europe, the concept of precariousness and of post-Fordism came into fruition in Western social science. But these terms are more descriptive of the inward-looking nature of Western social science as opposed to the sociology of work itself (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). The post-work imaginary is founded in precisely the same Western intellectual movement, routinely locating the contemporary crisis of work in the decline of the welfare state, the emergence of neoliberalism and the shift to post-Fordist or post-industrial economic eras: “The 1970s created a major shift within these general conditions, away from secure employment and unwieldy industrial behemoths and towards flexible labour and lean business models” (Srniczek, 2016, p.34).

This is problematic because it demonstrates that the post-work imaginary, even in attempting to decentralise traditional considerations of work, continues to reinforce them. It is an exclusionary consideration of work that overlooks racialised and gendered forms of work, instead concentrating on work as a mutual, albeit antagonistic, relationship between worker and employer. The post-work imaginary’s critique of capitalism – a mode of production they define as “the relationship between proletariat and employers, with waged work mediating between them” (Srniczek & Williams, 2015, p.92) – is levelled on the basis of a very particular, closed and modern conceptualisation of work imbued with the very ideological characteristics of the concept from which they themselves are trying to break. In the context of Neilson’s and Rossiter’s (2008) argument, the post-work imaginary here fails to problematise the precise ideologies that normalise dominant considerations of ‘work’ in the first place and the social relations they reflect: “The dominant theorization of post-Fordism leaves no room for the construction of new forms of political subjectivity or the invention of new institutional forms” (p.58).

Through these various examples, it is evident the extent to which the analysis of the contemporary post-work imaginary suffers considerable limitations due primarily to its repeated mystification of key social relations of work. Class antagonisms in all their racialised and gendered forms and the reflections of these antagonisms in specific social relations of work are repeatedly missing. The consequences of these missing points of analysis are dangerous: on the one hand, the post-work imaginary reproduces the very images of traditional work and workers that it continually professes to break with; but also, the post-work imaginary also fails to adequately create distance between itself and contemporary capitalism, unconvincingly pointing towards freedom in the face of a potential hell. The question with which the sociology of work is faced, therefore, is the question of where, precisely, this theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary stems from. What will be made clear is that the epicentre of this repeated mystification of social relations is *ideological* in character, rooted in the formulation of a problematic based not upon the analysis of the social relations of work, but upon the historical struggle of Man against alienation.

## HUMANISM AND THE POST-WORK IMAGINARY

Developing this analysis, this chapter argues that the theoretical weakness of the contemporary post-work imaginary so far examined stems from its contact with and interpretation of Marx's political economy: specifically, the humanist works of the Young Marx (1981). The contemporary post-work imaginary is founded fundamentally in a Marxist-humanist interpretation of labour, lifted from Marx's (1981) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. The argument is that the abundance of information, combined with the free time opened up for workers by automation, has seen (and will see) workers re-discover the original truth of the 'natural' sociality of their labour. The argument continues that information, automation and the cooperative working platforms that open up out of them are nothing less than a social expression of unalienated labour, of essentially cooperative human characteristics put to work. Information and automation are valorised within the post-work imaginary, *precisely* due to their propensity to capture and deploy human labour as a socially cooperative activity outside of capitalism. In the post-work imaginary, "nothing has changed about our humanity. It's just that our human desire to make friends, build relationships based on mutual trust and obligation, fulfilling emotional and psychological needs, has spilled over into economic life" (Mason, 2015, p.130). Crucially, this humanist ideological interpretation of labour mystifies the social relations within the post-work imaginary, as these social relations increasingly occupy only a complementary role in relation to the main historical event taking place in the consideration of 'postcapitalism': namely, the historical overcoming by the human subject of its alienated condition.

Within popular social scientific discourses, authors such as Mason (2015), Srnicek and Williams (2015) and others such as Aaron Bastani (2019) have been the leading voices in forwarding this argument. These authors rely heavily on humanist ideology in order to frame their thinking about the relationship between work and technology, which will be developed more fully throughout the course of this chapter. Despite the polemical character of these contributions, there is evidence to suggest that these contributions have been formative in a trend of thinking that is increasingly popular within more academic contributions to the sociology of work and employment. David Spencer (2018) cites these accounts approvingly in the context of the sociology of work, arguing that they are indicative of how “the loss of work has captivated the attention of writers across the intellectual and political spectrum and how this idea has fed different visions of the future in which automation serves to curtail the volume of work” (p.2). Increasingly, this post-work imaginary has been formative in the development of a sociological imagination about the future of work and the future of human subjectivity in the context of these changes (Celentano, 2019; Chessell, 2018; Means, 2017; Snape et al., 2017). In response to this prevailing post-work imaginary, a number of critiques have also emerged, including particularly important contributions from the perspective of labour process theory (Thompson & Briken, 2017) and social reproduction theory (Dinerstein & Pitts, 2018). It is to this critical response that this chapter adds, arguing that theoretical problems with the post-work imaginary identified in these accounts are rooted in the persistence of humanist ideological tropes throughout its formulations.

This is not the first argument to suggest that the theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary stems from its interaction with Marx’s work. Pitts’ (2017) critique of the post-work imaginary argues that this theoretical weakness pivots on its interaction with Marx’s (1974) ‘Fragment on Machines’ in the *Grundrisse*: a theoretical malaise that Pitts (2017) defines as ‘Fragment-thinking’ (p.328). Here, this chapter argues that understanding the theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary must include the analysis of its interaction not only with the ‘Fragment’, but with the *Manuscripts* and with Marx’s (1981) early works. This is because the problems of the post-work imaginary are not simply problems of interpretation, but problems of *ideology*. The theorists of the post-work imaginary have not simply mis-interpreted key Marxist concepts: rather, it is increasingly clear that they have adopted an entire theoretical framework that prevents a fuller understanding of the social relations of work, the character of which is ideologically humanist. The clues as to the adoption of this philosophy by the post-work imaginary lies in its direct and indirect contact with the humanist ideological works of the Young Marx (1981).

The interaction with Marx’s work is clearly influential upon the theorists of the contemporary post-work imaginary. Srnicek and Williams (2013) describe him as “the paradigmatic accelerationist thinker” (para.11) who understood that the development of

the forces of production under capitalism “were not to be reversed but accelerated beyond the constraints the capitalist value form” (para.11). For Mason (2015), Marx was the first to imagine “an economy in which the main role of machines was to produce, and the main role of people was to supervise them” (p.134), adding that “he was clear that in such an economy the main productive force would be information” (p.134). Marx is an important figure in the post-work imaginary not simply because he justifies the undertaking of a critique of work but because he appears compatible with the strategies and analysis of this discourse: namely, the embracing of capitalism’s own technological development as the basis for economic transition into a ‘postcapitalist’ era.

It has generally been accepted that the main point of interaction between this contemporary post-work imaginary and Marx, has been with a particular section of Marx’s (1974) *Grundrisse*: commonly known as the ‘Fragment on Machines.’ In this passage, Marx (1974) described how automation and the greater introduction of machinery into the labour process was a manifestation of the centrality of knowledge and information in production. Whereas other manual tools required the human application of knowledge in order to function (the pick-axe required the miner; the typewriter demanded the typist; the vacuum-cleaner demanded the housewife or cleaner), machines had the propensity to *store* this knowledge, with human workers simply occupying a supervisory role (Marx, 1974). For Marx (1974), automation was indicative of the way in which knowledge could be reinvested into the labour process as fixed capital in a way that was impossible with other tools in the labour process. Moreover, given the propensity of machines to liberate human beings from the labour process, Marx (1974) argued that this knowledge was increasingly incubated in a ‘general intellect’ across the workers which, once reinvested into production in the form of fixed capital, had a potentially revolutionary consequence, freeing human workers from wage-labour, expanding free time for all, whilst still ensuring the needs of society are met (Marx, 1974). The importance of this passage was first stressed by Negri (1991) in *Marx Beyond Marx*, influencing a generation of European Marxists such as Paulo Virno, Franco Berardi and Yann Moulier-Boutang. The contemporary post-work imaginary develops out of the legacy of this strand of Marxist thought. As Pitts (2017) writes, “postcapitalism, accelerationism, fully automated luxury communism: all owe their roots to the Fragment” (p.326). There is a clear compatibility between the ‘Fragment’ and the contemporary post-work imaginary, with Mason (2015) describing its content as “possibly the most revolutionary idea Marx ever had” (p.138).

For some, the problems of the post-work imaginary start and end with its interaction with this ‘Fragment.’ In his own critique of the post-work imaginary, Pitts (2017) argues that the theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary stems from its misunderstanding of the Marxist concept of the value-form. For the theorists of the post-work imaginary, value is treated not as an abstract form but as a quantifiable entity, corresponding to a set of inputs and outputs within the capitalist production process

(Pitts, 2017). The theory of ‘crisis’ on which the postcapitalist discourse is predicated is one that develops out of an apparent ‘crisis of value’ within contemporary production, due primarily to the abundance of information as the raw material of contemporary production and its ability to be ‘copied and pasted’ indefinitely. This, combined with the simultaneous liberation of human beings from the labour process due to automation, divorces the link between labour-time and exchange value, therefore sparking the crisis of capitalism that catalyses the shift into a ‘postcapitalist’ era (Pitts, 2017). However, Pitts (2017) argues that the interpretation of this as a ‘Marxist’ theory of value is fundamentally mistaken. On the one hand, for all their emphasis on the principle of ‘immaterial labour’ such as the production of information, the theorists of the post-work imaginary are far too material in their analysis (Pitts, 2017). Their critique of work and production “like most conventional value theory...emphasize[s] labour’s concrete expenditure over its abstraction” (Pitts, 2017, p.333). A Marxist labour theory of value, on the other hand, stresses the importance not of value but of *value-form*, which is not to describe concrete labour alone, “but...its commensuration in commodity exchange” (Pitts, 2017, p.333): a process which implicates, in the first instance, the social relations of production *as well as* its forces. This leads Pitts (2017) to his second criticism, which is that the theorists of the post-work imaginary, in the same breath, are not material enough due to the bracketing of these social relations of production from their analysis: “Fragment-thinking is nowhere near materialist enough, eliding the persistence of the social relations concealed and implied in changes in the immediate content of work” (p.334).

For Pitts (2017), this is the epicentre of the theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary. For all its reliance on Marx, it is a discourse that isn’t Marxist enough, basing its entire functionality and logic on a mis-reading of Marx’s concept of value-form. This mis-reading precludes particular social relations from view, underpinning its continuous reproduction of the very productivist image of work from which it seeks to break (Pitts, 2017). However, if there is one lesson to be learned from Althusser’s (1996) critique of those who mis-read Marx, it is that the nature of these mis-interpretations is *always* ideological. The theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary is not rooted in mis-interpretation alone: rather, these mis-interpretations are always signifiers of a deeper ideological malaise, of a deeper problematic that frames the discourse *in its entirety*. Through deeper analysis, conducted through the prism of ideology, it can be shown that the preclusion by the post-work imaginary of these social relations of work is the product of a persistent and pervasive humanist ideological base that sits at the core of its analysis. In order to understand this more fully, it is important to interrogate the relationship of the post-work imaginary to another of Marx’s texts: not only the *Grundrisse*, but the *Manuscripts of 1844*.

In an article for the *New Statesman*, Mason (2018) set about explaining ‘The Meaning of Marxism Today’, in a detour through the work of Raya Dunayevskaya: a

vanguard of Marxist-humanist philosophy and secretary to Leon Trotsky. Mason (2018) writes that her work “provides the link between classic Marxism and *the only form in which it can be relevant today*. ‘Marxism,’ she would insist, ‘is radical humanism’” (p.27, emphasis added). In this remarkable article, Mason (2018), as one of the foremost contributors to the postcapitalist discourse and its attendant post-work imaginary, refers directly to Marx’s (1981) *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, locating in them “an idea lost to Marxism” (p.29); the idea that “the real goal of human history is individual freedom and self-realisation” (p.29). Mason (2018) here combines, in explicit terms, his reading of the ‘Fragment on Machines’ in the *Grundrisse* with the Young Marx of the *Manuscripts*, to set out the ‘truly’ Marxist notion on which the vision of postcapitalism must rest: “Freed from work by the advance of automation, Marx had foreseen how humanity would use its leisure time: for the ‘free development of the individual’, not some collectivist utopia” (Mason, 2018, p.29).

The apparent compatibility between Marxist-humanism and this contemporary post-work imaginary is quite surprising given the post-human considerations of data, information, machines and cyborgs and the interconnection of these agents in networks of production that is so often central to ‘postcapitalist’ thinking. It is also surprising given the explicit attempts that it makes to distance itself from universal considerations of humanity and its related social constructions (such as race, sexuality, ability and gender). It is a discourse that develops out of the ‘anti-humanism’ of Antonio Negri (2017) who describes this project as “the refusal of all essentialist modes of individuation, the firm negation of the identity of the subject” (p.2), with the revolutionary actor by no means a ‘Man’ but an “assemblage of singularities [that] have the power to enable language to function, or rather to be able to trigger and transmit creation” (p.2). Indeed, Srnicek and Williams (2015) are firm in their assertion that “there is no authentic human essence to be realised, no harmonious unity to be returned to, no unalienated humanity obscured by false mediations, no organic wholeness to be achieved” (p.82). However, what is increasingly apparent is that Mason’s (2018) article is not an aberration or exception from an otherwise consistently anti-humanist discourse. Rather, the compatibility between these Marxist-humanist arguments and the post-work imaginary points to a deeper and more consistent ideological problem that effects the whole discourse.

The reason that there is such compatibility is because the post-work imaginary turns on what is a fundamentally humanist ideological conception of labour that is found first not in the *Grundrisse*, but in the *Manuscripts* so celebrated by Mason (2018). In particular, it turns on the concept of ‘social labour’ lifted from the political economy of the Young Marx (1981), which stresses the existence of inherently cooperative characteristics in both human beings and their labour, with this cooperation denoting their exceptionalism from other animals. As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, labour was argued by the Young Marx (1981) to be the social expression *par excellence* of the inherent

cooperative tendency of the human species, with capitalist organisations of labour relying fundamentally on the alienation of the human species from this natural tendency, wherein their labour was put to use in the production of capital for private hands. It is an argument readily available on the pages of Marx's (1981) *Manuscripts*: for example, he wrote of "communism...as the real *appropriation* of the *human* essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e. human) being" (p.90, original emphasis). Importantly, Marx (1981) made an equivalence between 'social' and 'human' beings, arguing that the social characteristics of human labour are inherent to its species-being: in other words that human labour is a 'naturally' social (cooperative) enterprise, which is alienated under capitalism but set free in the transition towards communism.

This ideological consideration of labour is problematic because nowhere in its formulations do the social relations of work appear. However, as an ideological problem it is more severe than merely a mis-reading or mis-interpretation: rather, *this problem affects this discourse's entire framing of the problem of work from the outset*. Before it even arrives at the automated labour process described by Marx (1974) in the *Grundrisse*, its very posing of the question of 'what is the problem with work?' is framed from its conception by its ideological roots in this Marxist-humanist concept of labour. Therefore, it is not simply that the social relations of work become mystified, but they are simply rendered unimportant, providing nothing more than considerable externalities to the main historical event taking place in the observation of 'work': that is, the alienation by capitalism of 'Man' from his essential species-activity and the struggle of the worker to overcome this alienation. In this way, humanism isn't just the vehicle through which the conclusions of the post-work imaginary are carried: rather, humanism provides the post-work imaginary with its entire problematic, its complete set of postulates with which to proceed (Althusser, 1996) and it is precisely this ideological operation that forecloses the production of sociological theory and precludes the social relations of work. Thus, Mason's (2018) article, celebrating the 'lost idea' of humanism in Marx, is by no means an aberration but is a comfortable and in no way contradictory expression of the "silent anthropology" (Althusser, 2015b, p.315) already present in the post-work imaginary.

Crucially, *this* must be the starting-point from which the post-work imaginary's interaction with the 'Fragment' is analysed. It is this humanist ideological approach to the concept of labour that foregrounds its theoretical weakness that reproduces its "Fragment-thinking" (Pitts, 2017, p.328) and its related shortcomings. Indeed, this ideological problematic is plainly observable. Take for example this oft-cited passage from Marx's (1974) 'Fragment':

The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree *general social knowledge* has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence,



the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the *general intellect* and been transformed in accordance with it. To what degree the powers of social production have been produced, not only in the form of knowledge, but also as immediate organs of social practice, of the real life process (p.706, emphasis added).

What is of importance here is Marx's (1974) description of the 'social' character of knowledge and information in its deployment in the capitalist labour process and its subsequent incubation in the 'general intellect.' A Marxist reading of the 'social' character of knowledge would argue that to describe this character is to describe its form in relation to the capitalist mode of production. The characteristics of knowledge or information are defined not by inherent characteristics but by "the material conditions of their production" (Marx & Engels, 1998, p.37), crystallised in a given mode of production (found in the combination between the forces and relations of production). However, it is clear to see how the functioning of the contemporary post-work imaginary depends upon a more humanist reading of the word 'social', found in the political economy of the Young Marx (1981) and of the concept of 'social labour' already discussed. Crucially, the emancipatory potential of the 'social' character of knowledge is located precisely in the spontaneously and inherently cooperative forms of labour that it inspires among a group of individuals now freed from the responsibilities of production by automation.

This is particularly evident in Mason's (2015) considerations of postcapitalism and of the post-work imaginary. Mason (2015) places a great deal of importance upon Marx's (1974) concept of 'general intellect' "which appears nowhere else – before or after – in his entire writings" (Mason, 2015, p.136) as, for Mason (2015) it is the precise vehicle in which the historical transition into 'postcapitalism' is made. Crucially, the 'general intellect' is the primary expression of the 'social' nature of knowledge and information in contemporary production: "In an economy where machines do most of the work, where human labour is really about supervising, mending and designing the machines, the nature of the knowledge locked inside the machines must, [Marx] writes, be 'social'" (Mason, 2015, p.134). However, the meaning behind this word 'social' and the realities that it describes only *make sense* in the context of a humanist framing and bear remarkable similarity to the concept of 'social labour' found in the Young Marx (1981). For Mason (2015), information becomes social to the extent to which it is produced and exercised by human individuals freed of the obligations of production by automation. The social character of knowledge is produced *precisely* by human beings who, thanks to the development of automation, are freed of the responsibilities of production and are therefore exchanging with one another 'naturally.' For example, Mason (2015) writes,

Non-market forms of production and exchange *exploit the basic human tendency to collaborate* – to exchange gifts of intangible value – which has always existed but in the margins of economic life. This is more than simply a rebalancing between public goods and private goods: it is a whole new and revolutionary thing. The proliferation of these non-market economic activities is making it possible for a cooperative, socially just society to emerge (p.143, emphasis added).

*This* is what Mason (2015) is referring to when he refers to the ‘social’ characteristics of information and indeed, this is how he interprets Marx’s (1974) meaning of the word too. Information is ‘social’ insofar as it incentivises these non-market forms of exchange that are predicated on this ‘basic human tendency’ to co-operate with one another. Describing peer-to-peer platforms such as Wikipedia, Mason (2015) describes how “it is not money the participants are exchanging. They are in effect exchanging gifts. And as anthropologists have long realized, the gift is only the physical symbol of something more intangible: call it goodwill, or happiness” (p.129).

In this way, information and automation are vehicles of emancipation in the first instance *not* because they create a crisis of value (this is added later), but because they combat the historical alienation of the human subject under capitalism and encourage the participation of human beings in socially co-operative labour as the very expression of their humanity. However, such ideological considerations entirely mystify the social relations of work from view because they are not important to the story being told or the problematic that is here addressed. For example the role of class struggle in determining the position of machinery within the labour process is not here included; the social relations of the labour process (the relations of production) are here invisible, as production is treated simply as a set of inputs and outputs that *facilitate* a particular social reaction; it treats the outside of work – the realm in which this ‘basic human tendency’ is fostered – as a politically neutral site, outside of capital, without its own social relations on which production depends (namely, the relations of reproduction). All of these things are hidden behind a formulation of production which turns on the basic ideological premise that labour is an essentially human activity merely unlocked by the forces of production, rather than one defined entirely by a given mode of production.

This humanist ideological problem is evident not only in the economic dimension of the post-work imaginary, but also in its politics too. Srnicek and Williams (2015) describe the political project that underpins the post-work imaginary as the defence of a so-called ‘left modernity’ (p.70). This fits with the accelerationist commitment to embrace the development of capitalism by arguing that instead of resisting modernity as a reflection of capitalism, the politics of the post-work imaginary must be predicated on a reclamation of the principles of modernity for itself: “Suggesting that history can progress through deliberate human action, it is the nature of this progress that competing

definitions of modernity have struggled over” (Srnicsek & Williams, 2015, p.72). Carefully, humanism is brought out into the ‘broad daylight’ of critique (Althusser, 2003, p.261), as Srnicsek and Williams (2015) do not celebrate the universal humanism that is brought along with modernity but instead describe this ‘left modernity’ as “a humanism that is not defined in advance. This is a project of self-realisation, but one without a pre-established endpoint” (p.82). This is a tactic used by Srnicsek and Williams (2015) to allow for their inclusions of the multitude in their theory, as a fluid, de-gendered and cybernetically augmented mass as opposed to the modern capitalist conception of Man.

However, the image of Man does not disappear from the stage but lurks again in the theoretical background. This is clear in the explication of the aims of ‘left modernity’ as a political project. In tandem with the economic conditions of postcapitalism, Srnicsek and Williams (2015) describe this ‘postcapitalism’ and the post-work imaginary – as *the* manifestations of the principles of ‘left modernity’ – as the conclusion of a “process of revision and construction” (p.82-83) completed by human individuals, through which “humanity can come to know itself” (p.82-83). Here, again, the central political problematic of ‘postcapitalism’ is observed in the historical struggle of human beings against their alienation and their presentation of an alienated self that is demanded of them by capitalism. Thus, accelerationism and ‘postcapitalism’ are desirable insofar as they fit with the political problematic of this ‘left modernity’: that is, the struggle (through socially cooperative forms of labour) against this condition of alienation. As Srnicsek and Williams (2015) write:

The development, deepening and expansion of knowledge enable us to imagine and achieve capacities that are otherwise unattainable. As we acquire technical knowledge of our built environment and scientific knowledge of the natural world, and come to understand the fluid tendencies of the social world, we gain greater powers to act (p.81).

According to Srnicsek and Williams (2015), left modernity will be the product of a renewed “social reasoning” (p.81), completed by a collective of individuals freed from the obligations of work by technological development. Tellingly, the roots of this social reasoning are somewhat unexplored, left simply as an assumed outcome of the inherent cooperation of this newly liberated human collective. This is evident in key passages, such as that in which they describe this emerging project as based upon “increasing the capacity of humanity to act according to whatever its desires might become” (Srnicsek & Williams, 2015, p.83). In much the same way as the humanist concept of ‘social labour,’ Srnicsek’s and Williams’ (2015) notion of left modernity and the post-work imaginary that rests on it are considered to be products of the inherent cooperative quality of the human species, which is freed up and deployed by virtue of the human liberation from alienating work.

Despite their protestations to the contrary and their care in declaring that “there is no authentic human essence” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p.83), it is apparent that their vision of emancipation rests upon an ideological image of the human subject and human labour.

Again, this post-work imaginary forecloses the view of particular social relations. In much the same way as in Mason’s (2015) critique, class struggle is all but invisible, both in the analysis of information and technology (treated as a static process of inputs and outputs) but also in the analysis of emancipation, as emancipation is observed not in the struggle of the proletariat but in the self-realisation of the human individual. Despite their citation of key feminist concepts – in particular Donna Haraway’s (1991) concept of the ‘cyborg’ – in their project of reclaiming modernity, Srnicek’s and Williams’ (2015) analysis tends to downplay the implications of the feminist critique of modernity that follows the image of the cyborg: Haraway (1991) does not use the cyborg to celebrate automation and embrace modernity in its wake, but uses it to demonstrate that ‘modernity’ and all its attendant notions (gender and work in particular, but also the very notion of ‘automation’ as the becoming-mechanical of that which was organic before) have only ever been important to the capitalist imaginary and are in fact antithetical to emancipatory thought. Relatedly, despite its proposed radicality, this image of the post-work imaginary – by virtue of the social relations mystified in it – fails to escape the traditional (and severely gendered) notion of work it seeks to critique. Whilst left modernity and its post-work imaginary has as its objective the radical re-imagination of self, it is powered by the freeing of time by automation and the provision of money through a UBI: “Time and money therefore represent key components of freedom in any substantive sense” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, p.80). Such a view does not break with the predominant view of capitalist ‘economics’, but stays strictly within its boundaries, accepting its economic parameters, still imagining economics within the closed ideological parameters of supply and demand and not adequately questioning the class character of money itself. “One form of wage labour may correct the abuses of another,” so Marx (1974) wrote in the *Grundrisse*, “but no form of wage labour can correct the abuse of wage labour itself” (p.123).

Relatedly, this humanist problem finds its expression in those texts more focused on the unsettling of the cultural dominance of work in contemporary society too. For example, Frayne (2015) argues that the contemporary post-work imaginary must rest on what he calls a ‘politics of time’ (p.217) – lifted from Frayne’s (2015) contact with André Gorz’s (2012) work – which turns on a very similar formula to the other additions to this post-work discourse: namely, that the technological development of capitalism opens up an emancipatory opportunity in the use of free time. As Frayne (2015) writes, “in view of the social constraints on working less, the question we must ask is whether and how society can be organised so that *everybody* can benefit from the time saved by capitalism’s productive development” (p.217, original emphasis). Though Frayne’s (2015) text centres on his interviews with workers in Britain who have developed various strategies for

resisting work, he is careful to avoid an individualistic interpretation of resistance: that is, resistance to work as something which the individual must take up alone. Rather, Frayne (2015) insists that “where to go next is not an individual but *a social choice*” (p.217, emphasis added).

Here again the word ‘social’ appears as the descriptor of the parameters of emancipatory action. But again, in deploying the word ‘social’, Frayne (2015) is not referring to the social relations of work as found in a capitalist society. For example, Frayne (2015) expresses interest in considerations of a UBI as it solves “the puzzle of how to reduce working-hours without low-paid workers experiencing a loss of income” (p.225), seemingly leaving the social relations of work (only in the context of which is the notion of an ‘income’ important) and, by extension, the productivist image of traditional work itself in-tact. Rather, for Frayne (2015) the success of the post-work imaginary is located in the ‘social’ “process of collective exploration and open debate” (p.222) that would ‘naturally’ occur among a society freed of the burden of paid employment. As Frayne (2015) writes,

The guiding ideal of social development would be the extent to which people were free to pursue and develop a range of interests and capacities. With more time to ourselves, we would have more time to work for ourselves, and hence would no longer depend on the economic sphere to cater to our every need (p.221).

Frayne (2015) appeals explicitly to Gorz’s (2012) notion of autonomy as “work-for-oneself” (p.57), which Gorz (2012) describes as the work “of self-realization by the creation of ‘non-alienated objects’” (p.57). For Frayne (2015), the contemporary post-work imaginary is to be located not in the structural adjustment of capitalist social relations, but in the expansion of the human propensity for this self-realisation and the construction of a social edifice based upon it: “The hope is that an increasing amount of free-time will allow people to forge new relations of co-operation, communication and exchange, and thereby become participants in the construction of their own futures” (p.222). It is not that these are undesirable conclusions: on the contrary, they form the imaginary of any communist project. But the problem is that the repeated humanist framing of these conclusions consistently precludes the social relations on which such desirable ends would be based, locating them in the spontaneous cooperation of the human species, rather than in a concrete political project.

This humanist ideological pattern continues to be repeated through numerous other popular examples. Carl Cederström and Peter Fleming (2012) argue that the post-work imaginary must be an exercise entirely of self-actualization, of subjective resistance against the hyper-alienation of contemporary work. Their analysis of work is observed less in the social relations it inaugurates, instead observed in the tendency of the human

individual to be alienated from life itself (Cederström & Fleming, 2012). Their conclusion tends to overlook the relationship between these anomic feelings and their expression in concrete relations of work, instead suggesting a “symbolic suicide” (Cederström & Fleming, 2012, p.66), where the target is not capitalism but the form of alienated subjectivity contemporary individuals have come to embody. Emancipation is here not an outcome of class struggle, but possible only in the self-actualizing struggle against this alienated condition: “Unlearning life, then, is what the symbolic suicide attempts to achieve, to wipe out ourselves in a way that re-creates a new vista” (Cederström & Fleming, 2012, p.67). It emerges again in Standing’s (2016) theory of the *Precariat*. Though the cornerstone of the precariousness that defines this new class of contemporary workers is the disappearance of work, Standing (2016) asserts that this same disappearance is the precise condition of emancipation too. The social relations implicated in emancipation are not analysed but merely signified, with Standing (2016) arguing that emancipation will be revealed through the social activity of a newly liberated humanity:

This leads back to the nature of freedom. It is not an ability to do what we want, even allowing for the caveat that it should do no harm to others. Freedom comes from being part of a community in which to realise freedom in the exercise of it. It is *revealed* through actions, not something granted from on high or divined in stone tablets (p.195, original emphasis).

Politics and political action are conveniently considered as the after-effect of initial liberation, incubated in the inherent creativity and cooperation of the liberated individual. Social relations, once more, are mystified from view, as externalities to be decided after the fact.

Here evident, across these numerous examples, is the extent to which the post-work imaginary is defined by a fundamentally humanist problematic. The post-work imaginary is an emancipatory project based upon the extent to which the conditions of contemporary political economy facilitate the freedom of the human individual from work, incentivising their engagement in ‘naturally’ or inherently cooperative interaction with one another. The roots of this ideological enterprise rest in the contact of this discourse with the early political-economic works of the Young Marx (1981), from which it has lifted its humanist ideological conception of labour and its ‘social’ characteristics. It is this fundamental ideological underpinning that forecloses sociological theory by consequence of the repeated preclusion of the social relations of work from its considerations. Emancipation is considered ‘social’ not because it is reflected in the social relations of work but because it is reflected in this inherent cooperative quality of the human species and their labour. This humanism accounts for the fundamental theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary and the problems incubated within it can be traced

back to this core ideological problem. Despite the clear influence of Marx and Marxism upon this discourse, the key theoretical principles that make it a rigorous form of analysis (the stressing of the primacy of social relations and of the class struggles reflected in these relations) is consistently bracketed and set aside by the post-work imaginary, in favour of an analysis that argues that advancements in capitalist production will finally liberate humanity from work and thereby catalyse a new form of society based on their inherent and 'natural' cooperative abilities.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown how the contemporary post-work imaginary presents only a limited critique of work and that the roots of this limitation are located in a problem of persistent and pervasive humanist ideology. Despite the attractive and compelling vision of the future set out by the theorists of the post-work imaginary, its analysis consistently brackets and mystifies social relations from view. Its vision, that the development of the productive forces of capitalism and the consequent automation of greater parts of the labour process can liberate humanity from work, unwittingly overlooks particular social relations and the class struggles reflected in these relations. Consequently, the post-work imaginary has been shown to reproduce and reinforce the very productivist tropes it seeks to escape, complementing traditional views of work and of workers which have always reflected capitalist domination rather than 'postcapitalist' liberation.

The chapter has rooted this theoretical weakness of the post-work imaginary in a very particular ideological operation: linked primarily to its dependence upon a humanist ideological concept of labour found in the works of the Young Marx (1981). This has been shown to be more than simply a problem of interpretation but fundamentally a problem of ideology, a problem that has set the very epistemological parameters of the post-work imaginary. The analysis of the post-work imaginary has proceeded from an initial humanist framing of its problematic, that the problem with contemporary work is its tendency to alienate individuals from the inherently cooperative character of their labour, and that the advancement of information and automation in contemporary capitalism expresses a capacity to negate this alienation by encouraging these cooperative characteristics of human labour. Consequently, the social relations of work are mystified in the post-work imaginary precisely because they are unimportant to the observation of this central historical event. The transition to 'postcapitalism' and therefore to a future society without work, is not observed in the development of class struggle and of the social relations reflected in this struggle but is observed fundamentally in the 'natural' human struggle against alienation that is now facilitated by the contemporary conditions of life. The social relations of work are therefore not simply missing but more dangerously, treated only as indicative externalities of a more central humanist event.

One of the most evident characteristics of the limitations of this discourse is its propensity to operate within and reinforce very traditional notions of work. The humanist ideological roots of the contemporary post-work imaginary are compatible with an image of work as a waged and productive activity that takes place within defined institutional parameters. In the next chapter, this thesis looks towards Marxist-feminist theory and the centrality of its critique of such traditional notions of work. What is clear from this analysis of feminist theory is that the break with traditional considerations of work such as these implicates a simultaneous deconstruction of humanism as an ideology. The post-work imaginary lacks this critical aptitude and is limited because of it. Therefore, the following chapter argues that feminism, and Marxist-feminism in particular, offers a more radical and more appropriate platform from which to launch the critique of work.



## Humanism, Ideology and Feminist Critiques of Reproductive Labour

This chapter analyses feminist sociological responses to shifts in the organisation of reproductive labour in the twenty first century, demonstrating the extent to which emerging humanist ideological tendencies pose a threat to the explanatory potential of feminist sociology. The twenty first century has seen global labour markets play an increasingly influential role in the way that reproductive labour under capitalism is organised, as the figure of the housewife – whose reproductive labour was largely concentrated within the industrial family unit – gives way to more globalised figurations of the reproductive labourer, organised in emerging industries such as domestic labour, sex work, tissue donation and surrogacy. These reproductive shifts implicate synonymous shifts in the social relations of reproduction under capitalism, visible in their expression in new global patterns of work, migration and imperialism, reflective of new global inequalities, new forms of gendered violence and, ultimately, new configurations of class struggle. However, these new social changes risk mystification beneath an emerging humanist ideological discourse that has risen to meet and analyse these new orientations of reproductive labour, relying on humanism as a way of distinguishing contemporary forms of reproductive labour from those which preceded it. This emerging humanist tendency cites specific and heightened expressions of human harm and human *alienation* as a way of conducting this analysis: however, this ideological tendency reproduces particular theoretical oversights and limitations against which feminist theory has consistently warned in the context of reproductive labour. The conclusion reached by this chapter is that the sociological analysis of these contemporary forms of reproductive labour demands that the critique of humanist ideology found in the Marxist-feminism of the mid-to-late twentieth century be revisited for today. In the approving analysis of Melinda Cooper's and Catherine Waldby's (2014) theory of 'clinical labour' at the end of this chapter, the thesis provides an insight into how this is possible and how this recapitulation of the critique of humanist ideology can help to produce knowledge of the changing conditions of reproduction in the bioeconomy.

Theoretically, the definition and deconstruction of humanist ideology has been a crucial exercise in the production of Marxist-feminist critique. The Marxist-feminism of the mid-to-late twentieth century, in revealing for the first time the dialectical relationship between the productive labour of the factory and the reproductive labour of the household, found in the deconstruction of humanist ideology the precise theoretical operation through which this revelation was possible. The capitalist reproductive relations of the household were shown to be hidden beneath "anthropological sophistries" (Firestone,

1979, p.17), which excluded reproductive labour from considerations of work by excusing it as the fulfilment of ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ duties as opposed to a form of work in its own right, organised according to the constellation of power and class within the capitalist mode of production. However, in the wake of these contemporary forms of reproductive labour and their organisation in the twenty first century, these sophistries re-emerge in the form of a renewed humanist ideological tendency which attempts to re-establish the dividing line between ‘work’ and ‘non-work’ – necessarily exploded by Marxist-feminism – in order to pronounce the specific human harms implicated by these emerging reproductive ‘industries.’ The theoretical defence against this emerging tendency demands a re-visitation of the principles of Marxist-feminism, particularly its critique of humanist ideology. Firstly, it is important to analyse these principles in more detail in an exploration of the Marxist-feminist theoretical approach.

## MARXIST-FEMINISM, REPRODUCTION AND IDEOLOGY

To speak of the social relations of work under capitalism, one must speak too of the relations that govern the *reproduction* of work. To describe what takes place when the worker and the capitalist meet, it is not enough to describe the relations that govern the division of labour within the factory walls, of the absorption of surplus-value at the close of the labour process or the payment of wages. Because these social relations are not relations of the workplace alone: on the contrary, they demand reproduction within spaces and amongst actors who fall outside of this traditional productive arena. To describe the *reproductive* relations contained herein is the *only* way to fully describe the social relations of production and of capitalism more generally. This has been the dominant argument made in Marxist-feminist approaches to work: as Tithi Bhattacharya (2017) describes it,

It is an approach that is not content to accept what seems like a visible, finished entity – in this case, our worker at the gates of her workplace – but interrogates the complex network of social processes and human relations that produces the conditions of existence for that entity (p.2).

Whilst traditional Marxist theory understood exploitation through the political economy of the wage-labour relation (as expressed, for example, in the labour theory of value), Marxist-feminism has argued that viewing exploitation through the prism of wage-labour and labour-power alone mystifies the exploitation necessary for the very reproduction of this labour-power. Analysis of the wage-labour relation says little about the exploitation of women in the household, about racialized experiences of capitalism and colonialism, or about the emerging forms of slave- and informal labour underpinning the globalised

economy. Marxist-feminism has therefore centralised new questions within the sociology of work, about “what constitutes work, who is the working class, and what is the nature of class struggle” (Federici, [2008] 2012, p.95).

Emerging from the 1970s onwards, a vanguard of Marxist-feminist theorists (see Dalla Costa & James, 1975; Federici, 2012; Firestone, 1979; James, 2012; Mies, 1986; Vogel, [1983] 2014) were responsible for the introduction of this theory of reproduction into Marxist theoretical discourse. Arguably, Étienne Balibar’s ([1964] 2015) contribution to *Reading Capital* introduces a rigorous and detailed consideration of reproduction into Marxist philosophy. However, even the analysis of reproduction forwarded by Balibar (2015) falls short of an analysis of the reproduction of those social relations ideologically excluded from the realm of ‘production’ proper. It was, rather, this vanguard of Marxist-feminists who opened up reproduction and sexuality “*historically...pointing out that reproduction can be understood ‘in the last instance’ not only in an economic way, but in a way that takes into account the entire conditions for the ‘perpetuation of the worker’*” (Power, 2017, p.227, original emphasis).

Crucially, Marxist-feminism looks to Marx to argue that the explication of the capitalist social formation ought not simply ‘include’ the relations of reproductive labour: rather, *it must begin with them*. In his *Origin of the Family*, Friedrich Engels ([1888] 1988) cited Marx in arguing that the relations of the modern family – based around the male breadwinner and the female housewife – contained “*in miniature all the contradictions which later extend throughout society and its state*” (p.121-122, original emphasis). Firestone (1979) took this further and wrote that, “Marx was on to something *more profound than he knew* when he observed that the family contained within itself in embryo all the antagonisms that later develop on a wide scale within society and the state” (p.20, emphasis added). In this way, Marxist-feminism essentially *reads* – in the Althusserian (2015a, 2015b; see also Power, 2017) sense of the term – the critique of reproductive social relations in Marx’s political economy. Marxism, so it is argued, contains the necessary concepts through which it is possible to explicate the whole of the capitalist social formation *from the starting point* of reproduction. As Dalla Costa and James (1975) wrote, “if you don’t know how women are exploited, you can never really know how men are” (p.35).

The wage-labour relation details how surplus-value is generated and absorbed through the commodification of labour as labour-power and its mobilisation through the wage-labour relation: normally observed within particular productive settings such as the factory or the office. However, what is missing from this analysis is precisely the process by which labour-power as a commodity is *reproduced* for sale each and every day. In order for the worker to arrive at the gates of the factory each day, there is a vast amount of unpaid work that goes into the preparation and reproduction of that worker on a regular basis: namely, the reproductive labour or ‘housework’ (Federici, [1975] 2012, p.15)

disproportionately completed by women. As Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James (1975) wrote,

The ability to labor resides only in a human being whose life is consumed in the process of producing. First it must be nine months in the womb, must be fed, clothed and trained; then when it works its bed must be made, its floors swept, its lunchbox prepared, its sexuality not gratified but quietened, its dinner ready when it gets home, even if this is eight in the morning from the night shift. This is how labor power is produced and reproduced when it is daily consumed in the factory or the office. *To describe its basic production and re-production is to describe women's work* (p.11, original emphasis).

From this perspective, Marxist-feminism makes necessary the adaptation of Marxist concepts upon which its critique of work and capitalism have for so long relied. For instance, the labour theory of value no longer holds as a prism through which to view either exploitation or the labour process inherent to capitalist production. The labour theory of value – in concentrating on the capture of surplus-value from the exploitation of labour-power – mystifies the role of reproduction in this equation and therefore is inadequate in providing a full view of exploitation under capitalism. As Federici (2012) wrote,

The wage gives the impression of a fair deal: you work and you get paid, hence you and your boss each get what's owed; while in reality the wage, rather than paying you for the work you do, hides all the unpaid work that goes into profit (p.16).

The traditional consideration of work as an exploitative relationship between worker and employer no longer holds: “When capital pays husbands they get two workers, not one” (James, [1972] 2012, p.66). Moreover, the factory and the office can no longer maintain their place as the primary sites of exploitation under capitalism. Reproduction makes necessary the inclusion of the family and the community as crucial locations within capitalist accumulation processes: “The community is the other half of capitalist organization, the other area of hidden capitalist exploitation, *the other, hidden, source of surplus labor*” (Dalla Costa & James, 1975, p.11, original emphasis).

Marxist-feminist theories of reproduction fundamentally change the Marxist critique of work and the observation of its historical development. Through the lens of production alone, capitalism ‘creates’ its workers primarily through the privatisation of the means of production, thereby making necessary the workers’ sale of their labour-power in return for access to necessities. However, Marxist-feminism exposes the inadequacy of this consideration through production alone, arguing that this primitive

accumulation of wage-labourers is at all times complemented by a primitive accumulation of *reproductive labourers* too: a process that Maria Mies (1986) described as “housewifization” (p.74). In this way, the concept of reproduction forces the reconfiguration of Marxist considerations of imperialism as the dominant explanation of how capitalism expands and reproduces itself. Just as Rosa Luxemburg ([1913] 2003) argued that imperialism was symptomatic of capitalism’s need for constant spatial expansion in order to survive and reproduce itself, the concept of reproduction as provided by Marxist-feminism argues that this movement is matched by a continued expansion of patriarchal social relations as capitalism necessarily ‘creates’ reproductive labourers alongside the wage-labourers of its factories. As Mies (1986) writes, “the ‘freedom’ of the proletarian to sell his labour power is based on the non-freedom of the housewife. Proletarianization of men is based on the housewifization of women” (p.110).

The concept of reproduction also makes necessary the reconfiguration of Marxist considerations of class and class struggle. Work is of interest to Marxism because it is a meeting place between the bearers of the bourgeois and proletarian classes and the workplace itself becomes a visible arena of class struggle in many ways. However, in expanding the notion of ‘work’ beyond the factory floor alone, the concept of reproduction shifts the site of class struggle into the household too. Class alone is no longer an adequate description of the inherent antagonism that continues to flare at the base of the capitalist mode of production: rather, Marxist-feminism makes necessary the addition of *gender* to this dialectic. ‘Class struggle’ is therefore argued to not simply be present in the relationship between bourgeois and proletarian, but between man and woman: the former with access to capital (through the wage) and the latter disciplined into their reproductive role in order to access this capital. Women are not simply struggling against capitalism, they are also struggling against patriarchy and the male sex and, in the case of women in the global South, also fighting on a third front against white supremacy and colonialism. The addition of gender and race complicates the consideration of class struggle and renders inadequate traditional historical analyses of class struggle in the factory alone:

It is absurd to compare the struggle of women for wages for housework to the struggle of male workers in the factory for more wages. In struggling for more wages, the waged worker challenges his social role but remains within it. When we struggle for wages for housework we struggle unambiguously and directly against our social role (Federici, 2012, p.19).

When considered through the lens of work and production alone, this struggle is mystified entirely. There is no place for housewives in the traditional class struggle of the proletariat. As James (2012) writes, “unions don’t know we exist” (p.66) and according to others, as Federici (2012) famously penned, “we are seen as nagging bitches, not as workers in

struggle” (p.16). Therefore, it is not simply that women as workers should be ‘included’ in the traditional class struggle: rather, class struggle itself is *only comprehensible* from the feminist perspective. As Federici (2012) wrote,

When we say that housework is a moment of capitalist production we clarify our specific function in the capitalist division of labor and the specific forms that our revolt against it must take. Ultimately, when we say that we produce capital, we say that we can and want to destroy it, rather than engage in a losing battle to move from one form and degree of exploitation to another (p.32).

In this way, Marxist-feminism produces a unique concept and a unique position in relation to social science. It at once challenges traditional Marxist critiques of capitalism, arguing that they are inadequate and mystify the unique exploitation of women and mystify the role of reproduction. However, this critique also distances itself from the more liberal feminist critiques of work such as those by Betty Friedan ([1962] 1992) and Arlie Hochschild (1997, [1986] 2003) for whom the struggle of women was visible in their greater involvement in traditionally male employment sectors. After all, as Dalla Costa and James (1975) wrote, “slavery to an assembly line is not liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink” (Dalla Costa & James, 1975, p.35).

Crucially, the development of Marxist-feminist theory in this way – its exposure of the social relations that exist between production and reproduction – involved a break with ideology: in particular, with humanist ideology. The precise ideological concept beneath which the social relations of reproduction are mystified is that of humanism, through which these social relations are bracketed and set aside, with reproductive work explained away by its consideration as a ‘natural’ or ‘biological’ activity rather than an expression of gendered social relations. As Federici (2012) wrote, in this way reproductive work is “ideologically sold to us as the ‘other’ of work: a space of freedom in which we can presumably be our true selves” (Federici, 2012, p.23). More radically, Marxist-feminism breaks with the whole ideological representation of reproduction as a manifestation of the biological characteristics or the very *nature* of the female body, instead exposing it as the social manifestation of a particular and historical gendered class struggle. In this way, it is possible to speak of the theoretical anti-humanism of the Marxist-feminist critique.

The social relations of work and reproduction – the relations of capitalism – come into being accompanied by particular knowledges of the body, of sexuality and of gender. In other words, the precise social relations that inaugurate the family unit and its pairing with the industrial worker, were at all times reflected within ideologies that reproduced and perpetuated discourse in relation to the human body and its ‘biological’ capacities. This was, for example, the key argument made by Foucault ([1976] 1998) in Volume One of his *History of Sexuality*:

The society that emerged in the nineteenth century – bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will – did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex (p.69).

This ‘uniform truth’ of sexuality is the basis for the ideologies that have concealed the social relations of reproduction from view. The gendered division of labour and the dialectical social relationship between production and reproduction is concealed beneath notions that production and reproduction are in fact *not* founded in social relations at all but correspond to the ‘natural’ characteristics of particular gendered bodies. As Federici (2012) wrote of gendered considerations of wage-labour, “there is no doubt concerning its meaning; you work, not because you like it, or because it comes naturally to you, but because it is the only condition under which you are allowed to live” (p.16). However, with reproductive labour this is not deemed to be the case, as the motivations behind reproduction are deemed to be physiological (corresponding to natural urges/necessities) as opposed to socio-economic.

Ideologically, humanism has been crucially important for the interpellation of women into their gendered social roles. For example, Simone de Beauvoir ([1949] 2011) demonstrated how the social positioning of women was directly justified by modern humanism, where the capacity for reason in men translated into their capacity for the mastery over nature: a capacity with which women struggled due to the inherent irrationality of their own reproductive nature. As de Beauvoir (2011) wrote, “[Man] grasps his body as a direct and normal link with the world that he believes he apprehends in all objectivity, whereas he considers woman’s body an obstacle, a prison, burdened by everything that particularizes it” (p.5). This inherent ‘struggle’ against the nature of reproduction within the female body provided the recurring ideological theme with which female subjectivity was repeatedly interpellated. According to a number of feminist histories of medicine (see Corea, 1988; Martin [1987] 2001; Scutt, 1990), modern medical discourses have been developed alongside a continued accumulation of knowledge regarding the female body and its perceived irrationality in relation to its male counterpart. As Finkelstein (1990) wrote “the woman who extended herself beyond customary social roles was, in some sense, ill and needing medical treatment” (p.13). These medical discourses, and the construction of narratives surrounding supposedly reproductive illnesses of the mind and body in women contributed to the construction of a double-edged discourse: solidifying a particular image of ‘Woman’ and at the same time solidifying the image of ‘Man’ in reference to this ‘other.’ Sexual promiscuity, moral

deficiency or independent thought on the part of women was seen “as a form of hysteria or illness directly related to the womb” (Finkelstein, 1990, p.14) relating back once again to the weakness of women to transcend the immediate physiological urges of their bodies, thus forbidding their ascent to the status of being fully human (and therefore justifying their lower social position).

From a Marxist-feminist perspective, these gendered discourses do not float freely in the modern era but are intimately tied to the development of the capitalist mode of production. As Federici (2004) argued in her text *Caliban and the Witch*, there is an observable and important correlation between the development of the humanist fascination with the body (and the discourses of knowledge that accompanied this fascination) and the process of primitive accumulation that accompanied the emergence of capitalist social relations. In the seventeenth century, humanist philosophy was taking shape in the form of a Cartesian struggle between the ‘forces of Reason’ (“parsimony, prudence, sense of responsibility, self-control” [Federici, 2004, p.134]) and ‘the low instincts of the Body’ (“lewdness, idleness, systematic dissipation of one’s vital energies” [Federici, 2004, p.134]). Crucially, this philosophical struggle was reflected in the social transformation taking place at the time: a transformation that gave rise to the social relations of production and reproduction integral to the emergence of capitalism. As Federici (2004) wrote,

The battle which the 17th-century discourse on the person imagines unfolding in the microcosm of the individual has arguably a foundation in the reality of the time. It is an aspect of that broader process of social reformation, whereby, in the ‘Age of Reason’, the rising bourgeoisie attempted to remold the subordinate classes in conformity with the needs of developing capitalist society (p.135).

According to Federici (2004) this emerging humanist philosophy was reflected in a developing gendered division of labour between men and women. The stripping of women of their rights over land, tools and other means of subsistence was justified on the basis that men, freed of reproductive obligations, were more capable of reason (and therefore closer to the human world than that of the animal kingdom) than women who were actively held back by the instincts of their bodies and its reproductive system (Federici, 2004). Indeed, the female body is here constructed “as uncontrolled, dangerous, savage ‘nature’” (Mies, 1986, p.90), with “control over the natural world, control over human nature being the first, most indispensable step” (Federici, 2004, p.140) towards bourgeois control over a newly formed class society. In this way, the “new anthropological paradigm” (Federici, 2004, p.134) of the seventeenth century provided the precise ideological concepts through which to facilitate and justify the social revolution taking place at the time, in which the institution of the modern family found its beginnings.



Humanism was also the ideology through which not only economic violence but physical repression was exercised over women as the bourgeoisie attempted to discipline these newly formed reproductive labourers into their familial positions (Federici, 2004). Just as Marx (2013) described how the making of the industrial working class was preceded by the “enforced transformation into vagabonds and paupers” (p.514) of those who resisted the new regime, Federici (2004) detailed the ways in which unproductive sexuality became criminalised by this emerging social order: new forms of moralism penalised nakedness and sexuality and decried manual labour as an unnatural occupation for women, with those who defied such moral ideologies ostracised as “sexually aggressive shrews or even as ‘whores’ and ‘witches’” (p.96). This violence comes to a head with the European witch hunts which, through this lens, cannot be viewed simply as the product of an ill-educated society coming to grips with new-found knowledges but as an integral and systematic campaign of violence that was the crucial midwife of the incoming capitalist society, dependent fundamentally on the establishment of social control over the means of reproduction (Federici, 2004). As Federici (2004) wrote, “it was in the course of this vast process of social engineering that a new concept of the body and a new policy toward it began to be shaped” (p.137), with violence as its central pivot “for blood and torture were necessary to ‘breed an animal’ capable of regular, homogeneous, and uniform behavior, indelibly marked with the memory of the new rules” (p.144).

Marxist-feminism has argued that this history of the primitive accumulation of women, of which their violent persecution, torture and criminalisation was all a part, must necessarily be viewed in the context of the emergence of the modern family. Just as Marx (2013) writes of wage-labour in *Capital*, following this process of primitive accumulation the need for direct force disappears and the relations of reproduction are experienced as ‘natural’ (p.516). It is precisely here where ideology serves its purpose (Althusser, 2008). At the end of this process of primitive accumulation, the relationships in the modern family are not experienced as forced set of social relations but, on the contrary, appear to approach both men and women as expressions of a *natural order*: “The image of a worker freely alienating his labor, or confronting his body as capital to be delivered to the highest bidder, refers to a working class already molded by the capitalist work-discipline” (Federici, 2004, p.135).

Crucially, the same ideological constructions that facilitate the naturalisation of the social relations of the modern family, bleed into the gendering of work itself. A correlation emerges between the socio-political position of the work of men who are able to transcend the immediate physiological demands of their bodies and the work of women whose class position is defined precisely by the assumed inability of this process of transcendence. As Dalla Costa and James (1975) argued,

The housewife's situation as a pre-capitalist mode of labor and consequently this 'femininity' imposed upon her, makes her see the world, the others and the entire organization of work as something which is obscure, essentially unknown and unknowable; not lived; perceived only as a shadow behind the shoulders of the husband who goes out each day and meets this something (p.37-38).

This argument is further confirmed by other Marxist-feminist critiques of work and reproduction. For example, Firestone (1979) demonstrated the effect of this ideology in relation to women's experience of the Second World War, in which women were called to fill the jobs in manufacturing and manual labour left vacant by the men who had left to fight. Firestone (1979) argued that this transcendence of the household was akin to a transcendence of bodily limitations, as these women "were temporarily granted human, as opposed to female status" (p.33). In the same movement, it is this same ideological construction that contributes to the cheapening of reproductive labour. The work of women is considered an animalistic and impulsive form of work whose powerlessness derives precisely from its ties to the physiological needs of the human organism. This gendered view of the division of labour has been crucial for the development of capitalism. Because whilst men's work is considered in the form of a political act that must be encouraged through the payment of a wage, women's work, pictured as *a natural resource*, therefore requires no such encouragement or payment, and can be taken advantage of at will and free of charge: as "a natural resource, freely available like air and water" (Mies, 1986, p.110). It is for this reason that capitalism can justify the withholding of wages from those who complete reproductive labour. If reproductive labour is considered as an ever-present activity that might otherwise be wasted if not taken advantage of and organised properly, then the requirement to pay for such labour is deemed unnecessary.

Therefore, the definition of ideology – particularly humanist ideology – is crucial to the construction of the Marxist-feminist critique. Humanism is a pivotal ideological tool that has facilitated the original formation of capitalist social structures, the primitive accumulation of women into their positions within these structures and the maintenance of the sexual division of labour necessary for the accumulation strategies of capitalist production. Thus, the Marxist-feminist movements – such as the demand for Wages for Housework in the 1970s – are *theoretical* movements that precisely sought to cut through these ideological deployments: by *defining* them. Without this clear ideological critique in mind, the Wages for Housework movement confronts feminism as merely a "critical ploy" (Weeks, 2011, p.128) designed only to make impossible demands of capitalism in order to demonstrate its inadequacy. However, the struggle for Wages for Housework was more than this and is representative of a class struggle both in theory and in practice,

valuable in its exposure and definition of an ideological construction which underpins the contemporary oppression of women. As Federici (2012) wrote,

*It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us (p.18, original emphasis).*

Thus, Marxist-feminism has not merely constructed a critique of capitalism through the inclusion of reproduction within considerations of exploitation. Rather, it is also responsible for a fundamentally feminist critique of ideology and specifically of humanist ideology, analysing its role in the facilitation of the exploitation of women in modern capitalism. This ideological critique that has emerged out of Marxist-feminism will be crucial in the examination of capitalist exploitation of reproductive labour, particularly in the context of twenty first century developments that confront the feminist sociology of work as new or heightened in the present day.

## REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

The Marxist-feminist theory so far dealt with emerged largely in the twentieth century, faced with a very particular orientation of reproductive labour: localised within the industrial family unit and expressed predominantly through the role of the Fordist housewife as the dialectical complement to the industrial male breadwinner. In the twenty first century, feminist theory is met with an emerging tendency that sees reproductive labour organised in different ways. The family unit remains as an important social manifestation of these reproductive relations: however, there is an observed migration of these relations, particularly in advanced capitalist economies, out of the traditional family unit and on to global labour markets. As Mies (1986) wrote, in anticipation of such shifts,

Man-the-breadwinner, though still the main ideological figure behind the new policies, is empirically disappearing from the stage. Not only does rising unemployment of men make their role of breadwinner a precarious one, but marriage for women is also no longer an economic guarantee of their lifelong livelihood (p.16).

Fundamentally, the principal role of reproductive labour remains the same: namely, the reproduction of labour-power. However, the reproductive relations that govern this are not confined to the family or the community in the same ways as in the twentieth century. Increasingly, globalised labour markets emerge as the contemporary social expression of

reproductive labour, as new ‘industries’ in domestic labour, sex work, tissue donation and surrogacy see the reproduction of labour-power – and the gendered class struggle inherently reflected therein – no longer confined *only* to the family unit. As Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby (2014) argue, “domestic tasks, sexual services, care provision, and...the process of biological reproduction itself have migrated out of the private space of the family into the labor market and are now central to post-industrial accumulation strategies” (p.5).

According to Nancy Fraser (2017), an inherent contradiction lies at the centre of this reproductive shift, as alterations to capitalism’s accumulation strategies have meant that capitalism is increasingly unable to secure and exploit the reproductive labour necessary for its own survival. As Fraser (2017) writes, “this new regime is now promoting state and corporate disinvestment from social welfare while recruiting women into the paid workforce. Thus, it is externalizing care work onto families and communities while diminishing their capacity to perform it” (p.32). Fraser (2017) recognises a shift in gendered familial ideology, away from the industrial family of the male breadwinner, towards an egalitarian valorisation of “the two-earner family” (p.35). Due to the reduction of wages and the rise in precarious and informal working conditions that have appeared heightened in advanced capitalist economies, increasing numbers of women are brought into the paid workforce, leaving behind particular “care deficits” (Hochschild, 1995, p.336) which need to be filled. The result, as Fraser (2017) argues,

Is a new, *dualized* organization of social reproduction, commodified for those who can pay for it and privatized for those who cannot, as some in the second category provide care work in return for (low) wages for those in the first (p.32, original emphasis).

This new, dualized organisation of social reproduction makes necessary a feminist sociology dedicated to the interrogation of the complexities of class, gender and race within this global order and the investigation of the relationship between these complexities and the contemporary experience of reproductive labour.

At the turn of the twenty first century, there is an evident proliferation of literature dedicated to the analysis of this phenomenon in the context of housework and domestic services (see Anderson, 2000; Cox, 2006; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Gregson & Lowe, 1994; Lutz, 2011; Parreñas, 2001). Contemporary statistics reveal that sixteen per cent of households in California employ domestic workers such as nannies, maids and housekeepers (Waheed et al., 2016). As Guarnizo and Rodriguez (2017) describe, “over half of these households (54%) hire housecleaners, while one fourth of them (27%) hire homecare helpers and one fifth (19%) seek help with childcare” (p.4). Viewed through the lens of housework, these shifts in the organisation of reproductive labour are seen here to

have a profound impact upon the provision of *care* within the household. As a result, wealthier families within the advanced capitalist economies of North America, Australia and Western Europe become increasingly reliant upon the provision of domestic services by other women workers, more often than not from the global South. The proliferation of jobs in the Western world as nannies and maids has seen the increased migration of women from the global South into these families, filling the care gaps left behind for very low wages. Hochschild (2002) has described this in terms of an “emotional imperialism” (p.27):

Women choose to migrate for domestic work. But they choose it because economic pressures all but coerce them to. That yawning gap between rich and poor countries is itself a form of coercion, pushing Third World mothers to seek work in the First for lack of options closer to home (p.27).

As Gutierrez-Rodriguez (2014) argues, these developments see reproductive labour become bound together with questions regarding migration and the nation state in ways that appear quite peculiar to this particular historical orientation of capitalism: “In private households employing a migrant care and/or domestic worker, we encounter the immediate effects of migration policies. In this context, the dividing line between citizen and migrant structures the mode of encounter between employers and domestic workers” (p.195). Racialised ideologies ensure loose regulations regarding the protection and monitoring of these migrants as workers (Gutierrez-Rodriguez, 2014), with gendered ideologies facilitating and justifying the relationship between workers and employers: domestic work is seen by employers as “a family necessity rather than an economic transaction” (Guarnizo & Rodriguez, 2017, p.11) resulting in “closer, more intimate employer-employee relations that in turn lead to flexibility in the workload assigned and laxer labor relations” (p.11).

The conditions of contemporary capitalism have also agitated new sociological discussions regarding sex work (Brewis & Linstead, 2000; Hardy et al., 2010; Mac & Smith, 2018; Sanders et al., 2009). Though sex work is by no means a new phenomenon, globalisation, developing technologies and new strategies of primitive accumulation make sex work of renewed interest to contemporary sociology: “The industrialization of the sex trade and its globalization are fundamental factors which make the contemporary sex industry different from previous times” (Kingston & Sanders, 2010, p.3). Fact sheets compiled by the English Collective of Prostitutes (2017) demonstrate that there are 72,800 sex workers in the UK, 88 per cent of whom are women. There is a definite link between participation in sex work and the austerity-based politics of the UK Government, as squeezes upon welfare services and the contraction of stable employment in a number of sectors (particularly education and healthcare) are often cited by British sex workers as

reasons for participating in sex work (English Collective of Prostitutes, 2017). Moreover, research by Nicola Mai (2009) has looked more closely at the involvement of migrant workers in the UK sex work industry. Mai's (2009) research reveals that economic insecurity and strict immigration laws contribute more highly to migrant involvement in the UK sex work industry, as opposed to trafficking or coerced involvement which is comparatively low. Mai's (2009) interviews with sex workers reveal how, echoing Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002), migration policies emerge at the forefront of new campaigns of primitive accumulation on the part of capitalism, forcing the involvement of expanding numbers of women from Eastern Europe and the global South in Western capitalist labour markets: "In most cases the UK was chosen as the preferred migration destination because of the possibility of finding work and earning better wages" (Mai, 2009, p.20-21).

With developing technologies and globalisation, medical developments and the proliferation of tissue economies (Waldby & Mitchell, 2006) based upon the trade in bodily tissues such as stem cells and oocytes have become of increasing interest to contemporary sociology. Discussion of the 'bioeconomy' has become increasingly central for contemporary feminist sociologists, referring to an increasing global market for services in human tissue donation – in particular, the donation of organs (Crowley-Matoka & Hamdy, 2016), umbilical cord blood (Brown, 2013; Waldby, 2006) and oocytes (Waldby, 2008) – and also gestational services such as surrogacy (Lewis, 2019; Pande, 2010a, 2010b). As Cooper's and Waldby's (2014) research reveals, emerging markets in tissue donation – primarily made up of women who donate umbilical cord blood (from which stem cells are harvested) and oocytes (used for stem cells but also for in vitro fertilisation [IVF] and surrogacy procedures) – are participated in by women from Eastern Europe and the global South, with women and families in North America and Western Europe representing the primary 'buyers' of this service. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write, a "significant proportion of oocyte vendors are young eastern European women trying to navigate the insecurities of transitional postsocialist economies where formal labor options have retreated and national labor markets have dramatically restructured" (p.64). Whilst the links between emerging medical industries and reproductive labour are not new (see Corea, 1988; Martin, 2001), it is expressive of wider trends in capitalist labour markets, characteristically centred on developing technologies, increased precariousness and the migration of people, capital and tissue (Cooper & Waldby, 2014).

These sociological trends are matched in emerging surrogacy industries. Whilst surrogacy is tightly regulated in North America, Western Europe and Australia, loose regulations in countries like India and the Philippines have made countries such as these into hubs for the medical tourism of wealthier families looking to take advantage of this loose regulation and low medical costs (Singh, 2014). Available British statistics

demonstrate “that births in approximately 26% of orders made in the year to October 2011 took place overseas, contrasting with 13% in 2010, 4% in 2009, 2% in 2008 and 0% in 1995” (Crawshaw et al., 2012, p.271), with Amrita Pande’s (2009) research revealing that surrogates in India can be expected to be paid only between \$3-5000; much cheaper than the average \$30-50,000 paid to US surrogates (Global Surrogacy, 2016). As Pande’s (2010a, 2010b) research shows, Indian surrogates are paid to engage in gestational surrogacy, in which they act as the ‘host’ for the fertilisation of donated reproductive tissue from a prospective parenting couple. Pande’s (2010a, 2010b) research repeats a similar pattern, demonstrating how economic necessity most often underpins the women’s involvement in surrogacy and how these emerging medical industries make possible the primitive accumulation of Indian reproductive labourers into capitalist labour markets.

What is evident in this landscape of contemporary reproduction that today confronts feminist sociology is a new orientation of gendered class relations which are reflected in emerging inequalities between global women, new patterns of migration and imperialism and new divisions of labour between men and women as well as between women themselves. The reproduction of labour-power underpins these emerging social realities and their manifestation in these contemporary reproductive ‘industries.’ Confronting feminist sociology is therefore a different orientation of capitalist relations of reproduction, the analysis of which holds clues as to the nature of gendered exploitation in the twenty first century and how it demands an alternative social strategy in comparison to its traditional industrial organisation within the family unit. However, the theoretical approach taken towards these new social realities is of particular importance. Problematically, there is an emerging tendency within social scientific analyses of this re-orientation of reproductive labour which takes a theoretically humanist approach to this analysis. Whilst pointing towards particular gendered social harms implicated by this new political economy of reproduction, the explanatory framework that it offers for producing concrete knowledge of these emerging realities is particularly limited, by virtue of its roots in humanist ideological concepts.

## EMOTION, ALIENATION AND CONTEMPORARY REPRODUCTION

In the context of these emerging political economic developments in contemporary reproduction, a theoretically humanist analysis of capitalism has emerged which observes its critique in the propensity of contemporary capitalism to centralise new strategies of human *alienation* in order to bring these new reproductive industries to pass. According to this approach, these new relations of reproduction are distinct from those of the household and the family that preceded them, by virtue of the unique and significantly heightened forms of human harm and alienation that they inaugurate. Unlike the reproductive labour of the family, so this critique goes, the manifestation of reproductive

labour on global labour markets commodifies human feeling, human contact and essential human values as services to be bought and sold. 'Love', 'care', 'motherhood' and 'sexuality' all take shape as commodities in this emerging market of reproductive services, alienated from the women to whom these values belong and deployed cynically by contemporary capitalism as a source of profit. For these authors, these new forms of reproductive labour are to be guarded against and resisted as evidence of an encroaching commodification of the female body. As Hochschild (1983) wrote, "it may not be too much to suggest that we are witnessing a call for the conservation of 'inner resources,' a call to save another wilderness from corporate use and keep it 'forever wild'" (p.22).

By virtue of this discourse's setting-out from a humanist problematic, it finds it particularly difficult to think production and reproduction together. The key insight of Marxist-feminism has been that the social relations of production under capitalism are *at all times* a reflection of the relations of reproduction and that one cannot be viewed without the other. However, in this humanist argument, there is an evident resurrection of a normative division between 'work' proper and the relations that escape this definition. This normative separation becomes crucial in pronouncing the characteristics of human alienation under capitalism but makes for a limited analysis as the social relations of reproduction find themselves inevitably mystified. In this humanist analysis, there is no critique of the ways in which contemporary forms of sex work or domestic labour implicate a particular gendered class struggle which is then reflected in capitalist production more generally: rather, contemporary forms of reproductive labour are separated out from other types of 'work', as uniquely harmful expressions of human alienation that require particular strategies of resistance.

Within contemporary contributions to feminist sociology, this humanist problematic finds itself most readily expressed in the emergence of new concepts, in particular the concepts of 'emotional' (Hochschild, 1983; Veldstra, 2018), 'affective' (Oksala, 2016; Whitney, 2018) or 'intimate' labour (Burke, 2016; Boris & Parreñas, 2010; Satz, 2010; Zelizer, 2005). 'Intimacy' and 'emotion' have become increasingly popular frames of reference through which the exploitation of reproductive labour is thought about in the context of a burgeoning market economy (Attwood et al., 2017). Contemporary capitalism and the emerging 'reproductive' industries it has made available, risk undermining the protection from the market that reproductive labour had previously enjoyed (in the private household), opening it up to commodification in ways that are uniquely dangerous. This unique danger stems from the fact that, unlike the activities of the wage-labourer, these reproductive labours correlate to distinct and specifically "human values" (Satz, 2010, p.3) which, under contemporary capitalism, find themselves mobilised in the provision of a host of new reproductive services. The relationship between intimacy and labour was introduced conceptually by Arlie Hochschild (1983) with the concept of 'emotional labour' (p.7), arguing that what



contemporary service-industries 'sell' is in fact the emotional labour of its workers, crystallised in the maintenance of an emotionally genuine relationship between the worker and their customer in the delivery of a service. In recent years, this has been updated and expanded, particularly in notable contributions such as that of Eileen Boris and Rhacel Parreñas (2010) and their theory of 'intimate labour.' The concept of intimate labour "brings together the often-separated categories of care work, domestic work and sex work, calling attention to the labour involved in *tending to the intimate needs of individuals* inside and outside their home" (Lee & Parreñas, 2016, p.285, original emphasis). However, these concepts offer a definitively humanist framing of how reproductive labour is exploited (by emphasising the existence of pre-existing emotional or intimate human characteristics from which the reproductive labourer is alienated in the course of their work) and this section argues that this humanist framing of reproductive labour develops problematically, into a tendency which sees the gendered class relations of reproductive labour obscured or bracketed. In order to demonstrate this, this section will critically analyse some of the leading contributions to this emerging discourse.

This argument was central to Hochschild's (1983) critique in *The Managed Heart*. For Hochschild (1983), contemporary capitalism was defined by its centralisation of what she called 'emotional labour' (p.7) in its organisation of production. Hochschild (1983) described 'emotional labour' as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (p.7), arguing that contemporary capitalism was less concerned with the production of material products, but instead was increasingly more invested in reproducing feelings of gratitude, happiness and satisfaction within an augmenting base of consumers more interested in services than commodities. Using the example of flight attendants – whom Hochschild (1983) used in the empirical studies conducted in her text – Hochschild (1983) described how through the centrality of emotional labour within contemporary production, "the *emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself*" (p.5-6, original emphasis) in a way that is not prevalent in earlier, more industrial forms of production (the worker's emotional attitude towards a material commodity does not have any bearing on the appearance of that commodity following its production). Synonymous with this new form of production was, essentially, a new form of alienation. Rather than separating the worker from merely the products of their labour, this new regime of capitalist production depended upon the separation of workers from distinctively human emotional capacities. In reference to Marx's (2013) observations of wallpaper production in industrial capitalism, Hochschild (1983) described this new form of alienation:

The work done by the boy in the wallpaper factory called for a coordination of mind and arm, mind and finger, mind and shoulder. We refer to it simply as

physical labor. The flight attendant does physical labor when she pushes heavy metal carts through the aisles, and she does mental work when she prepares for and actually organizes emergency landings and evacuations. But in the course of doing this physical and mental labor, she is also doing something more, something I define as *emotional labor*...This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality (p.6-7, original emphasis).

In this way, “the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self – either the body or the margins of the soul – that is *used* to do the work” (Hochschild, 1983, p.7, original emphasis). Hochschild (1983) problematised contemporary capitalism because the regimes of production that it was centralising were dependent upon the alienation and commodification of human qualities more deeply set and distinctive than the simple manipulation of tools required by manual forms of production. Human emotions and human relationships, once protected from commodification, now found themselves deployed in the service of capital accumulation, often to the detriment of the workers from whom these qualities were alienated (Hochschild, 1983). As Hochschild (1983) argued,

The company lays claim not simply to her physical motions – how she handles food trays – but to her emotional actions and the way they show in the ease of a smile. The workers I talked to often spoke of their smiles as being *on* them but not *of* them (p.7-8, original emphasis).

Through this argument, Hochschild (1983) problematised contemporary capitalism on the basis of its propensity to alienate and commodify basic and inherent human values – expressed primarily through human relationships and human emotions – and set these values to work in the pursuit of profit. The result, so Hochschild (1983) argued, is the production of a society in which human emotion is transformed from a genuine expression of social cohesion to simply a product of an expanding service industry. This analysis of alienation constructed by Hochschild (1983) has been reflected in contemporary social scientific analyses of reproductive labour. The observation of this alienation provides the analytical pivot of these emerging reproductive services, which are problematised in the extent to which they demand an alienation of distinctively human emotional capacities.

This condition of alienation is evident, for example, in the employment of nannies, maids and other domestic workers. Anderson (2002) argues that the working patterns that emerge in the relationship between a domestic labourer and their employing family are much different from those of an ordinary wage-labour relationship. What is demanded from the domestic labourer in the cleaning of homes, the raising of children or the care of other family members is a particular form of emotional labour that simulates a ‘genuine’

familial or emotional connection that is reflected in the work that is carried out. For example, Anderson (2002) describes the way in which domestic labourers are effectively inducted into the family and are expected to develop familial emotional bonds with those family members, in order that these bonds are reflected in the quality of care delivered. Problematically, for Anderson (2002), the emotional bond that the domestic labourer forms with their employing family is a fundamentally alienated one, which results in a disproportionate benefit for the employing family, providing them with an opportunity to exploit greater amounts of emotional labour dependent upon their needs. As Anderson (2002) writes,

Although being a part of the family does not entitle the worker to unconditional love or support, it does entitle the employer to encroach on the worker's off-duty hours for 'favours'. In fact, many employers will invoke either a contractual or a family relationship under different circumstances, depending on what is most convenient (p.112).

For Anderson (2002), the emotional relationship forged by the domestic labourer with their employing family is exploited as a way of designing working patterns to the benefit of the employing family, played on to demand longer working hours and more imposing forms of care work, but which is not reciprocated with a similar emotional response from the employing family and is simply paid for through a wage: "As far as the employer is concerned, money expresses the full extent of her obligation to the worker" (Anderson, 2002, p.112). What therefore emerges within middle-class families in North America and Western Europe is an economy of alienated emotional labour, wherein the capacities for care and compassion that exist within particular (often poorer) women are alienated and exploited to the benefit of (often richer) families. As Anderson (2002) writes of the domestic labourer, "her caring engenders no mutual obligations, no entry into a community, and no real human relationship – just money" (p.112): a situation which "denies the worker's humanity and the very depth of her feelings" (p.112).

In this instance, these examples of contemporary reproductive labour are considered exceptional in the extent to which they demand a form of emotional alienation more severe than normal types of work. This is true not only of examples of domestic labour, but is particularly acute in considerations of sex work. In the wake of heightened calls for the decriminalisation of sex work in Europe, social critics such as Kat Banyard (2016) argue that calls for decriminalisation and for sex work to be treated as 'work', ignore the particular and uniquely severe forms of alienation that are central to the relationship between sex workers, their clients and their 'employers.' For Banyard (2016), sex work is different from other types of work precisely because of the intense and heightened forms of alienation – and the reflection of this alienation in sexual and

gendered violence – that are inaugurated by the conditions of this industry. By drawing attention to this, Banyard (2016) hopes to expose the “chilling absurdity of claiming that what’s taking place on porn sets and in brothels can be suitably framed as an innocuous consumer transaction” (chapter 2, para.18). Through her interviews with sex workers, Banyard (2016) describes the experience of women in the sex industry by highlighting the ways in which women are in some way separated from their sexuality as it becomes commodified and made available for sale. For example, one interviewee, ‘Tanja’, describes her experience as a sex worker, saying “it was like my sexuality didn’t belong to me. It was something men could take if they wanted” (Banyard, 2016, chapter 2, para.24). ‘Crystal’, another former sex worker interviewed by Banyard (2016), says that “I still feel like I lost a part of myself back there – and there’s no getting her back” (chapter 2, para.51). Banyard (2016) draws attention to these accounts of loss and separation as a way of articulating the unique harms, reflected in a form of emotional alienation, that force the thinking of sex work as separate and distinct from other forms of work. For Banyard (2016), the sex trade codifies this alienation by ‘commodifying consent’, removing women’s autonomy over their own sexuality by alienating it from their control and making it available to be bought and sold:

If while having sex with someone you feel repulsed by them touching you, afraid of what they might do, degraded and humiliated by the sexual acts, hurt by the hateful words they’re whispering in your ear, sore because he’s the fifth man you’ve had sex with today, exhausted from it all, traumatised, abused – the fact that you’ll get a bit of cash at the end does not change this fact. There is no invisible hand in the prostitution market that magically disappears the lived experience of sexual abuse (chapter 2, para.20).

In relation to sex work, this analysis is also echoed in the context of pornography and types of sex work that differ from prostitution (for example the production of adult material such as magazines, films and online broadcasts). For sociologists such as Gail Dines (2010), contemporary society is one increasingly saturated with what she identifies as “porn ideology” (p.100), which not only describes the proliferation of increased popularity of pornographic images in society but, more importantly, the infection of human approaches to sex and sexuality by the ideas and values reinforced by these pornographic images. The greater involvement of women in sex industries is, for Dines (2010), a reflection of the fact that in contemporary society, approaches to sex and sexuality have been reified in an alienated condition, where sex is routinely pictured as something to which women are only an accessory as opposed to an active participant. As Dines (2010) writes,

Why, then, are girls and women agreeing to have sex under emotionally shallow and at times physically dangerous circumstances?...In this hypersexualized culture, we are socializing girls into seeing themselves as legitimate sex objects who are deserving of sexual use (and abuse) (p.117).

For Dines (2010), the reflection of alienated sexuality in human society is particularly damaging insofar as it reproduces dangerous attitudes towards sex not only in men (who come to see women as objects to whom the act of sex is applied) but also in women too (who come to accept that sex is not something in which they engage, but are simply involved). This reproduces a passive attitude towards the figuration of sex and sexuality in human relationships, undermining social values such as intimacy but also, more dangerously, legal considerations of consent (Dines, 2010). Therefore, for these authors, the consideration of these forms of sex work within the paradigm of 'work' overlook the fact that the mobilisation of sex and sexuality within service provision implicates a heightened form of human emotional alienation that is reflected in severe societal dangers and particular types of gendered violence.

This humanist approach is also evident in confrontations with tissue donation and surrogacy. Summarising popular critical responses to emerging markets in tissue donation and surrogacy, Donna Dickenson (2007) argues that what motivates concerns in relation to these emerging markets is the prospect of the commodification and marketisation of not only the human body, but of the cells that *belong* to it. In particular, the way in which tissue donation separates particular cells and bodily entities away from the body, or the way in which surrogacy ascribes value to only certain *parts* of the body (primarily the womb and its gestational capabilities), is problematised insofar as it reproduces a particular form of subjective alienation, in which the bodily capabilities that underpin the human capacity for care become alienated from the precise human subject and its social setting, in the sole context of which these capabilities find their importance: "A large part of what disturbs people about commodification of the body appears to be the way in which it transforms us into objects of property-holding rather than active human subjects" (Dickenson, 2007, p.4). For Dickenson (2007), these concerns regarding the alienation of bodily corporeality and distinct human capacities are reflected in the political economy of surrogacy and tissue donation as "the recipient couple views the transaction as purely monetary, while the donor mother is encouraged to think she is giving the greatest gift of all, the gift of life" (p.22). Again, Dickenson (2007) here demonstrates how the concerns regarding this contemporary expression of reproductive labour are reflected in an observation of a heightened emotional alienation that is unparalleled in other types of work.

The accounts here described are evidence of an emerging theoretical approach to contemporary manifestations of reproductive labour under capitalism, which observe

their analysis in the heightened and markedly severe forms of human alienation that are implicated in these developments. The quarrel with these accounts is not with the particular social and indeed disproportionately *gendered* harms that this theoretical approach signifies. It is clear that the contemporary constellation of reproductive relations under capitalism implicate markedly different and, in many cases, more severe instances of disproportionately gendered harm, violence and exploitation, culminating in a unique experience of the effects of patriarchal capitalist power by women. However, what is evident from the Marxist-feminist approach first set out at the beginning of this chapter is that the comprehension of this unique experience and its implications pivots on an initial understanding of the particular *social relations* that underpin this experience and the gendered class struggles reflected in these relations. It is clear that these contemporary markets in reproductive services centralise a different class relationship from that of the industrial family, implicating a gendered social division of reproductive labour that implicates not only men and women, but women and other women across transnational reproductive networks. However, in this humanist theoretical approach, the concrete knowledge of these social realities – and their expression in gendered violence – is in fact foreclosed by this theoretically humanist approach by virtue of its grounding in a problematic of human alienation and the reflection of this grounding in particular theoretical weaknesses.

For example, in order for this humanist ideological analysis to function, it relies upon the unwitting but nonetheless problematic resurrection of a normative boundary between ‘work’ and ‘non-work.’ In observing its analysis in the heightened emotional alienation of contemporary reproductive workers, the proponents of this ideological tendency necessarily construct a normative consideration of emotion and of work itself in order to provide themselves with a point of distinction between genuine emotion and its alienated form. This is evident, for example, in Anderson’s (2002) critique of domestic labour. For Anderson (2002) the heightened alienation of domestic labour is reflected in the degradation of the worker’s *genuine* emotional and familial relationships with their own families. As Anderson (2002) writes,

They often feel ill at ease in their home countries, where things have changed in their absence, and where they may feel that they no longer belong. When their families meet them at the airport, these women commonly do not recognize their own kin. They talk of the embarrassment of having sex with husbands who have become virtual strangers, and of reuniting with children who doubt their mother’s love (p.110).

This is also evident in Banyard’s (2016) critique of sex work. Banyard (2016) problematises the calls for the decriminalisation of sex work and its treatment as a form

of 'work' like any other, arguing that such decriminalisation would simply open sex workers up to the precariousness and informality that currently plagues contemporary employment markets:

Basic workplace health and safety rules don't even apply to most women in Germany's legal brothels. Why? Because for them to apply an individual has to be an employee. And it is up to individual brothels whether or not they employ women or simply host them as 'independent contractors' (chapter 2, para.5).

The theoretical approach taken by these authors sees them unwittingly reproduce a separation between 'work' and 'non-work', with the dialectical social relationship that exists between them overlooked. For Anderson (2002), the familial space outside of work is normatively constructed as a space of 'genuine' emotion and human relationships, which allows for the description of the process of alienation that underpins domestic labour. However, this approach betrays the fundamental lesson of feminist critiques of reproduction, which argue that behind the apparently 'genuine' emotional relationships that exist within society are *always* particular social relations pertaining to historical forms of production and reproduction. For Banyard (2016), the correlation between the proliferation of the sex industry, the exercise of gendered violence and the conditions of informality of the contemporary labour market is a missed opportunity for critique, with this brief sociological critique of contemporary employment markets utilised as nothing more than a critical foregrounding to her resistance towards the decriminalisation of sex work based upon the heightened alienation that it centralises. In both of these instances, the theoretical humanism of these analyses resolves itself in the production of particular ideological limitations in which the social relations of production and reproduction are missed and overlooked in favour of an analysis of human emotional alienation.

Relatedly, the reinforcement of this normative separation often sees the proponents of this discourse uncritically or unwittingly celebrate wage-labour itself as an ideal or a 'norm', leaving the relationship that it shares with the gendered violence they have just analysed unthought. Again, in relation to domestic labour, Anderson (2002) argues in favour of the 'professionalisation' of domestic labour, writing that professionalisation serves as "a means of giving respect to domestic workers as workers, as well as of managing the personal relationships that develop from care work" (p.113). However, the idea that the wage-labour market is desirable to the extent that it respects the workers under its charge is a misnomer which, though helpful to Anderson's (2002) argument, betrays the feminist critique of production and reproduction: a critique that demonstrates that part of the reason that reproductive labour is exploited is because the wage-labour relation *withholds* respect and economic justice from its participants. Moreover, the reach of patriarchal capitalist social relations is also left unthought by

Anderson (2002) as it does not follow that the professionalisation of certain forms of reproductive labour would lead to a more egalitarian gendered division of labour across society: as Federici (2012) wrote, “the overalls did not give us any more power than the apron – quite often even less, because now we had to wear both and had even less time and energy to struggle against them” (p.22).

Banyard’s (2016) argument travels in the other direction, arguing that sex work should not be decriminalised and called ‘work’ but in fact should be more strictly regulated. However, Banyard (2016) makes this argument not because she recognises the reflection of gendered exploitation in the wage-labour relation itself (which makes the demand for professionalisation on its own, short-sighted); rather, Banyard (2016) unwittingly constructs an argument that defends wage-labour as a normative construct, arguing that the inclusion of sex within definitions of ‘work’ risks degrading the nature of work itself and the protections that ‘ordinary’ workers (particularly women) currently enjoy. This argument comes through in Banyard’s (2016) juxtaposition of the work of sex with other ‘ordinary’ forms of work:

So if ‘sex work is work’, then presumably if an airline company requires all its female flight attendants to offer male passengers blow-jobs, as well as drinks and snacks, that’s all right? What about City firms stipulating that female employees must have sex with male clients as part of their corporate entertaining duties? OK?...I guess if this is ordinary work then at worst the requested task is merely outside her job description? (chapter 2, para.12).

Again, Banyard’s (2016) analysis points towards a critical social point, only to turn away from it in the last instance. Instead of making the argument that the contemporary appearance of sex work and the particular forms of gendered violence and exploitation that it exhibits are in fact reflected in the apparently innocuous acts of gendered exploitation that exist within ‘ordinary’ workplaces, the humanism of Banyard’s (2016) argument forces the stopping-short of this critical point. In order to pronounce the heightened alienation of sex work and formulate this into a critical resistance to its decriminalisation, Banyard (2016) effectively forces the protection and celebration of the wage-labour relation as a form of untainted employment: an analysis that *necessarily* mystifies the existence of interpenetrative social relations between production and reproduction.

As well as resolving itself in this false distinction between work and non-work, the humanist ideological approach also reproduces a theoretical limitation that has long dogged dominant critiques of capitalism: that is the exclusion of particular gendered actors from analyses of class struggle and social change. The objective of twentieth century movements such as the Wages for Housework Movement was to position women first



theoretically and then concretely as class actors with a distinct social stake in the development of capitalism and a unique position in their ability to change this social situation. It was on this basis that the observation of housewives as ‘workers’ was justified. However, within this emerging ideological critique in relation to contemporary reproductive markets, this tends to be forgotten and removes the particular class agency and unique class positions that workers in these industries occupy. For Banyard (2016) the framing of sex work as ‘work’ and of the women involved in it as ‘workers’ dresses what is essentially sexual abuse, up in a “media-friendly moniker” (chapter 2, para.66). However, this argument misses the fact that calling sex work ‘work’ – in the same way that the Wages for Housework Movement defined housework as ‘work’ – is not a campaign to justify or simply seek compensation for the abuses suffered in these forms of reproductive labour: rather, it is to identify their position within the matrix of productive and reproductive relations essential to capitalist production, “to make a broader point about how the wage relation operates within capitalism” (Power, 2017, p.224-225) and thereby attribute its participants a particular class position. This position, rather than labelling them as passive victims of gendered exploitation actually empowers them as social agents with a particular and unique capability to struggle against these conditions of exploitation. This is entirely overlooked in Banyard’s (2016) account, because this class position is *incomprehensible*: a lack of comprehension that is foregrounded by the mystification of particular social relations. For Banyard (2016), sex workers cannot occupy a particular gendered class position, because their work is considered as cut off from the relations of production in capitalist society: as an extreme example of alienation in an underground economy rather than reflective of a deeper social situation.

In these ways, the humanist ideological approach to contemporary forms of reproductive labour is problematic and theoretically limited. By observing the critique of reproductive labour through the prism of human alienation, the proponents of this approach point towards the emergence of new gendered social harms, but provide little concrete knowledge of the precise social conditions that underpin these harms and the potential routes out of these harms. The humanist ideological framework of this approach reproduces many of the theoretical obstacles first necessarily deconstructed by Marxist-feminist theory, relying on normative ideas of human emotion and human relationships as a way of articulating contemporary alienation and gendered exploitation, unwittingly reproducing the precise ideological mystifications beneath which gendered exploitation has typically been hidden. Moreover, rather than empowering women as agents of class struggle and social change in the context of these contemporary developments, the proponents of this analysis tend to remove the political agency of women as workers by interpreting their position as one of victimhood without conceivable escape, rather than as a position reflective of a particular gendered class constellation, the terms of which are always subject to social change. In this way, this emerging humanist ideological analysis

prevents a fuller understanding of the nature of contemporary reproductive labour, whilst also obscuring the knowledge of socio-political strategies through which to combat the gendered exploitation implicated in these new arrangements.

## TOWARDS A CRITIQUE OF 'CLINICAL LABOUR'

The theoretically humanist approach to the contemporary landscape of reproductive relations under capitalism has shown itself to be particularly limited. It finds itself unable to think production and reproduction in tandem with one another, falsely separating the two spheres apart from one another in order to secure the functionality of its own analysis of human alienation. The ideological effect of humanism in this way is not surprising, given that – as the Marxist-feminists of the mid-to-late twentieth century have already shown – this was its precise function when deployed by capitalism itself. This theoretical humanism has pointed towards examples of gendered violence and exploitation but has been significantly limited in its ability to demonstrate the ways in which these instances of violence and exploitation are socially anchored, not in a process of alienation, but in the matrix of interpenetrative relations of production and reproduction that underpin the capitalist social formation.

It is therefore apparent that the production of a feminist sociological analysis of contemporary forms of reproductive labour demands an alternative theoretical approach. This chapter argues that such an approach exists in the re-visitation of the critical theoretical principles of Marxist-feminism, paying particular attention to its critique of ideology. The originality of Marxist-feminist approaches to work and reproduction has been in demonstrating that production and reproduction, though they contain unique social relations, do not exist in isolation from one another: rather, they inform one another, with the social appearance of 'work' necessarily dependent upon the constellation of reproductive relations within a given social setting. In the twentieth century, the industrial workplace and its appearance – the length of the working-day, the shift patterns and the division of labour itself – corresponded to the orientation of reproductive relations within the family home which, themselves, were reflective of a gendered class struggle. It is in producing a similar view of the nature of contemporary reproductive labour that it will be possible to explain the social character of gendered exploitation, as an expression of gendered class struggle rather than a manifestation of human alienation. For this, the chapter turns to the Marxist-feminist analysis of Cooper and Waldby (2014) in their critical analysis of *Clinical Labour*.

Cooper's and Waldby's (2014) analyses focus on what they call 'clinical labour' (p.7), which is the reproductive labour primarily associated with contemporary biomedical industries in fertility: the donation, gestation and reproduction of cells, tissues and even human beings themselves. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) specify, "the life

science industries rely on an extensive yet unacknowledged labor force whose service consists on the visceral experience of experimental drug consumption, hormonal transformation, more or less invasive biomedical procedures, ejaculation, tissue extraction, and gestation” (p.7). Though they have a specific form of reproductive labour in mind, ‘clinical labour’ itself is a conceptual device deployed by Cooper and Waldby (2014) to describe the complex interplay between the relations of production and reproduction that underpin contemporary capitalism’s strategies of accumulation. For Cooper and Waldby (2014), the appearance of the capitalist mode of production in the twenty first century can *only be comprehended through its reproductive relations*, of which clinical labour is but the most contemporary example. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write of clinical labour, “far from representing an exceptional or extreme manifestation of the underground economy, is emblematic of the conditions of twenty-first-century labor” (p.17).

Crucially, the argument that Cooper and Waldby (2014) make is that the appearance of capitalist production in the twenty first century is fundamentally underpinned by *a renegotiation of the reproductive limits of the body*. Twenty first century trends in the employment market that demonstrate tendencies towards outsourcing, the increased migration of labour-power and the mobilisation of labour-power through precarious and individualised employment contracts, for Cooper and Waldby (2014) do not find their roots in the greater advancement of the forces of production (machines and technologies that facilitate the greater flexibility of labour-power) but in a gendered struggle over the productive and reproductive limitations of the human body which, though certainly made possible by the availability of reproductive technologies, is driven in the first instance by gendered class struggle. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write,

The outsourcing of labor and the rise of new forms of clinical labor are not merely parallel historical developments but rather are deeply imbricated one with the other, and they act as the leading edge of late twentieth-century neoliberal experimentation with new forms of accumulation (p.19).

For Cooper and Waldby (2014), the political economic innovation of contemporary capitalism that makes labour-power easily exploitable within post-Fordist economic constellations, finds its roots fundamentally in the renegotiation of reproductive relations in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

The argument here put forward is fundamentally and theoretically different from that of the humanists discussed in the previous section. For the proponents of the humanist discourse of alienation, contemporary forms of reproduction – including these manifestations of clinical labour – are the result of a particular process of human

emotional alienation that is facilitated by the contemporary make-up of capitalist social relations. However, Cooper's and Waldby's (2014) analysis is more socially grounded, arguing that the answers as to the social location of clinical labour – and the gendered forms of exploitation that it inaugurates – are located not in processes of human alienation but in the social interpenetration between relations of production and reproduction under capitalism which, as will be shown, not only implicate new particular exploitations of labour-power but new regimes of the primitive accumulation and exploitation of reproductive labour and reproductive labourers: relations which are always reflective of a particular class struggle.

Revisiting Federici's (2004) Marxist-feminist analysis of primitive accumulation, Federici (2004) demonstrated how the interrogation and establishment of knowledges regarding the productive and reproductive potential of the female body was absolutely central to the establishment of emerging regimes of capitalist production. In this way, as Federici (2004) argued, gendered class struggle was waged *at the level of the body*, as the enclosure of land and the privatisation of the means of production that would underpin capitalist production, was simultaneously complemented by an enclosure and study of *the body itself* as a vital pillar on which notions of productivity and value would themselves be based. As Federici (2004) wrote, "we can see, in other words, that the human body and not the steam engine, and not even the clock, was the first machine developed by capitalism" (p.146). It is important to extrapolate precisely what Federici (2004) means here. Federici's (2004) argument is not the humanist one: that the development of capitalism in these early stages was dependent upon the identification, alienation and eventual exploitation of reproductive capacities that existed 'innately' within the female body. Rather, it was in the gendered class struggle over control over the body that the female body itself *comes to have any sort of reproductive capacity at all* (Federici, 2004). In other words, to speak of any reproductive capacity existing within the female body is to speak of measures of 'capacity', 'reproduction' and 'potential' which *only* have meaning in the context of capitalist production and its measure of value. The body itself and its capacities are, in this way, *the product of gendered class struggle*, as the bourgeoisie necessarily sought to produce knowledge of the productive capacities of labour-power and the requirements for its reproduction, on which it would base the entire of its political economic approach: "The body, then, came to the foreground of social policies because it appeared not only as a beast inert to the stimuli of work, but also as the container of labor-power, a means of production, the primary work-machine" (Federici, 2004, p.137-138).

In analysing the contemporary character of clinical labour, Cooper and Waldby (2014) argue that what they observe is *the re-deployment of this strategy* in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries. The availability of medical technologies has made possible, for Cooper and Waldby (2014), an opportunity for the bourgeoisie to further interrogate the productive and reproductive potential of the human (female) body,

upon which to base new regimes of production and value creation. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) argue, “we contend that the renegotiation of bodily limits and productive possibilities has become *the core business of bioeconomic innovation* (p.107, original emphasis). Primarily, this strategy of reproductive primitive accumulation – through which the productive and reproductive capacities of the body are renegotiated – takes place within contemporary discourses and practices of biomedicine and the biomedical industries: the collation and study of reproductive tissues, the production of cell lines, the development of experimental medicines and the medicalisation of child birth (Cooper & Waldby, 2014). Crucially, for Cooper and Waldby (2014), the clinical labour that underpins this biomedical innovation is by no means a manifestation of human alienation but a contemporary reflection of gendered class struggle at the level of the body itself.

For Cooper and Waldby (2014) it is this process of primitive accumulation – and not heightened forms of alienation – that explains the breakdown of the industrial sexual division of labour between the male breadwinner and female housewife. For Cooper and Waldby (2014) the ‘commercialisation’ of particular reproductive labours and the opening up of reproductive markets reflects a re-mapping of gendered class relations in capitalist society, in which the class division between the male breadwinner and female housewife is no longer the dominant expression of gendered antagonism. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) argue,

We can say that the vertical disintegration of national production and the large corporation associated with post-Fordism, the shift to horizontal outsourcing, was accompanied by the *vertical disintegration of the Fordist household* and the development of new kinds of contractual mechanisms to secure both biological and social reproductive capacity from outside the family unit proper (p.61, original emphasis).

The re-mapping of gendered class relations in this way facilitates the development by capitalism of new strategies of reproductive primitive accumulation upon which to base developing strategies of capital accumulation more generally. Fundamentally, it is in this re-orientation of gendered class struggle – and not in the heightened alienation of human values – that these emerging reproductive ‘industries’ find their root. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write, “the Californian oocyte and surrogacy markets of the 1980s gain their momentum in part from the social energies unleashed by dismantling of this particular gender order, the Fordist household of public male breadwinner and private female housewife” (p.60-61).

Crucially, this re-mapping of gendered class antagonism finds itself reflected within the emerging relations of capitalist production and reproduction that are observable in the developing biomedical industries. For example, this re-mapping of class

antagonism is reflected in the individualisation and ‘neoliberalisation’ (Waldby & Cooper, 2008, p.57) of reproduction. In contrast to its organisation within the industrial family unit, these emerging biomedical industries necessitated an individualisation of reproductive labour where the donors of reproductive tissue were interpellated into a position of having individual and contractual responsibility over the production and delivery of biological materials. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write, “the woman takes on an entrepreneurial economic role, but in this case, her collateral is her own body. In order to realize its value, she enters into the...contract as the proprietor of her own reproductive capacity” (p.84). In this way, the renegotiation of the reproductive capacities of the body forms the basis on which employment relations themselves come to be reformulated and deployed. The individualistic employment contracts that transfer risk onto the worker, find their roots not in technology or advancements in the forces of production, but crucially in the fundamental renegotiation of productive capacity at the beginning of this wave of capitalist primitive accumulation:

The constitution of a proprietorial self – able to rationally calculate the deployment of his or her body’s productivity, its risks and benefits, and enter into a contract – is a corollary of a global market for biological services in the self, a moment in the ordering of particular embodied processes as fungible entities, tradeable between strangers (Cooper & Waldby, 2014, p.85).

Relatedly, this re-orientation of gendered class relations is reflected in the contemporary tendencies towards globalisation, migration and outsourcing. As well as allowing for capitalism to move beyond the industrial family in search of reproductive labour, its contemporary establishment in emerging employment markets facilitates the location of reproductive labour in sectors and areas where its exploitation is much cheaper: “Households in Europe are increasingly formed through transnational relations, and reproductivity at all levels is more and more likely to involve the labor of women from outside the family proper” (Cooper & Waldby, 2014, p.76). Cooper and Waldby (2014) describe the development of networks in biomedical reproduction that implicate white and primarily Western clients as the primary ‘consumers’ of reproductive labour, with women from poorer Eastern European countries or from countries in the global South (in particular, India) tending to provide the ‘service.’ In this way, the gendered class relations implicated in developing forms of primitive accumulation further break their industrial mould, as biomedical reproduction bears witness to “emerging class relations between women, as well-paid professional women employ other women to provide care” (Cooper & Waldby, 2014, p.106). Moreover, the development of capitalist relations of reproduction in this way map on to old networks of production and reproduction implicated in the development of race and empire, as capitalism repurposes the structures of global

exploitation previously constructed to develop new sources of reproductive labour: “In each case, women isolate and transact the desirable aspects of their fertility according to a map of regional and global economic power relations, which itself maps on to older histories of race and empire” (Cooper & Waldby, 2014, p.88).

Moreover, the renegotiation of reproductive capacities also resolves itself in important reorientations of capitalist property relations. The importance ascribed to ‘cognitive labour’ and the apparent power of cognition within contemporary capitalist production, again, does not emerge by virtue of the development of the forces of production under capitalism. For Cooper and Waldby (2014), this power is developed out of the further interrogation of capitalism as to the reproductive capabilities of the human body. It forms the basis of the re-establishment of a new gendered division of labour between the clinical labour of the donor and the cognitive labour of the scientist or doctor. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write, “the organization of intellectual property in the life sciences recognizes the cognitive labor of the scientist and the clinician, but not the constitutive nature of the biological material or the collaboration of the donor” (p.100). In this way, as Cooper and Waldby (2014) argue, the power of cognitive labour is of importance only to contemporary capitalism, as it becomes the precise mechanic through which it establishes and reifies relations of intellectual property utilised to exploit clinical labourers and deployed in the production of surplus-value. As Waldby (2002) writes, this division of labour is synonymous with “the process of technical innovation that enables the patenting of cell lines, genes and transgenic organisms as inventions, securing their status as intellectual property and possible sources of profit for their investors” (p.310).

In this analysis of clinical labour, it is increasingly clear that the complexities of reproductive labour in the twenty first century cannot be arrived at through a theoretically humanist approach. Cooper’s and Waldby’s (2014) analyses have shown that the appearance of contemporary reproductive relations – manifest in new divisions of labour, new property relations and in newly deployed networks of migration and empire – can in no way be traced to relations of human alienation. Rather, these realities are comprehensible only in the context of a particular gendered class struggle at the heart of contemporary capitalism and the reflection of this struggle in the primitive accumulation of reproductive labourers through the interrogation and renegotiation of the reproductive capacities of the body. Humanist ideology not only forces a theoretical foreclosure, obscuring these social relations of production and reproduction (and the class struggles reflected in these relations) from view *in theory*. What is also evident is that, in the same way as it did during the early primitive accumulation of women as reproductive labourers, humanism re-emerges as the precise ideological concept through which contemporary forms of reproductive labour are cheapened and exploited within contemporary capitalism.

In the same way that the class position of women and the political economic positioning of their reproductive labour has been obfuscated behind the notion that reproductive labour was an expression of 'natural' or 'biological' tendencies, in the context of clinical labour these themes have re-emerged primarily through ideological deployments of 'altruism' and 'gift-giving.' These ideologies, though they are presented in the form of bioethical concerns regarding the safeguarding of workers and consumers within biomedical industries, their effect is actually, primarily, a political-economic one, which materialises to facilitate the separation of the reproductive labourer from the product of their labour: "The intent of some current [bioethical] guidelines seems to be...to cut off any further claims by the donor and any continuing obligations for the clinician, researcher or biotechnology corporation in receipt of the gift" (Dickenson, 2007, p.18). In this way, as Cooper and Waldby (2014) argue, "whether it is framed in a liberal or a human rights register, we contend that bioethics as discourse and practice is internal to the political economy of the life sciences" (p.14).

Prominent within the biomedical industries is the deployment of humanist ideology in the context of discourses of 'gift' giving or the 'gift relation.' Routinely, the exploitation of reproductive labour and its mobilisation within structures of capitalist reproduction are mystified beneath ideological arguments that insist that the gestation, donation and reproduction of human tissues as clinical labour is not engaged in by women for the receipt of money, but transcends this and is an expression of their inherent altruism and propensity for care: donated in the form of a 'gift.' It is by virtue of the donor's wish to 'give the gift of life' by donating their tissue towards medical research or transplant, or by donating oocytes or even becoming a surrogate that clinical labour is thought to come to pass: a social expression of inherent human values as opposed to a form of labour mobilised through particular relations of production and reproduction. The roots of this ideology are manifest in examples of social anthropology, particularly that of Richard Titmuss (1973), who argued that the emerging biomedical industries and the 'donation' of biological materials inherent to their functioning posed an opportunity for the establishment of social bonds on the basis of altruism and inherent human cooperation. As Waldby (2002) writes,

For Titmuss, *giving* blood as an act of altruistic donation establishes social ties of indebtedness between fellow citizens, and creates the condition for the maintenance of community between strangers. *Selling* blood, on the other hand, creates instrumental, non-binding commodity relations between producers and consumers (p.309, original emphasis).

However, when this ideology is reflected into contemporary political economy, it does not result in the emergence of an altruistic model of exchange, but rather a fundamentally



exploitative one which is shielded beneath these economic mystifications of human altruism and cooperation. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write, “the labor involved in this collaboration goes largely unrecognized, valued as a gift of natural, reproductive surplus rather than a process of embodied production” (p.101).

From the perspective of political economy, this ideology serves a number of functions. For example, it is used as a means of undermining the bargaining power of clinical labourers by reflecting their struggle for higher wages, better compensation or more suitable working conditions as an act of selfishness or greed (Cooper & Waldby, 2014). As Cooper and Waldby (2014) explain, “women who attempt to bargain on their own behalf are considered not psychologically appropriate to the task and may be excluded on those grounds” (p.56). Crucially, these ideologies of the ‘gift’ complement the traditional patriarchal capitalist ideologies that have constructed women as ‘naturally’ generous, caring and altruistic – ideologies that have been deployed as a means of securing reproductive labour for as cheaply as possible – as “remuneration detracts from the idealized cultural image of women/mothers as selfless, nurturant, and altruistic” (Ragoné, 1999, p.71-72).

In this way, humanism emerges as the precise ideology beneath which reproductive labour is located and *cheapened* by contemporary capitalism. In the same way that Mies (1986) identified the ways in which gendered humanist ideologies manufactured the notion that reproductive labour was a resource that was always-already present within human societies, as “a natural resource, freely available like air and water” (p.110), humanism serves a similar purpose in the context of clinical labour as it allows for the reduction of reproductive tissues to a position of omnipresence in human society, where value is produced in the *transformation* of this resource. Necessarily, as Cooper and Waldby (2014) argue, the profitability of human tissues is located upon an ideological enterprise which argues that “the bodily contribution of tissue providers and human research subjects appears as an already available biological resource, as *res nullius*, matter in the public domain” (p.9). The position of the reproductive labourer is here mystified within capitalist political economy once again and the source of value is – within capitalist political economy – located in the transformation of this *res nullius*, rather than in its reproduction from the outset by women.

Moreover, and relatedly, this humanist ideology therefore also serves to mystify contemporary class relationships and smoothen out the class antagonisms between the global actors brought into contact through the relations of reproduction under capitalism. If biological materials are an always-already present and publicly available resource to be taken advantage of then this, in combination with ideologies of the ‘gift’, presents contemporary reproductive labour not as an industry based inherently on exploitation, but as the culmination of rational networks of distribution, simply bringing the economic

agents of supply and demand into contact with one another. As Cooper and Waldby (2014) write,

This...is generated by the marketing rhetorics used by brokerage companies, saturated with references to 'the gift of life' and the maternal generosity of potential surrogates and oocyte providers. By imagining the transaction as a gift relation, the parties can experience the exchange in less starkly commercial and adversarial terms than those stated in the contract. Without this softening language, the spectacle of the oocyte vendor as the efficient negotiator of her reproductive capital threatens to contaminate the maternal generosity that has formed part of her market appeal (p.58).

This is particularly evident in the context of India's surrogacy industry. The political economy of race and gender that facilitates the establishment and running of surrogacy clinics in the global South for a much lower cost, is mystified by humanist and gendered ideologies that seek to construct surrogacy as based upon a natural and ever-present form of labour, which these clinics merely organise. As documentaries such as *Google Baby* (politoTV, 2012) demonstrate, surrogacy clinics in India rely upon the deployment of these ideologies as a marketing strategy, valorising feminine qualities of motherhood and nurturance as a way of attracting potential parents from overseas to take advantage of the benefits of drastically lower medical costs. But humanism is also used to appropriately position poor women as surrogates too, medicalising their bodies but also devaluing them as part of the surrogacy contract. Pande's (2010a, 2010b) research into India's emerging gestational surrogacy industry demonstrates how alongside an emerging 'trade' in surrogacy in India, with women almost always involved in surrogacy for monetary reasons, is the deployment of a gendered ideology in which these women are made to consider their bodies as 'vessels' or rented space over which they have no ownership. Pande (2010a) talks about how the surrogacy clinics have become disciplinary spaces in which surrogates are conditioned into this view of themselves. As 'Khanderia' – a member of the medical staff at one of the clinics in which Pande's (2010b) study takes place – explains to the surrogates in the clinic, "you have to do nothing. It's not your baby. You are just providing it a home in your womb for nine months because it doesn't have a house of its own" (p.308).

Through this analysis of reproductive labour, Cooper and Waldby (2014) have demonstrated how contemporary forms of reproductive labour are not expressions of alienated human relations but a distinctly social manifestation of gendered class struggle and its reflection within particular relations of production and reproduction. Not only is humanism a particularly unhelpful theoretical device in shedding light on the social composition of contemporary reproduction – foregoing an analysis of class for one of

human alienation – but Cooper and Waldby (2014) have also shown humanism to be the precise ideological mystification beneath which contemporary forms of gendered exploitation are mystified. In this way, humanism does not permit a better understanding of uniquely gendered violence within contemporary forms of reproduction: rather, it *forecloses* the analysis of these realities by mystifying their social character. In re-visiting the principles of Marxist-feminism and its critique of reproduction, Cooper and Waldby (2014) have here been more successful in producing a sociological analysis of contemporary reproduction and at the same time have demonstrated the ways in which humanism prevents a fuller understanding of these gendered social realities.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has therefore demonstrated how an adequate understanding of contemporary forms of reproductive labour must necessarily be rooted in an exposure and explication of the social mechanics of contemporary reproduction and of its reflection at all times of particular gendered class struggles. The chapter has demonstrated that this was the precise strength of Marxist-feminist critiques of reproduction that emerged in the mid-to-late twentieth century. They dismantled the notion that housework and reproduction more generally were nothing more than expressions of an ‘innate’ or ‘inherent’ capacity for care, nurturance or sexuality, by rooting these notions within concrete social relations, demonstrating the ways in which these forms of reproduction directly translated into the appearance and functionality of capitalist production proper. Moreover, the position of women in the household was shown by the Marxist-feminist to be the product of an historical class struggle, the product of a long and violent history of primitive accumulation of which the industrial family was but the most contemporary expression.

In the context of contemporary forms of reproductive labour and the emergence of reproductive ‘industries’ in domestic labour, sex work, tissue donation and surrogacy, this lesson first taught by the Marxist-feminists appears to have been overlooked. This re-orientation of reproductive relations has increasingly been interpreted through a humanist ideological lens, with its unique characteristics and the particular forms of gendered social harm that it inaugurates observed in contemporary capitalism’s tendency towards the greater alienation of human capacities: an alienation with disproportionate impact upon women. However, this humanist ideological reaction has been shown to in fact foreclose a fuller understanding of the social mechanics of this gendered harm, reproducing ideological obstacles that prevent the production of sociological analysis. In light of this, the chapter has demonstrated how a re-visiting of the principles of Marxist-feminism, and the analysis of contemporary reproduction from the starting-point of questions of class and social relations has produced a more helpful sociological critique of

contemporary reproduction, providing an understanding of the social grounding of gendered violence, but also producing an understanding of the social grounding of those actors most appropriately poised to change these conditions.

In moving to the next chapter, it is evident that this ideological problematic finds itself reproduced in critical responses to the 'Anthropocene' and to emerging challenges in relation to climate change and ecological disaster. The realities of this present historical moment prompt a humanist ideological reaction, which identifies a lack of responsibility and adequate human action in the face of these ecological realities in an alienation of the human subject from its labour, upheld and reinforced by modern discourse. What is clear, however, is that this ideological argument mystifies the social relationship that exists between capitalism, work and the planet and how the realities of ecological catastrophe are not the result of alienated labour but of strategies of accumulation that have continually relied on revolutionising ways of working and on a forceful adaptation of the human relationship with nature.

## ‘Making’ History: Labour and the Humanism of the Anthropocene

This chapter tracks and exposes the ideological limitations that have emerged in contemporary social scientific considerations of labour in the context of ‘the Anthropocene.’ The chapter focuses its analysis on developments within the social sciences that have risen in response to recent discoveries in the field of geology – namely, the ‘discovery’ of humanity’s geological agency and the reflection of this agency in the geo-historical epoch of ‘the Anthropocene’ – which have taken these discoveries as an opportunity to revisit predominant theoretical approaches to social scientific concepts. The chapter argues that the figuration of labour within this social scientific approach is reflected in the emergence of a renewed theoretical humanism, in which the Anthropocene is problematised as a geo-historical expression of the historical power of human labour. This renewed theoretical humanism reproduces a now-familiar humanist problematic at the core of social scientific approaches to the Anthropocene: namely, a critical analysis of the geo-historical *alienation* of human labour. This analysis of alienated labour is reflected in a critique of modernity, where the sustained separation between human and natural histories is argued to have manifested itself in two centuries of alienated human labour: the products of which are the conditions of planetary instability that today face humanity. However, this theoretically humanist approach has an ideological effect, mystifying the social relationship that exists between capitalist relations of (re)production and these contemporary conditions of climatological imbalance. The argument made by this chapter is that this humanist approach to the problem of labour and the observation of its geo-historical alienation, forecloses its sociological application, preventing a fuller understanding of the relationship between the social relations of human society and contemporary planetary conditions.

The Anthropocene discourse is diverse and multi-disciplinary, covering contributions to the fields of geology, chemistry and biology as well as politics, sociology, ethics and economics under one conceptual umbrella. The term ‘Anthropocene’ itself originates from research conducted by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000) – an atmospheric chemist and biologist respectively – in a short article for the *Global Change Newsletter* of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP). In the article, Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) presented evidence for the Earth’s entering into of a new geological era, which has been shaped fundamentally by the human species as a natural force. Whilst other eras have been marked by volcanic eruptions, glacial movements or extreme cooling, the human species itself, through its activity upon the Earth, is argued to have joined this list of natural forces in ushering in the next stage of Earth’s geological

history (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000). Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) argued that the Holocene epoch, a period spanning the last ten to twelve thousand years and characterised by stable global temperatures capable of sustaining life, has ended and that the contemporary geological era is that of the human: the Anthropocene.

For Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), the start of the Anthropocene coincided with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, with particular attention paid to the invention by James Watt of the steam engine towards the end of the eighteenth century. Other natural scientific analyses of the Anthropocene that followed (see McNeill & Engelke, 2014; Steffen et al., 2011; Zalasiewicz et al., 2008) have debated between themselves the 'actual' start date, with some defending the initial one agreed by Crutzen and Stoermer (2000) and others placing greater emphasis on the so-called 'great acceleration' in both human population and human consumption patterns in the middle of the twentieth century. Regardless of the start date, these natural scientists find consensus in the need to classify the current geo-historical moment as one indelibly shaped by human action:

We learn that 30-50% of the land surface has been transformed by human action; more nitrogen is now fixed synthetically and applied as fertilizers in agriculture than fixed naturally in all terrestrial ecosystems; the escape into the atmosphere of NO [nitric oxide] from fossil fuel and biomass combustion likewise is larger than the natural inputs, giving rise to photochemical ozone ('smog') formation in extensive regions of the world; more than half of all accessible fresh water is used by mankind; human activity has increased the species extinction rate by thousand to ten thousand fold in the tropical rain forests and several climatically important 'green house' gases have substantially increased in the atmosphere: CO<sub>2</sub> [carbon dioxide] by more than 30% and CH<sub>4</sub> [methane] by even more than 100% (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000, p.17).

The existence of the Anthropocene as a specific and 'official' geological epoch has not yet been codified, as doing so requires the completion and submission of geological research, including the demonstration of a visible layer in the rock of the planet that distinguishes this epoch from the last. However, its lack of 'official' definition has not prevented the emergence of an already quite substantial social scientific discourse dedicated to the posture of a variety of questions and theories regarding human society in relation to its new-found geological agency. As Bruno Latour (2017) writes, "these historians are proposing the most radical term of all for putting an end to anthropocentrism as well as to the old forms of naturalism; they are thus completely reconstituting the role of human agents" (p.117). Fundamentally, the possibility of the Anthropocene, and its implications in relation to the inextricable relationship between human society and planetary history,

makes possible and necessary a renewed critique of the presuppositions on which social scientific enquiry has, until this point, been consistently based.

This chapter focuses on the figuration of labour in the context of the emergence of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene makes necessary the re-centring of questions regarding the relationship of the human subject with nature and the manifestation of that relationship within history itself. This chapter argues that a humanist conceptualisation of labour – corresponding precisely to this relationship between humans and nature – figures at the centre of a renewed theoretical humanism within the Anthropocene discourse. In this way, the Anthropocene as a geo-historical juncture, marred by planetary instability, is formulated as a problem of human labour. The question of labour frames the problematic of the Anthropocene and also provides the foundation from which to imagine and deploy potential ‘solutions’ to these problems.

## LABOUR AND THE THEORETICAL HUMANISM OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

A closer analysis of the Anthropocene discourse reveals that labour and the problematisation of the historical power of human labour sits as the theoretical pivot of this emerging discourse. The emergence of the Anthropocene and the conditions of planetary instability that it brings with it are presented, fundamentally, as problems of human labour. Human interaction with nature over the last two centuries – and its manifestation in the cities, industry, agriculture and technological advancement that has come to define the appearance of human society – has, whilst bringing to pass the conditions of liberal democratic capitalism, also brought with it conditions of planetary instability. The Anthropocene brings to the attention of its observer the *power* of human labour to not only produce the marvels that have revolutionised human existence but also the planetary conditions that place this existence in real peril. The essence of this paradoxical situation is, in all instances, the labour of humanity, the activity of the *Anthropos* of the Anthropocene: a reality that makes absolutely necessary the figuration of this labour as the central problematic of thinking this historical epoch.

With this problem of human labour at its centre, the Anthropocene emerges as the foundation for the construction and deployment of a renewed theoretical humanism. On the one hand, the Anthropocene itself is a problem of human labour, in the ways outlined above. The conditions of planetary instability that today confront humanity are a direct product of its own activity. On the other hand, however, the apparent geo-historical power of human labour in fact bolsters humanity and the human subject as a geo-historical actor. If the human subject is imbued with the power to bring the planet to the brink of ecological catastrophe then, surely, it is *the* actor with the power capable of transcending this geo-historical trajectory and charting an alternative historical path. This theoretical humanism is reflected across the Anthropocene discourse: from natural scientific

considerations of ‘planetary stewardship’ that have built directly upon Crutzen’s and Stoermer’s (2000) geological conclusions; to developments within the social sciences which have argued that the realities of this geo-historical moment make both possible and necessary the emergence of “a new human condition” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p.4).

The discourse of the Anthropocene is not the first time that a theoretical humanism of this type has been deployed within critical analysis. In his *Reply to John Lewis*, Althusser ([1972] 2008) constructed a critique of a very similar theoretical humanism emerging within Marxist-humanist critiques of labour and history. In his essay, the target of Althusser’s (2008) critique was the observation of a particular historical quality within human labour: that is, the ability of human labour to *make* and *re-make* history. From a perspective of Marxist-humanism, it was easy to see the utility of this ideological notion. The idea that human labour *made* history qualified the notion that capitalism – as a historically specific social formation – could in fact itself be the *product* of historically alienated human labour: that is, historical activity carried out against the interests of those who completed it (Althusser, 2008). Moreover, this humanist ideological consideration of labour was important because it also qualified Marxist-humanist analyses of revolution as the ability of the human subject, now conscious of its alienated condition, to *transcend* its historical situation through the conscious application of its own historically-powerful labour (Althusser, 2008). In this way, as Althusser (2008) argued, “to make history is therefore ‘to negate the negation’, and so on, without end” (p.72).

In this humanist ideological figuration of labour and its reflection in historical progress, the precise emancipatory force of human labour exists not in its simple power of creation, but in its power of *transcendence*: that is, the ability, when confronted with particular conditions of historical existence, to overcome those conditions and chart an alternative historical path. As Althusser (2008) wrote of this approach, it

Does not endow [the human subject] with a power of absolute creation (when one creates everything it is relatively easy: there are no limitations!) but with something even more stupefying – the power of ‘transcendence’, of being able to progress by indefinitely *negating-superseding* the constraints of the history *in which* he lives, the power to transcend history by *human liberty* (p.75, original emphasis).

This property of transcendence, inherent to humanist ideological considerations of labour, proves itself to be particularly important in the considerations of labour and history made by the theorists of the Anthropocene too. In fact, this theoretically humanist framework outlines the entire approach of the Anthropocene theorists to the problems of labour and of history. It is, on the one hand, the ability of the human subject to *make*



history in the first instance that explains the emergence of the geo-historical conditions of the Anthropocene: the idea that “we’, the human species, unconsciously destroyed nature to the point of hijacking the Earth system into a new geological epoch” (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016, p.XII). But on the other hand, it is the precise ability of the human subject to use this power to transcend the geo-historical conditions that confront humanity that marks an historical path out of the crisis of the Anthropocene too: “In the time of the Anthropocene, the entire functioning of the Earth becomes a matter of human political choices” (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016, p.25).

In different ways and from varying perspectives, it is possible to observe the presence of this theoretical humanism throughout the Anthropocene discourse. For example, it finds its most simplistic reflection in the discourse of ‘planetary stewardship’ that emerges primarily within natural scientific approaches to the Anthropocene. Building on the original conclusions of Crutzen and Stoermer (2000), a number of theorists within the natural scientific approach to the Anthropocene (see Chapin et al., 2010; Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2011) have argued that the Anthropocene marks both a moment of crisis but also a particularly useful opportunity in which to re-evaluate humanity’s relationship with the planet. As Chapin et al. (2010) write, “this unsustainable trajectory demands a dramatic change in human relationships with the environment and life-support system of the planet” (p.241). These scientists observe the completion of this dramatic change in the occupation of human beings of a role as *planetary stewards*. According to these authors, humanity’s ascension to a geological force in the era of the Anthropocene has not only meant that they are responsible for the setting of the planet upon an unstable ecological trajectory, but also that they remain the *only force capable* of potentially reversing the effects of their actions and creating more stable climatological conditions. As Steffen et al. (2011) write, “we are the first generation with the knowledge of how our activities influence the Earth System, and thus the first generation with the power and the responsibility to change our relationship with the planet” (p.749).

For the natural scientists, the solutions to this problematic are largely techno-scientific in nature. There is an emerging consensus regarding the design and deployment of models of planetary stewardship around Rockström et al.’s (2009) model of ‘planetary boundaries’: the establishment of nine key ecological boundaries of differing variables (such as, for example, levels of ocean acidification, rates of biodiversity loss and the observation of ozone depletion), over which human beings become responsible for ensuring the equilibrium and sustainability. As Steffen et al. (2011) write of this approach, it is designed to “define a ‘safe operating space’ for humanity by analyzing the intrinsic dynamics of the Earth System and identifying points or levels relating to critical global-scale processes beyond which humanity should not go” (p.753). The barriers to achieving the successful deployment of this programme are, for the natural scientists, largely problems of global governance. For these authors, fundamental alterations in

international and domestic structures of governmentality are the crucial first step to successfully completing this programme of planetary stewardship. As Chapin et al. (2010) write, “transformations involve forward-looking decisions to convert a system trapped in an undesirable state to a fundamentally different, potentially more beneficial system, whose properties reflect different social-ecological controls” (p.246) with Steffen et al. (2011) echoing this, arguing that “human impacts on Earth System functioning cannot be resolved within individual jurisdictions alone; supranational cooperation is required” (p.751).

This theory of planetary stewardship is a limited one, insofar as it places a great deal of faith in governing institutions such as governments, corporations or supranational bodies, without properly interrogating the particular inequalities and social harms often incubated by these institutions. Moreover, as Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) write, within the natural scientific discourse, “everything is presented as if the environmental knowledge and initiatives of civil society did not exist” (p.82) and that the knowledge of this particular planetary predicament emanates exclusively from these scientists and their geological discoveries, in which the scientists appear not only “as spokespeople for the Earth, but also as shepherds of a public opinion that is ignorant and helpless” (p.80). Limitations aside, what is evident is that reflected within this theory of planetary stewardship are the ingredients of a particular theoretical humanism, which pivots on the concept of labour. The Anthropocene as an historical moment is here formulated as a product of the inherent historical power of human labour to not only shape the products that it pulls from nature (in the form of the industrial development of human society and production across the last two centuries), but also, in so doing, to shape the very nature of the raw material from which it extracts this productive capability (in the form of the ecological instability of the world which now faces this humanity). Finally, and perhaps most crucially, the knowledge of the Anthropocene catalyses the transcendent ability of human labour, of its ability to shift fundamentally and negate the constraints of this historical moment by virtue of the application of its own action in an alternative direction.

Social scientific approaches to the Anthropocene have been more successful in considering questions of social inequalities in their approach. More than this, it is argued that the Anthropocene, in forcing together human and natural histories in such a dramatic fashion in fact undermines the modern epistemological orientation on which knowledge – but also, *power* – has been based. As Hamilton et al. (2015) write, “the Anthropocene means that natural history and human history, largely taken as independent and incommensurable since the early nineteenth century, must now be thought as one and the same geo-history” (p.4). The Anthropocene therefore is expressive, for the social scientists, of an opportunity to re-interrogate notions such as ‘equality’, ‘justice’ and ‘democracy’ by exposing the inadequacies of a constellation of power relations now confronted with the very real dangers posed by planetary history itself:

Human-induced climate change gives rise to large and diverse issues of justice: justice between generations, between small island-nations and the polluting countries (both past and prospective), between developed, industrialised nations (historically responsible for most emissions) and the newly industrialising ones, and so on (Chakrabarty, 2015, p.49).

Despite the fact that the social scientific approach to the Anthropocene is more developed in its considerations of power, inequality and social justice, what is evident is that the theoretical humanism of the 'planetary boundaries' approach in fact finds itself reflected – albeit with greater sophistication – in these social scientific approaches too. The adaptation of the human relationship with the planet demands the problematisation of human labour and the extent to which it itself is the reflection of the modern separation between human and natural histories. The result is an echo of the considerations of the natural scientists: that humans, who have laboured towards the Anthropocene, are the *only* geological agents, catalysed by the reality of their actions, capable of reformulating this relationship with nature.

The evidence of this theoretically humanist approach is located primarily in the way that labour is used to describe humanity's geo-historical emergence at the time of the Anthropocene and its discontents. This depends firstly upon the establishment of labour as *the* historical motor, which is set out well by Mackenzie Wark (2015). For Wark (2015), labour is an important concept for the theorists of the Anthropocene because it is descriptive of an historical motor which, though it originates from the hands of the human subject, nonetheless has interpenetrative historical effects upon both human and natural histories. The concept of labour is important because it allows for the theorists of the Anthropocene to construct a version of history that undermines the modern idea of nature as a space upon which history itself merely unfolds. Rather, the concept of labour allows for the theorists of the Anthropocene to demonstrate a *historical causality* that emerges from human labour, in its ability to shape natural history as well as its own (Wark, 2015). As Wark (2015) writes,

Labor finds itself *in and against* nature. Labor is always firstly in nature, subsumed within a totality greater than itself. Labor is secondly against nature. It comes into being through an effort to bend resisting nature to its purposes. Its intuitive understanding of causality comes not from exchange value but from use value. Labor experiments with nature, finding new uses for it. Its understanding of nature is historical, always evolving, reticent about erecting an abstract causality over the unknown (p.19, original emphasis).

In this way, the theorists of the Anthropocene can stress the central importance of human labour as a historical motor, but justify its inclusion in their anti-modern critique by showing how – by virtue of the emergence of the Anthropocene itself – it is an historical activity with implications for both humans and non-humans alike. As Wark (2015) writes, “labor is the mingling of many things, most of them not human...almost already a cyborg point of view, in which the human organism and its machines interleave in an apparatus” (Wark, 2015, p.217). However, despite the fact that labour, thought in this way, implicates more than simply human actors or human history, the question that is left necessarily unanswered is the question of precisely *who* is carrying out this labour. The configuration of labour in this way, as a historical motor, still depends upon the existence of a human subject to carry it out.

For example, it is evident within these social scientific approaches that it is the human being – wielding this geo-historically powerful form of labour – that has *made* planetary history, albeit in a particularly unstable form. The Anthropocene, as a geo-historical moment defined by potential ecological catastrophe, is, unequivocally, the product of this human labour. The Anthropocene “captures the realization that humanity is interfering, interacting, and communicating with the Earth’s long-term systems with increasing intensity” (Schwägerl, 2013, p.29). Human action as human labour is the precondition for historical development, as “real history only commenced when humans began to do unnatural things: cultivate crops, make tools, build cities, and create societies and cultures” (LeCain, 2016, p.15). What is repeatedly made clear is that, despite the fact that labour has been shown to have effects across both human and non-human histories, it is in the specifically historical character of human labour that these histories are themselves made: “The more we interfere with resources and ecosystems, the closer we get to natural phenomena and the deeper we move ‘into’ the new nature that arises through our actions” (Schwägerl, 2013, p.36). The Anthropocene forces humanity to confront the geo-historical power of its own labour and how it resolves itself in the appearance and trajectory not of human history alone but of natural history too.

However, it is this precise moment of confrontation that also compels the human subject to *transcend* the geo-historical conditions of the Anthropocene – conditions of its own making – and chart an alternative historical path. This transcendence of history through human labour is reflected in what the social scientists have often termed a ‘new human condition’: a new sense of responsibility felt by the human subject in the context of the planet and the natural world, with an alternative geo-historical trajectory emanating from this new-found responsibility. As Pálsson et al. (2012) write,

The new era, characterized by measurable global human impact – the Anthropocene – does not just imply conflation of the natural and the social, but

also a ‘radical’ change in perspective and action in terms of human awareness of and responsibility for a vulnerable earth – a ‘new human condition’ (p.4).

Consciousness of the power of human labour – of its inherent ability to cross both human and natural histories – underpins a new human condition in which the human subject, armed with this consciousness, transcends the present historical situation. In this way, “the Anthropocene therefore really commences when humans become aware of their global role in shaping the earth and, consequently, when this awareness shapes their relationship with the natural environment” (Palsson et al., 2012, p.8). Despite the fact that the Anthropocene is considered an important era insofar as it presents a version of history in which human beings are neither the main nor the sole actors, the human subject nonetheless finds itself re-asserted at the centre of history in this view: it is the consciousness of the human subject as to the power of their labour that catalyses an alternative geo-historical trajectory. Though, as LeCain (2016) writes, “humanism may never be the same again” (p.15), it is still very much a ‘humanism’ with which these theorists are concerned.

Across these examples, it has been possible to show how approaches to the Anthropocene – expressed across quite different disciplines with quite different political aims – share a central theoretical framework, the nature of which is fundamentally humanist. The central problematic with which the theorists of the Anthropocene are faced is one of human labour and the fact that its deployment over the last two centuries has resulted in the production of a particularly unstable geo-historical epoch, marred by a changing climate, biodiversity loss and ozone depletion. In the face of these realities, human labour is configured as the precise force capable of transcending this geo-historical situation and forging an alternative historical trajectory that can avoid potential catastrophe: either reflected in renewed systems of governance and the enforcement of planetary boundaries; or reflected in the emergence of a new human condition, wherein the human subject is conscious of their geo-historical power and aims to use it for the better.

It is at this point that the chapter arrives at *the* fundamental point of critical interrogation, particularly in relation to social scientific approaches to the Anthropocene. It is evident that the Anthropocene itself is a product of human labour; and it is also evident that human labour remains the potential ‘solution’ to the problems here presented. What remains to be accounted for by the theorists of the Anthropocene is why, precisely, human labour over the last two centuries has resulted in the production of these catastrophic geo-historical conditions. More pressing still, this question is important because its answer points towards the precise *change* that will be necessary if humanity is to transcend these contemporary geo-historical conditions. It is here that the Anthropocene discourse relies – as many theoretical humanisms in the past have also

done – on the construction and deployment of a theory of human *alienation* in order to problematise the Anthropocene. Addressing the last two centuries of human labour demands their consideration in the context of an historical alienation, the struggle against which will provide the precise geo-historical tools with which humanity can transcend the present situation.

## ALIENATION, MODERNITY AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

The explanation of the Anthropocene as an unstable geo-historical manifestation of human labour, depends upon the centrality of human alienation as a theoretical problematic. For the social scientists of the Anthropocene, alienation is the precise conceptual device utilised to explain the geo-historical trajectory of human labour over the last two centuries, descriptive of a *distance* or *separation* enjoyed by humanity from its grounding within natural history. For these theorists, the critical analysis of this geo-historical alienation is reflected in the completion of a critique of *modernity*. These theorists argue that the geo-historical trajectory of human labour and its alienated reflection in forms of society, production, culture and history that are cut off from their grounding in natural history, has been underpinned at all times by the reinforcement of a false separation between human and natural histories at the heart of modern discourse. The Anthropocene, as a geo-historical moment, not only provides humanity with the consciousness of its geological agency, but provides the opportunity for the reflection of this consciousness in a critique of modernity and for its embedding within discourse itself. For the social scientists of the Anthropocene, the critique of modernity is a corollary critique of the geo-historical alienation of the human subject and its labour. The reflection of geo-historical consciousness within discourse is here argued to parallel the expression of this consciousness in forms of social and political action necessary to transcend the dangerous planetary conditions of the Anthropocene.

However, this problematic of alienation reproduces particular limitations that undermine the explanatory potential of this discourse. Notably, despite the centrality of the critique of modernity and the modern ideological separation between human and natural histories, this problem of alienation in fact reproduces many of the modern ideological tropes from which it seeks a break. This is visible most obviously in its re-assertion of the human subject as the central geo-historical actor in its analysis. It is the alienation of the human actor that explains the emergence of the Anthropocene, but it is also precisely the human subject, in achieving consciousness of its alienated condition (and reflecting this consciousness in its deployment of social and political strategy) that possesses the power by which to transcend these geo-historical conditions of its own making. More severely, from a sociological perspective, this story of human alienation also mystifies the social relations of human society and the extent to which they underpin any

possible social or political change. As the chapter will show in due course, this mystification of social relations is particularly problematic for the implication and analysis of the social relations of capitalist production in the context of planetary crisis.

Social scientific approaches to the Anthropocene are littered with signposts that point toward the existence of a condition of human alienation. It is manifest in descriptions of the way in which human beings “unwittingly” (Chakrabarty, 2009, p.206) laboured their way into the Anthropocene. As Chakrabarty (2009) writes, “it is true that human beings have tumbled into being a geological agent through our own decisions. The Anthropocene, one might say, has been an unintended consequence of human choices” (p.210). Moreover, the links between this alienated condition and the development of modernity and modern discourse are also evident in the foregrounding of this analysis. Just as Klaus Eder (1996) wrote that “modernity’s characteristic pride in dominating nature *has caused us to forget* that we are living in the culture that more or less unconsciously ‘forces’ us into a self-destructive relationship with nature” (p.VII-VIII, emphasis added), the theorists of the Anthropocene today observe a similar problematic, arguing that “the moderns, having externalised Nature, were blind to the environmental/geological impacts of the industrial mode of development” (Hamilton et al., 2015, p.7). There is a recognition, at the forefront of the Anthropocene discourse of a particular unconsciousness or alienation that defines the human condition and, importantly, is reflected in modernity itself.

The recognition of this condition of alienation underpins the celebration of the Anthropocene as a moment within the social sciences. In forcing humanity’s consciousness as to the geo-historical power of its labour and its occupation of a position of geological agency, the Anthropocene provides an opportunity through which to undermine this condition of alienation, articulated through a critique of modernity as the concrete epistemological reflection of this alienation. As Hamilton et al. (2015) write, “the Anthropocene represents a threshold marking a sharp change in the relationship of humans to the natural world” (p.3), that is expressed in “the ‘impossible’ fact that humans have become a ‘force’ of nature and the reality that human action and Earth dynamics have converged and can no longer be seen as belonging to distinct incommensurable domains” (p.3). This violent coming-together of world histories necessitates the imagination of “a new human condition and requires us to reintegrate nature and the Earth system at the heart of our understanding of history, our conception of freedom and our practice of democracy” (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016, p.19-20). In this way, as Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) continue, “the grand narrative of the Anthropocene is thus the story of an awakening. There was a long moment of unawareness, from 1750 to the late twentieth century, followed by a sudden arousal” (p.73).

The social scientists of the Anthropocene pinpoint this alienated human condition in the false separation between ‘human’ and ‘natural’ histories that underpins the modern

*episteme*. For the theorists of the Anthropocene, ideas of ‘society’ and ‘nature’ are themselves recent inventions of a modern discipline which has presided over a division in the production of knowledge, observing human history in one set of disciplines and discourses (the ‘human sciences’) and observing natural history in another, entirely separate set of discourses (the ‘natural sciences’). It is through this epistemological arrangement, peculiar to modernity, that social science has arrived at the categories of ‘Man’ and ‘Nature’ as distinct entities with distinct histories:

From Buffon to Lyell and Darwin, biology and geology extended terrestrial time to hundreds of millions of years, creating a context that was seemingly external, almost immobile and indifferent to human tribulations. In parallel with this, the bourgeois and industrial Enlightenment emphasized the value of man, the modern subject, as autonomous agent acting consciously on his history and settling social conflicts by dominating nature (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016, p.19).

Exposing the peculiarity of this epistemological orientation to modernity is the centrepiece of Bruno Latour’s (1993) assertion that *We Have Never Been Modern*. Latour (1993) argued that modernity and modern knowledge were problematic insofar as they relied upon and reproduced this false separation between human and natural histories. The invention of modernity, so Latour (1993) argued, was based upon a sustained separation of human politics and society from the phenomena of the natural world, as knowledge of each was produced necessarily in isolation. As Latour (1993) wrote, modern knowledge produced a world in which “the representation of things through the intermediary of the laboratory is forever dissociated from the representation of citizens through the intermediary of the social contract” (Latour, 1993, p.27). Human history, expressed in theories of politics and society were kept at arms-length from natural history as reflected in the study of biology or chemistry. Latour’s (1993) argument was that the entire modern *episteme* was based upon this fundamental separation, but that it was ultimately a false one, reproduced in order to secure the functionality of discourses of knowledge, but which had no real basis in the reality of things:

By rendering mixtures unthinkable, by emptying, sweeping, cleaning and purifying the arena that is opened... the moderns allowed the practice of mediation to recombine all possible monsters without letting them have any effect on the social fabric, or even any contact with it (p.42).

However, with the arrival of the Anthropocene, it becomes impossible to maintain the separation between these monsters of the natural world and the social fabric of human history (Latour, 2017). The coming-together of human and natural histories implicated by



the discoveries of the Anthropocene explodes the modern separation of these histories and the discourses of knowledge that were founded on this sustained separation: “The Anthropocene does not ‘go beyond’ this division: it circumvents it entirely. The geohistorical forces *ceased to be the same* as the geological forces as soon as they fused at multiple points with human actions” (Latour, 2017, p.120, original emphasis). In the Anthropocene, it becomes impossible to think about ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ actors within the social and political arena, as the two are forced together and become inseparable. As Latour (2017) continues,

Where we were dealing earlier with a ‘natural’ phenomenon, at every point we now meet the ‘Anthropos’... and, wherever we follow human footprints, we discover modes of relating to things that had formerly been located in the field of nature (p.120).

For Latour (2017), it is simply impossible to any longer maintain the separation of human and natural history, making necessary the explosion of modern discourse and its presuppositions. For Latour (2015) it is expressive of an opportunity to construct and deploy a critique of modernity and is “the best alternative we have to usher us away from the notion of modernisation” (p.146).

Crucially, the realities presented by the Anthropocene extend the impetus of this critique of modernity beyond mere academic interest. The Anthropocene does not simply present a conceptual or epistemic crisis in terms of modernity and its assumptions. It also presents a very real crisis in which the geo-historical existence of both humans and the planet is placed in particular danger. As Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) write, “while triumphant industrial modernity had promised to prise us away from nature, its cycles and its limits, placing us in a world of boundless progress, the Earth and its limits are today making a comeback” (p.20). The reinforced separation between human and natural history within modernity is reflected in the real-world incapability of human beings to react to a warming climate, to rising sea levels, mass extinctions and to the increase in climate-related disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes and floods: an incapability that is rooted, fundamentally, in an inability to *comprehend* this reality. In this way, the critique of modernity is not simply the search for better theory in the era of the Anthropocene, but also the search for a way in which to make humanity conscious of its geohistorical agency and therefore able to avert incoming ecological catastrophe.

For authors such as Latour (2014), the focus of such an endeavour resides in the adaptation of human politics. For Latour (2014), contemporary politics is reflective of humanity’s modern alienated condition, deploying political strategies and structures in a way that remains cut off from its grounding in nature and natural history. In the modern era, Latour (2014) argues that human beings lack “the mental and emotional repertoire”

(p.1) to face the challenges of the Anthropocene. Problematically for Latour (2014), this modern human alienation is reflected in the “impotence” (p.15) of humanity when confronted with the ecological realities of the Anthropocene:

Either we agitate ourselves as traditional political agents longing for freedom – but such a liberty has no connection with the world of matter – or we decide to submit to the realm of material necessity – but such a material world has nothing in it that looks even vaguely like the freedom or autonomy of olden times. Either the margins of actions have no consequence in the material world, or there is no freedom left in the material world for engaging with it in any politically recognizable fashion (p.15).

For Latour (2014), this human impotence stems from the spectre of the modern separation between human and natural history that continues to haunt human political strategies. As Latour (2014) argues, it is *impossible* to think politics in this condition of alienation: impossible to think politics when “what is to be composed is divided into two domains, *one that is inanimate and has no agency, and one which is animated and concentrates all the agencies*” (p.14, original emphasis).

The solution, for Latour (2014) is the construction and deployment of politics and forms of political agency that transcend this historical alienation and conflate human and natural histories through the distribution of political agency across human and non-human actors alike: “far from trying to ‘reconcile’ or ‘combine’ nature and society, the task, the crucial political task, is on the contrary to *distribute* agency as far and in as *differentiated* a way as possible” (p.15, original emphasis). Crucially, however, this task remains a fundamentally human one: the task of a human subjectivity, imbued with geo-historical power and agency, to construct and deploy a form of history that embeds this political image. For example, Latour’s (2014) considerations of political agency in the Anthropocene are driven fundamentally by the potential *recognition* of all non-human actors and entities by a humanity that acts as a geological force, with Latour (2014) arguing that geo-historical agency in the Anthropocene will be located by its recognition and inclusion in the historically conscious action of the Anthropos. As Latour (2014) writes,

This time we encounter, just as in the old prescientific and nonmodern myths, an agent which gains its name of ‘subject’ because he or she might be *subjected* to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent, who also gains its quality of ‘subject’ because it is also *subjected* to his or her action (p.5, original emphasis).

In Latour's (2014) formulations, the humanity of the Anthropocene not only possesses the ability to make history but, in so doing, names the agents of this history too through its recognition – in the context of its own historical action – of actors of various kinds. Natural history comes to matter only to the extent that it becomes bound up in the historically-powerful action of the Anthropos: a binding that ascribes meaning and agency to this history. As Latour (2014) writes, “existence and meaning are synonymous. *As long as they act, agents have meaning*” (p.12, original emphasis).

This notion is reflected more starkly in accounts such as those of Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) and his reconsideration of Enlightenment. In much the same way as Latour (2014), Chakrabarty (2009) argues that the values of freedom, democracy and equality that have come to define modern, liberal politics are deployed in contemporary society in a condition of fundamental and essential alienation, in which they correspond to the false separation between human and natural histories. As Chakrabarty (2009) writes, in modernity, “philosophers of freedom were mainly, and understandably, concerned with how humans would escape the injustice, oppression, inequality, or even uniformity foisted on them by other humans or human-made systems” (p.208). In the Anthropocene, where human and natural history interpenetrate one another, this narrow conception of freedom in fact, for Chakrabarty (2009), forecloses its fuller understanding and realisation: it is in this way that Chakrabarty (2009) poses the question, “is the geological agency of humans the price we pay for the pursuit of freedom?” (p.210). The full realisation of freedom demands its conceptual development in relation to the shared historical destiny of humans and the natural world. For Chakrabarty (2009), it is no longer adequate to consider freedom within the confines of human societies and man-made political structures: rather, it must be a value conceived of in relation to the non-human actors who have been thrust into an inextricable relationship with humans by the Anthropocene. As Chakrabarty (2009) writes,

Whatever our socioeconomic and technological choices, whatever the rights we wish to celebrate as our freedom, we cannot afford to destabilize conditions (such as the temperature zone in which the planet exists) that work like boundary parameters of human existence. They have been stable for much longer than the histories of these institutions and have allowed human beings to become the dominant species on earth (p.218).

Chakrabarty (2009) argues that this does not mean that these values should be abandoned: on the contrary, their achievement must be re-orientated as the central task of the human struggle against alienation. For Chakrabarty (2009), “the Anthropocene is about *waking up to the rude shock* of the recognition of the otherness of the planet” (p.55, emphasis added), that is, about humanity's becoming-conscious of its alienation and its

struggle to redeploy these concepts of Enlightenment in the wake of this consciousness. For Chakrabarty (2009), the answer must be the reflection of this new-found consciousness across *all* areas of life in the Anthropocene, where politics and society, and its expression in democracy, in collective action and in public discourse is at all times a manifestation of the shared historical destiny of both human and non-human actors. As Chakrabarty (2009) writes, “for humans any thought of the way out of our current predicament cannot but refer to the idea of deploying reason in global, collective life” (p.210). Just as the Young Marx (1981) argued that communism was the social manifestation of humanity’s consciousness of the reflection of its own labour in nature, the Anthropocene as a geo-historical era must be, for Chakrabarty (2009), one in which humanity similarly recognises itself in the planet as a whole: “Logically, then, in the era of the Anthropocene, we need the Enlightenment (that is, reason) even more than in the past” (p.211).

Theorists like Jane Bennett (2004, 2010) echo this in a more philosophical argument, arguing that the Anthropocene provides the context in which to re-think materialism and materialist philosophies. Bennett (2004) problematises modern considerations of materialism – particularly implicating Marx’s materialism – as foreclosing the contemplation of a “less specifically human kind of materiality” (p.348) and the idea that “attentiveness to (nonhuman) things and their powers can have a laudable effect on humans” (p.348). For Bennett (2004), the Anthropocene offers the opportunity to re-think materialist philosophy in the way that it centralises the notion that human society is not the product of isolated human action (as the modern view would have it), but in fact is the material product of a complex interplay between matter of human and non-human varieties. It is an argument for what Bennett (2004) calls ‘thing-power materialism’:

Thing-power materialism does not endorse the view, absorbed from the nineteenth-century roots of the science of ecology by deep ecologists, that ‘ecological’ means ‘harmonious’ or tending toward equilibrium. To be ecological is to participate in a collectivity, but not all collectivities operate as *organic* wholes (p.365, original emphasis).

For Bennett (2004), contemporary philosophy reflects modern alienation, unable to think human and natural history together in its materialist vision. This version of materialism, as opposed to its modern predecessor, “figures things as being more than mere objects, emphasizing their powers of life, resistance, and even a kind of will” (Bennett, 2004, p.360). In the era of the Anthropocene, this materialist vision points towards a more suitable method of philosophical comprehension in the wake of potential ecological crises. It signals the fact that planetary history is the culmination of collective action across

species boundaries: a culmination that implicates not only the problems, but also the solutions of the Anthropocene (Bennett, 2004). As Bennett (2004) concludes, “these are powers that, in a tightly knit world, we ignore at our own peril” (p.360).

This theoretical critique of modernity and alienation is also evident in Donna Haraway’s (2015, 2016) considerations of subjectivity. Though Haraway (2016) has reservations about the name ‘Anthropocene’ (“surely such a transformative time on earth must not be named the Anthropocene!” [p.30-31]), Haraway (2016) recognises the present moment as one of significance, insofar as it allows for the interrogation and deconstruction of anthropocentric conceptualisations of subjectivity. For Haraway (2015), the Anthropocene as the coming-together of human and natural histories undermines the modern humanist notion that human subjectivity is cut off from nature or other non-human entities, instead exposing subjectivity as a messy and co-created product of multiple entities. As Haraway (2015) writes, “no species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern Western scripts, acts alone; assemblages of organic species and of abiotic actors make history, the evolutionary kind and the other kinds too” (p.159). In the Anthropocene, the conception of subjectivity in any other way becomes inadequate, as subjectivity ceases to correlate to its modern, individualistic notion and instead has meaning only in a time of geo-historical agency: “What used to be called nature has erupted into ordinary human affairs, and vice versa, in such a way and with such permanence as to change fundamentally means and prospects for going on, including going on at all” (Haraway, 2016, p.40).

For Haraway (2016), the Anthropocene is an important moment insofar as it allows for humanity to *think* beyond its alienated condition. Haraway (2016) argues that the Anthropocene is the manifestation of a particular alienated condition, in which humans are unable to think catastrophe due to the persistence of modernity and modern ideologies in the way that bodies, agents and subjects are conceived and thought to matter. As Haraway (2016) writes,

What is it to surrender the capacity to think? These times called the Anthropocene are times of multispecies, including human, urgency: of great mass death and extinction; of unrushing disasters, whose unpredictable specificities are foolishly taken as unknowability itself; of refusing to be present in and to onrushing catastrophe in time; of unprecedented looking away (p.35).

For Haraway (2016), even in her distaste for the ‘Anthropocene’ as a descriptive term, the value of this geo-historical moment is that, in the wake of the consciousness of humanity as to the geo-historical power located in its labour, this capacity to think returns to humanity in a way that potentially inaugurates a new way of understanding subjectivity and thus a new way of reflecting subjectivity and recognition within society and culture

(Haraway, 2016). In this way, the Anthropocene allows for “making persons, [but] not necessarily as individuals or as humans” (Haraway, 2015, p.161).

Through the examples here discussed, it is clear to see the translation of the initial theoretical humanism of the Anthropocene discourse into a critical analysis of human alienation and its reflection in modern discourse. Modernity and modern discourse have been shown here to reflect a condition of human alienation, in which the human subject has found itself essentially cut off from its grounding in natural history. The precondition for humanity’s transcendence of the geo-historical parameters of the Anthropocene and its capabilities in escaping potential ecological activity, demands human consciousness of the geo-historical power of its own action and the reflection of this consciousness in alternative social and political strategies. In this way, humanity finds “the power to transcend history by *human liberty*” (Althusser, 2008, p.75, original emphasis). Therefore, the Anthropocene is not simply a moment of crisis, but celebrated here as a moment of opportunity through which humanity can – through the consciousness of its position, through its achievement of reason in the Anthropocene – chart an alternative geo-historical path.

However, this theory of alienation observed by the theorists of the Anthropocene is not unproblematic. What is evident is that the theoretical humanism of the Anthropocene discourse and its resolution in a problematic of human alienation is reproductive of a number of theoretical and ideological weaknesses that force the questioning of its analytical applicability. For example, the apparent break that the Anthropocene discourse proposes to make with modernity and modern ideology is betrayed by the re-assertion of the human subject at the centre of its theoretical critique. Despite the fact that the Anthropocene is celebrated in creating the conditions for the construction of a post-anthropocentric approach to social science, the position of the human subject as *the* defining geo-historical actor betrays this break, reflected in the reproduction of humanist ideological tropes regarding concepts such as human labour, human subjectivity and human history. In this way,

This fable, claiming to break with the world-view of the moderns that it incriminates, in the end actually reproduces it. It proceeds from the same regime of historicity that dominated the nineteenth century and a part of the twentieth, in which the past is assessed only as a backdrop, for the lessons it yields for the future, and in representation of time as a one-directional acceleration (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016, p.77-78).

Moreover, by insisting upon an analysis and observation of geo-historical alienation, crucial social relations are forced to the background. Though the proponents of the Anthropocene discourse suggest the development and deployment of alternative social

and political strategies for averting potential ecological catastrophe, the precise social relations (and potential social upheavals) that would foreground any such developments are obscured from view, hidden behind this ideological story of human alienation. As Palsson et al. (2012) write, “it is remarkable how little these concepts tell us about the process, the driving forces, and the social consequences of the changes they imply” (p.7).

Particularly problematic is the fact that, obscured by this humanist story of alienation are the social relations of production and reproduction inherent to contemporary capitalism. Nowhere figured in the social scientific response to the Anthropocene is the relationship between strategies of capital accumulation and the degradation of the planet. The idea that the inability of humanity to *think* or *comprehend* the crisis with which it is faced is the epicentre of human catastrophe “are just so much ideological noise, intended to obscure the real peril that humanity is today exposed to: that is to say, the impasse that globalised capitalism is leading us into” (Badiou, 2018, para.3). Moreover, it is not entirely clear to what extent the social science of the Anthropocene and its notions of human consciousness directly contradicts the ideological reproductions of the contemporary capitalist class. As authors like Naomi Klein (2014) have highlighted, it is precisely within the comfort of such techno-scientific and humanist ideological reactions to the problems of climate change that capitalists such as Richard Branson – the CEO of Virgin Atlantic airways and its fleet of fossil-fuel dependent jets – and policy-makers like Al Gore – the 2000 US Presidential Candidate – locate their concern about climate change and ecological disaster. They do so, because such an anthropocentric perspective that puts the blame squarely upon the “ingenious if unruly species” (Crist, 2016, p.16-17) of Man, foregoes the attribution of any blame to the strategies of accumulation inherent in globalised corporations or Western-democratic politics. As Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) argue, with caution, “the seductive Anthropocene concept may well become the official philosophy of a new technocratic and market-oriented geopower” (p.49).

There is a considerable legacy of ecological critiques of contemporary capitalism that have attempted to expose the links between capitalist development and the growing climatological instability of the planet. Notable contributions include those of James O’Connor (1991) and his founding of the journal *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* that has provided consistent leftist analysis of the relationship between capitalism and ecology. Also important were the contributions to Marxist political-ecology made by Paul Burkett ([1999] 2014) and John Bellamy Foster (2000) who stressed the link between the contradictions of capitalist development and ecological catastrophe. Centralising the concept of “metabolic rift” explored by Marx ([1894] 1991, p.949) in Volume Three of *Capital*<sup>2</sup>, these authors argued that ecological instability was the result of a contradiction

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<sup>2</sup> Marx (1991) wrote that “Large landed property reduces the agricultural population to an ever-decreasing minimum and confronts it with an ever growing industrial population crammed together in

that emerged between the development of capitalist production and the shrinking availability of space and resources required to power this development: “This contradiction develops through the growth simultaneously of large-scale industry and large-scale agriculture under capitalism, with the former providing the latter with the means of extensive exploitation of the soil” (Foster, 2000, p.156). Since then, there has been a notable proliferation of critical examinations of the relationship between capitalism and climate change that have focused on this relationship in the context of developing technologies (Hornborg, 2016), fossil fuels (Malm, 2015; Mitchell, 2013) and alternative economics (Wall, 2015).

The theoretical humanism of the Anthropocene discourse and its expression in the observation of geo-historical human alienation is problematic insofar as it forecloses the critical analysis of these social relations and the relationship between capitalism, class and ecology in the context of planetary crisis. Through the discourse of the Anthropocene, labour only becomes available in its humanist ideological form, expressive of the geo-historical act through which humanity is able to *make* and *re-make* history. In order to arrive at an analysis of work and labour which makes available the critique of this present geo-historical juncture in the context of the social relations of capitalism, an alternative theoretical approach is demanded that can more adequately deconstruct humanist ideology and produce an analytical framework based upon this ideological deconstruction. For this, the chapter turns to the work of Jason W. Moore (2015) and his world-ecological approach to work, capitalism and ecology.

## LABOUR AND THE CAPITALOCENE

The Anthropocene has told a particular story about the relationship between society, politics and the planet. It is a story, essentially, of the human being: in particular, an alienated human being that has unwittingly mined, burned and consumed its way into geological history. For Moore (2015), such a view completely obfuscates the role of capitalism in this story, in particular its unique relations of production, reproduction and *appropriation*: as well as the ideologies that facilitate the exercise of these relations. As Moore (2015) writes,

The Anthropocene makes for an easy story. Easy, because it does not challenge the naturalized inequalities, alienation, and violence inscribed in modernity’s strategic relations of power and production. It is an easy story because it does not ask us to think about these relations *at all* (p.170, original emphasis).

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large towns; in this way it produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself” (p.949).



Though resistant to such epochal labelling, Moore (2015) argues that such a period would be better defined as the 'Capitalocene': an "historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital" (p.173). Such a picture shifts the emphasis away from the human subject, towards the structural relations inherent within contemporary capitalism: a shift, in other words, away from the unwitting arrival of humanity into its role as a geological agent through the reckless burning of fossil fuels, to "the relations of power, capital, and nature that rendered fossil capital so deadly in the first place" (Moore, 2015, p.172).

Of particular interest to the analysis here conducted is the concept of 'appropriation' as a concept that "names those extra-economic processes that identify, secure, and channel unpaid work outside the commodity system into the circuit of capital" (Moore, 2015, p.17). Moore (2015) uses the concept of appropriation to bring a Marxist analysis of work together with the conditions of planetary crisis that today confront the social sciences. For Moore (2015), the production of capital does not depend simply upon the exploitation of human labour-power: rather, a fuller picture of capitalist production demands an analysis of the precise social processes through which capitalism *appropriates* cheap sources of food, water, land and reproductive labour as a way of reproducing this labour-power. In this way, Moore (2015) argues that it is inadequate to analyse contemporary capitalism merely as a mode of production: rather, capitalism is better explained as a *world-ecology*, where class struggle is reflected not simply in the social relations of production, but in the social relations of appropriation, manifest in *historically specific* forms of nature as well as society.

What is evident throughout this analysis of Moore's (2015) work is that the application of his analysis demands a consistent deconstruction of humanist ideology. To access this world-ecological view of capitalism and expose the reflection of historical class struggle in both the relations of production and those of appropriation, demands a theoretical approach that consistently decentralises the human subject as the focal-point of theoretical analysis. This is evident in the critique of modernity that Moore (2015) undertakes at the beginning of his critical analysis, but is carried throughout as Moore (2015) persistently critiques the human subject as an unhelpful ideological notion that obscures the social (that is, class) grounding of the conditions of planetary instability today confronting humanity.

At the top of Moore's (2015) analysis is a fundamental critique of modernity. Moore (2015) dedicates a significant portion of his work to the deconstruction of a 'Cartesian Dualism' (p.76) predicated upon the false separation of human and natural histories upheld by modern discourse. As Moore (2015) writes,

One of Cartesian dualism's essential features is the tendency to circumscribe truth claims by drawing hard and fast lines between what is human and what is 'natural.'

We might call this an *epistemic rift*. At the core of this epistemic rift is a series of violent abstractions implicated in the creation and reproduction of two separate epistemic domains: ‘Nature’ and ‘Society’ (p.76, original emphasis).

The language that Moore (2015) uses here in his critique would fit comfortably with the anti-modern critique conducted by the theorists of the Anthropocene such as Latour (1993). However, for Moore (2015), modernity is initially problematic not because it reflects and justifies the alienated condition of humanity, but because it mystifies the fact that contemporary capitalism occupies a ‘world-ecological’ (p.3) position in history. For Moore (2015), the contemporary geo-historical moment that has so far been classified as ‘the Anthropocene’ in fact points towards capitalism’s position as a world-ecological social formation, implicating a set of social relations that penetrate not only human history but natural history too. *This* is what, for Moore (2015), modernity hides. It does not hide the fact that for two centuries human beings have been labouring in essential alienation, cut off from their basis in natural history: rather, it hides the fact that nature itself, rather than the objective or passive background upon which capitalist production takes place, *is itself a historical product of capitalist productive relations* (Moore, 2015). In this way, Moore’s (2015) analysis proceeds from an entirely different theoretical starting-point from the theorists of the Anthropocene, as Moore (2015) moves the field of observation away from the human subject and towards the historical structure of social relations in which human experience itself is mobilised. It is also for this reason why Moore’s (2015) critique implicates a deconstruction of modernity:

The difficulty in pursuing this alternative analysis has been rooted in the dualisms immanent to modern thought; *for to construct capitalism in the fashion that I have suggested is to transcend the man/woman, nature/society boundaries upon which the whole edifice of modernist thought depends* (p.69, emphasis added).

In this way, Moore’s (2015) critique of modernity and modern humanism is not central because of its necessity in cutting through the alienated condition of humanity in the Anthropocene. It is central because it is *only* by virtue of the break with the set of postulates set down by modern discourse that Moore (2015) is able to produce knowledge of his object: that is, the world-ecological relations of contemporary capitalism. What is here evident is a theoretical quality lacking in the Anthropocene discourse: a quality located fundamentally in the theoretical anti-humanism of the Marxist theoretical framework that foregrounds Moore’s (2015) approach. It is in this way that Moore (2016) justifies his utility of a Marxist approach, arguing that “what Marx understood better than most Marxists is that capitalism ‘works’ because it organizes *work* as a multispecies

process” (p.93, original emphasis), with Marx identifying a “‘deep structure’ of historical capitalism...[providing] a clue to how human and extra-human nature work is entwined” (Moore, 2015, p.60).

By virtue of his theoretical position, Moore (2015) constructs an entirely different consideration of history to that constructed by the theorists of the Anthropocene. For the theorists of the Anthropocene, history was a manifestation of human labour, either in its alienated form (manifest in the geo-historical emergence of the Anthropocene) or in its ‘liberated’ form (through which humanity transcends the historical limitations reflected in modernity). However, for Moore (2015), historical progress is to be charted in the development of world-ecological relations. The motor of historical development – a development that has become expressed in the conditions of climatological instability experienced today – is, fundamentally, the historical forms of class struggle that are reflected within historically unique world-ecological relations: relations present not only in the organisation of production, the division of labour in society or the constellation of property relations, but also in historical appearance of *nature* itself which mirrors the relations that are established to (unevenly) appropriate, exploit, distribute and consume nature in various ways (Moore, 2015). In this way, and again, the Marxist historical analysis of class sustains the critique of modernity as through the world-ecological view, “relations of class, capital, and empire are *already* bundled with extra-human natures; they are configurations of human and extra-human natures” (p.37, original emphasis). The theoretical anti-humanism of Moore’s (2015) approach is here evident and essential again, as history itself is formulated as the development of social relations, not of human alienation.

Crucially, the theoretical anti-humanism of Moore’s (2015) approach – grounded in the world-ecological relations of capitalism as opposed to the observation of alienated human labour – is absolutely essential to Moore’s (2015) understanding of the nature of labour under contemporary capitalism. Moore’s (2015) understanding of labour is formulated in the context of a theoretical approach which observes its appearance not in the alienated reason of humanity as geological force, but as the reflection of historically determined world-ecological relations in which labour is mobilised. Crucially, these world-ecological relations interpenetrate human and natural histories, meaning that labour under capitalism not only reflects a particular historical orientation of human society (in the division of labour, the design of the labour process, the exploitation of surplus-value and the reflection of class relations therein), but also a particular historical orientation of nature itself (reflected in the fundamental changes to the landscape made necessary by mining, flattening and farming, in the emergence of new enclosures of land reflected in imperialism and colonialism and reflected in the setting-to-work of nature in the provision of food, water and labour-power in various ways) (Moore, 2015). In this way, labour under capitalism is reflective at all times of historically specific (in this case,

capitalist) world-ecological relations, through which the appearance of human society and nature itself are shaped.

This is particularly evident in Moore's (2015) application of the concept of 'appropriation' (p.54). Appropriation is Moore's (2015) way of using labour as a means to bring the analysis of human and natural histories together in the context of a critical analysis of labour. However, whilst for the theorists of the Anthropocene the pivot of this conceptual application of labour is the ideological observation of human consciousness, for Moore (2015) it is located in the precise world-ecological relations that are brought into view by labour: specifically, the combination of relations of *exploitation* and *appropriation*. For Moore (2015), capitalist production depends upon the twin execution of two social operations: the exploitation of human labour-power (primarily through its mobilisation in the wage-labour relation and through a definite labour process) and the appropriation of nature (through the appropriation of land, water and resources, but also through the appropriation of various forms of free human labour too, in the form of slave-labour or reproductive labour that goes unpaid). It is a law of capitalist world-ecological production simplified as follows: "Every act of exploitation (of commodified labor-power) therefore depends on an even greater act of appropriation (of unpaid work/energy)" (Moore, 2015, p.54). In this way, labour brings human society and nature together in the way that they are mutually constituted under capitalist world-ecological production, through the joint enterprise of exploitation and appropriation.

This world-ecological approach to exploitation and appropriation forces the re-consideration of labour under capitalism. Exploitation under capitalism can no longer be considered within the parameters of a traditional consideration of 'work': the mobilisation of commodified human labour-power through a labour process, with the aim of capturing and reinvesting surplus-value. The coming-together of human and natural labour forces the re-thinking of exploitation, by insisting that an integral part of processes of capitalist exploitation in fact implicates labours and actors that have traditionally escaped this quite productivist view of work. As Moore (2015) writes,

The rate of exploitation under the law of value is determined not only by the class struggle within commodity production (between capitalist and direct producers), and not only by the organization and value composition of commodity production. *It is also determined by the contribution of unpaid work*, performed by human and extra-human natures alike (p.100, original emphasis).

Echoing feminist applications of the concept of reproduction, Moore's (2015) argument is that the concept of appropriation forces the further development of the concept of reproduction, implicating the unpaid labour not only of human beings but of *non-human* actors too. As Moore (2015) writes, "the *unpaid* 'work of nature' – over the short-run of

agriculture, the intergenerational time of childrearing, the geological time of fossil fuel creation – is the pedestal upon which the *paid* ‘work of capital’ unfolds” (p.102, original emphasis).

Within Moore’s (2015) critique, the consideration of production in this way – as the result of a twinned exploitation and appropriation of labour – makes necessary a re-evaluation of the history of work and production as well, in a way that is more sensitive to the realities of this twenty first century geo-historical moment. The world-ecological development of capitalism, in light of the concept of appropriation, no longer simply implicates the primitive accumulation of human beings in the form of wage-labourers or even as reproductive labourers alone. Rather, it implicates a more complex form of primitive accumulation, based on the securing and enclosure of an ever-expanding base of sources for food, water, land and energy through which to reproduce the relations of exploitation and appropriation on which capitalist production relies (Moore, 2015). As Moore (2015) writes,

For the relations necessary to accumulate abstract social labor are – *necessarily* – more expansive, in scale, scope, speed, and intensity. Capital must not only ceaselessly accumulate and revolutionize commodity production; it must ceaselessly search for, and find new ways to produce, Cheap Natures: a rising stream of low-cost food, labor-power, energy, and raw materials to the factory gates (or office doors, or...) (p.53, original emphasis).

The coming-together of humans and nature at the base of capitalist production forces a re-telling of the history of capitalism, as one that does not simply implicate human society, but implicates unique historical orientations of nature as well. The world-ecological development of capitalism is in this sense, as Marx (2013) himself argued, a history of “blood and dirt” (p.152) as its development does not inaugurate great violence upon human populations alone, but upon non-human natures in order to bend them towards the wills of capitalist accumulation. In this way, the Anthropocene argument is once again countered, as the degradation of nature can no longer be traced back to the alienation of human labour but *must* be formulated “as a specific expression of capitalism’s organization of work” (Moore, 2016, p.111).

Moore’s (2015) critique of labour also makes necessary the re-thinking of how the organisation of work is to be analysed sociologically. The social periodisation of production and work often collected under headings such as ‘Taylorism’, ‘Fordism’ and ‘post-Fordism’ must also be re-assessed in the wake of capitalism’s world-ecological character. Science and technology were not only important insofar as they permitted the rationalisation of the labour process in which human labour-power was mobilised. These developments in the productive forces of capitalism also resulted in fundamental

alterations in the relations of appropriation that extended beyond the immediate human experience of work on the production line. As Moore (2015) argues,

Great advances in labor productivity, expressing the rising material throughput of an average hour of work, have been possible through great expansions of the ecological surplus. The assembly line of classic Fordism, for instance, was unthinkable without Cheap steel, rubber, and oil (p.96).

Again, the critique of modernity here resurfaces for Moore (2015), insofar as the modern reinforcement of the separation between humans and nature is figured here as an ideological reflection of the material relations of appropriation, as the precise justification for the heightened appropriation of non-human labour for little or no charge. As Moore (2015) writes, “at the core of the capitalist project, from its sixteenth century origins, was the scientific and symbolic creation of nature in its modern form, as something that could be mapped, abstracted, quantified, and otherwise subjected to linear control” (Moore, 2015, p.86).

The world-ecological analysis of labour and capitalism that Moore (2015) here develops, has been shown to produce a remarkably different picture of human experience in this contemporary geo-historical moment from that of the Anthropocene. For the theorists of the Anthropocene, human labour implicated a story of human consciousness and the observation of the historical emergence of the Anthropocene as the manifestation of alienated human labour, of labour completed by a humanity unconscious of its power and its grounding in natural history. For Moore (2015) and his world-ecological view of the ‘Capitalocene’, the story painted by the concept of labour is much different. The coming together of humans and nature in their mutual exploitation and appropriation under capitalism – a coming-together exposed through the critique of modernity – does not implicate a story of human consciousness, but a specific and historical set of world-ecological relations of capitalist production, in which notions of class, production and work must necessarily be re-thought in the wake of the exposed reflection of capitalist social relations in contemporary appearances of both human society and natural history.

Of crucial importance to this outcome is the critique of humanist ideology that exists and continues at the core of Moore’s (2015) theoretical approach. The theorists of the Anthropocene did not adequately critique humanist ideology but reproduced and reinforced it through their story of human consciousness and human alienation at the meeting point between labour and history. The ideological consequence of this was not only the mystification of key social relations, but the normalisation and reproduction of the very modern tropes they sought to distance themselves from. The definition and deconstruction of humanist ideology that underpins Moore’s (2015) analysis – located primarily in the theoretical anti-humanism of his Marxist approach – at one and the same

time allows him to maintain his critique of modernity (as the set of ideas that mystifies the world-ecological character of capitalism) but also stress the primacy of social relations over the consciousness of human subjectivity (capitalism achieves its world-ecological character not from alienated human labour, but through the historical development of relations of exploitation and appropriation).

What is evident is that the theoretical anti-humanism of Moore's (2015) approach makes it a much more appropriate basis from which to think a sociology of work in relation to the conditions of life so often collected under the heading of the 'Anthropocene.' Moore's (2015) Marxist critique has revealed that behind the conditions of climatological instability that currently face humanity are not conditions of alienated reason, but historically unique world-ecological relations of exploitation and appropriation, which see humans and nature come together in their mutual involvement in capitalist production. The existence of these relations necessarily implicates a re-assessment of the notion of class and class struggle: a re-assessment that looks set to be more convincing but also more materially grounded in its ability to think the unity of human and non-human actors, than the humanist ideological analysis of alienation told by the theorists of the Anthropocene.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated the effects of humanist ideology upon the ability to think the nature of labour in the context of the contemporary conditions of planetary instability today faced by humanity. From the theoretically humanist perspective of the Anthropocene discourse, labour is configured as the distinct and geo-historical activity of the human subject, through which this subject is able to *make* and *re-make* history. The conditions of the Anthropocene, in this formulation, confront the sociologist as the alienated product of this labour: an alienation that is codified in the reinforcement of a false separation between human and natural histories within modern discourse. The ability of the human subject to transcend these geo-historically unfavourable conditions depends upon this subject's consciousness as to its geo-historical power in this way: a consciousness that first sees humanity confronted with the discontents of its historical action and thereafter compelled to transcend the historical conditions reflective of these discontents.

However, this theoretically humanist approach to the Anthropocene has been shown to reproduce ideological effects, mystifying the relationship between the social relations of capitalist production and appropriation and these conditions of planetary crisis. What modern ideology hides is not the geo-historical alienation of the human subject, but the world-ecological character of capitalism, the class-struggle of which is reflected not only in historically specific orientations of human society, but also

historically specific configurations of nature. The exposure of capitalism's world-ecological character and the inherent primacy of the social relations of exploitation and appropriation that underpin this character (relations that are reflective of class-struggle at all times) provides an entirely different theoretical framework through which to consider labour in the context of these contemporary planetary conditions: a framework that is more suitable for the establishment and development of a sociology of work.

The development of a sociology of work in the context of 'the Anthropocene' is still forthcoming. The discourse is relatively new, inaugurating a proliferation of exploratory theoretical texts within the social sciences. But what has been made clear in this chapter is that, theoretically, this discourse seems to leave humanist ideology unthought in relation to the consideration of work and labour: an oversight that could prove particularly problematic for the development of any future sociology of work. Moving into the concluding chapter of this thesis, the considerations of theory in the Anthropocene here completed, stress the necessity of the critique of ideology as a central theoretical task for the construction of the sociology of work.



## CONCLUSION

# The Humanist Controversy Revisited

Across the chapters of this thesis it has been argued that humanism and humanist ideological concepts underwrite a significant and persistent theoretical weakness throughout the sociology of work. In various ways and through various sociological interactions with labour and work, humanism has been shown to repeatedly emerge to the detriment of sociological analysis, mystifying key social relations of work, prioritising certain social perspectives over others and reinforcing the precise ideologies with which contemporary social inequalities are justified. Analyses of the social relations of work – the commodification of labour-power, the inequalities that dictate its mobilisation and exploitation, the social relations that underpin the reproduction of this labour-power and the unique class struggles that are reflected in these relations – have all been mystified, obscured and rendered-invisible by repeated appeals to humanist ideology as an explanation for contemporary social phenomena. Ideological concerns regarding human essence, human alienation and human self-affirmation have, in various ways, been substituted for sociological analysis in relation to work, signifying human experience but offering a limited understanding of its concrete implications.

The thesis has therefore shown that both humanism and ideology are by no means problems of the past: they have been shown to pose a present and immediate danger to the sociology of work in the twenty first century. Despite the influences of Althusser and his contemporaries upon philosophy and upon social science more broadly, humanism has here been shown to persist as an ideological problem for contemporary sociology. What has been made clear in this thesis is that if the sociology of work is to emerge as an adequate and effective explanatory framework in the face of contemporary transformations of work, it must necessarily include a theoretical critique of humanism and ideology as a central task. In the face of a contemporary philosophical landscape that appears unable to permit this critique, this thesis has made the case for the importance of re-visiting Althusser's critique of humanist ideology for the sociology of work.

## HUMANIST IDEOLOGY AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

In the opening chapter, the thesis stated the case for the problematisation of humanism within the social sciences. Across a broad range of contributions to sociological research, humanism and the ideas and assumptions attached to it have been approached critically, recognised often as ideological attachments to many contemporary social inequalities. However, this thesis has shown that when it comes to considerations of work, the function of humanism in this way has largely gone unthought, with humanist ideology often

providing a normative framework for the way in which work is problematised and considered within sociological analyses. The chapters of this thesis have explored the extent to which this is the case within the sociology of work, detailing the ways in which humanism persists in the way that work is framed and thought about, whilst exposing the limitations that such framing places upon these sociological analyses.

Chapter Two has shown how the development of sociological critiques of work, primarily throughout the twentieth century, have relied consistently upon humanism for both a normative framework and a critical edge. The chapter has demonstrated the prevalence of a persistent ideological temptation within the sociology of work to substitute an analysis of the social relations of work, for the articulation of critique through humanist ideological themes. This has been shown to resolve itself in the reproduction of a sociological critique in which work is examined not as a social expression of particular capitalist social relations – the commodification of labour-power, its motion in the wage-labour relation, its place in the relationship between the forces and relations of (re)production and the gendered and racialised class struggles reflected in these relations – but instead is repeatedly explained as a manifestation of the alienation of the human subject from essential characteristics under capitalism, with emancipatory action synonymous with the struggle against this alienation. This persistent ideological temptation has been shown as problematic because it insists upon the bracketing of key social relations of work and their relegation to the side-lines of this more humanist historical event. Despite Althusser's (1996) important interjection into Marxist theory, the chapter has revealed the surprisingly persistent nature of these humanist tropes within the sociology of work and has demonstrated a particular weakness of this discourse in resisting the ideological temptations offered by humanism.

This evident theoretical weakness in the sociology of work has been shown to be reflected in contemporary articulations of sociological critique. Chapter Three of the thesis has exposed the relationship between humanist ideology and the shortcomings of the contemporary 'postcapitalist' discourse and its attendant post-work imaginary. The shortcomings of the contemporary post-work imaginary have been shown to be numerous, culminating in the reproduction of the working experience of a very particular social subject: the white, male manual worker of Western Europe. The reproduction of this image has been shown to stem from a consistent mystification of key social relations of work: in particular the class character of technology and information as centrepieces of contemporary production, the dialectical relationship between production in the factory and reproduction outside the factory and the social character of money all remain necessarily absent in the formulations of this contemporary discourse. This chapter has demonstrated how these consistent mystifications are ideological in nature, rooted in a humanist conception of labour similar to that incubated and reproduced in the critical sociology of work throughout the twentieth century. The humanist ideological framing of

the post-work imaginary – that technology and information are important because they liberate the inherent and unalienated cooperative forces of human labour – entirely precludes these key social relations of work because they are nothing more than considerable externalities to a larger human story: namely, the historical struggle of the human subject against their alienation. It is *this* struggle against alienation which has been shown to define the transition into a postcapitalist era and a potential post-work society: a definition that has seen the social relations of work bracketed and removed from view.

The problem of humanism is accentuated in Chapter Four, as it poses a danger to critiques within the sociology of work that have typically responded with theoretical strength to the problem of ideology: specifically, feminist analyses of social reproduction. Capitalism in the twenty first century is marked by a re-organisation of reproductive relations in which the industrial family unit is decentralised as the predominant reproductive institution under capitalism, with these relations today organised through emerging reproductive labour markets in domestic labour, sex work, tissue donation and surrogacy. Feminist theorists such as Cooper and Waldby (2014) have demonstrated how this emerging constellation of reproductive relations is indicative of the reconfiguration of gendered class struggle under capitalism, informing new strategies of primitive accumulation through the continuous re-negotiation of the productive and reproductive capacities of the body. However, this shifting social landscape – and its reflection in gendered violence – risks mystification beneath an emerging humanist tendency that has risen to meet the development of these reproductive ‘markets’, which argues that these industries are problematic in the extent to which they inaugurate new and heightened forms of bodily and emotional alienation. This humanist tendency has been shown to be problematic insofar as it reproduces many of the ideological limitations associated with this theoretically humanist approach: most dangerously, the reproduction of a normative separation between ‘work’ and ‘non-work’ (as a way of demonstrating the difference between ‘genuine’ and ‘alienated’ emotion). Here, humanist ideology has been shown to risk the foreclosure of the development and deployment of feminist sociological analysis, by obscuring the mutually informative nature of capitalist social relations of production and reproduction beneath mythical ideological representations of human alienation.

Finally, Chapter Five has confronted the ideological limitations that have been reproduced in a renewed theoretical humanism that sits at the heart of social scientific approaches to ‘the Anthropocene.’ The central theoretical pivot of this discourse has been shown to be a humanist conceptualisation of labour and the notion that contained within labour is the inherent and unique ability of human beings to *make* history. The historical power of human labour has been shown to frame social scientific approaches to the Anthropocene, allowing for both its problematisation (the planetary instability of the Anthropocene as a problem of human labour) and its potential ‘solution’ (that human

labour, imbued with this historical power is the *only* force capable of counteracting the discontents of this geo-historical period). The result is the re-emergence of a problematic of human alienation – reflected in a critique of modernity – which argues that the Anthropocene as a geo-historical period is the product of over two centuries of alienated human labour, in which humanity laboured without *consciousness* of the reflection of its action in planetary history. However, this theoretically humanist approach has been shown to be problematic insofar as it mystifies the relationship between contemporary conditions of planetary instability and the configuration and exercise of capitalist social relations. The social relationship between the exploitation of labour-power at the heart of capitalist production and the historical *appropriation* of natural resources such as land, food and water that have been necessary for the ongoing reproduction of this labour-power, has been shown in this chapter to have been entirely mystified beneath the ideological productions of this theoretical humanism. The centrality of the story of human alienation in the discourse of the Anthropocene has been shown to preclude the fuller understanding of the social character of work in the context of planetary crisis: a fact that is particularly problematic given the growing prominence and popularity of the Anthropocene within the social sciences.

In each chapter, this thesis has clearly outlined the extent to which humanist ideology acts to limit the analytical and critical abilities of the sociology of work. In each instance, the production of sociological theory has been, in one way or another, foreclosed by the persistence of humanist ideological tropes. These tropes have bracketed and obfuscated key social relations of work from view, leading to the sociological discourse in each instance enunciating its critique through humanist ideological concepts: concepts which, though they are attractive, are at best moral and anthropological rather than analytical and sociological.

## THE CRITIQUE OF HUMANIST IDEOLOGY AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

At the same time as exposing the problem of humanist ideology, this thesis has looked favourably upon a number of critical sociological interjections which effectively critique these ideological concepts: a critique to which these accounts owe their explanatory force. Where sociological analysis has been successful in thrusting the social relations of work to the forefront of investigation, it has done so primarily through the implicit or explicit critique and deconstruction of existing humanist ideological tropes that have hitherto framed the problem.

Through the re-direction of Pitts' (2017) ideological critique in the context of contemporary post-work thought, Chapter Three of the thesis has revealed important oversights in sociological confrontations with the 'crisis of work' in advanced capitalist economies. Pitts (2017) reveals how key social relations of work are missing from key

contributions to this contemporary post-work discourse, in particular the class struggles reflected in the historical development of productive technology missed in the fetishism of the forces of production, the class character of money missed in the valorisation of the UBI and the social relations of reproduction missed through the maintained focus of this discourse upon paid employment. Pitts (2017) articulates this through a critique of ideology, codified in the critique of 'Fragment-thinking' (p.328), arguing that it is the economistic and technologically deterministic ideology echoed in Marx's (1974) 'Fragment on Machines' that is to blame for this continued sociological oversight. Through an extension of this ideological critique, this chapter of the thesis has demonstrated that the ideology that limits this contemporary post-work discourse is as much humanist as it is economistic, relying on a humanistic interpretation of the 'social' characteristics of human labour which secured the functionality of an otherwise technologically deterministic historical account of the labour process, devoid of a serious analysis of class struggle. It was these ideologies – humanism and economism – which appeared to secure the functionality of these sociological contributions. It has been only through their identification and deconstruction that their shortcomings become apparent and that avenues for improvement and further investigation become available.

Chapter Four has explored the critique of humanist ideology inherent within Marxist-feminist approaches to social reproduction. Confronted with theoretical and sociological discourses which fetishised wage-labour and the experience of the male breadwinner on the production line, Marxist-feminist contributions such as those of Federici (2012) and James (2012) exposed the limitations of these contributions, pivoting on a critique of humanism. The humanist ideas attached to human labour – solidifying its image as something universal, productive and absolutely distinct from the 'animalistic' activity of reproduction – has been shown by Marxist-feminism to have contributed to the mystification of the role of social reproduction in the functioning of capitalism. The emergence of reproductive labour at the forefront of sociological conversations about work and class comes directly from a critical deconstruction of the humanist ideas that have contributed to the gendered division of labour: a critical deconstruction inaugurated by these Marxist-feminists. In the face of the expansion of global labour markets and the greater primitive accumulation of reproductive labour-power through expanding labour markets in sex workers, tissue donors and surrogates, Chapter Four has shown how this critique of ideology re-emerges again. Cooper's and Waldby's (2014) critique of 'clinical labour' (p.7) surfaces the gendered class antagonisms embedded in this labour-market expansion, primarily through the deconstruction of the humanist ideological concepts that have hitherto framed the way that this expansion has been thought about. Ideas of 'motherhood' and the 'gift' of reproduction are restated by Cooper and Waldby (2014) as allegories of humanist assumptions around women as human subjects, the clearing away of which becomes a necessary precondition for the exposure of the gendered class

inequalities that function at the base of these economic trends: an exposure that fundamentally alters the strategy in the struggle for equality here (away from abolition, towards organisation and empowerment).

Pronouncing the social relations of work in the context of sociological considerations of ecology has also been shown to require a critique of humanist ideology. Mobilising Moore's (2015) critique of the Anthropocene, Chapter Four has demonstrated the extent to which the shortcomings of the sociological confrontation with work and labour in the context of ecology stems from its humanistic ideological framing. Moore's (2015) critique has demonstrated the extent to which ecological crisis is presented as a story of the Anthropocene – 'the era of Man' – focusing on a problematisation of human labour. Moore (2015) argues that this fetishism of human labour as the source of ecological problems erodes the role of capitalist social relations in this story, deconstructing the humanist assumptions of the Anthropocene to reveal the historical class struggles that lie behind climate change and other related crises. Moore's (2015) critique of humanism is collected in his deployment of the concept of a 'Capitalocene' (p.77), arguing that in order to reveal the true social causes of ecological catastrophe, sociology must dispense with a reductive narrative of human culpability towards a structural analysis of class struggle and its reflection in ecological crisis.

The original contribution that this thesis makes to the sociology of work is *the exposure of this ideological critique at the centre of these more favourable sociological contributions*. The capability of these contributions to expose the class antagonisms that underpin work in the 'platform economy', in the clinical labour of the 'bioeconomy', or in the appropriated labour of the 'Capitalocene' emanates from an initial and productive critique of the existing humanist ideology that framed the way in which these things were considered. This crucial theoretical exercise, codified in the explicit and implicit critique of humanist ideology within the sociology of work, has the productive outcome of *revealing* the class antagonisms incubated in these different forms of work and of *revealing* the social relations of work which reflect this struggle. In this way, the critique of ideology has been shown as a methodology by which to *clarify* the object of sociological study and revealing the material basis of work and labour as social phenomena, by dismantling the pre-existing humanist mystifications of these phenomena. The critique of ideology is a *theoretical tool* that is useful for the sociology of work in this way and it is the demonstration of this utility that has been the primary objective of this thesis.

## THE CRITIQUE OF HUMANIST IDEOLOGY IN 'PRACTICAL' SOCIOLOGY

The Althusserian critique of humanist ideology has an opportunity to provide a timely and forceful contribution to ongoing epistemological debates within the sociology of work and employment, which frame how more empirically-grounded or 'practical' sociological

analyses are approached. Increasingly, contemporary contributions to the sociology of work have found themselves more concerned with epistemological questions, including *what* the sociology of work should produce analyses of and *how* it should go about producing this knowledge. The rapidly changing conditions of work and employment covered in this thesis have spurred this reflection in the sociology of work to some extent, with these developments having “blown the debate over what constitutes ‘work’ wide open” (Komlosy, 2018, p.4). This has realised itself in the recent publication of new volumes dedicated to the re-assessment of what, exactly, is meant by ‘work’ today, such as Andrea Komlosy’s (2018) *Work* and Joanna Biggs’ (2015) *All Day Long*. Moreover, radical contributions to the sociology of work such as Mac and Smith’s (2018) *Revolting Prostitutes* and Sophie Lewis’ (2019) *Full Surrogacy Now* pivot fundamentally on troubling the epistemological assumptions of the sociology of work, revealing how the relations that govern sex work and surrogacy are the same as those which govern more traditional paid work and employment: “It becomes inconceivable that people could do something considered so strange and terrible for the same mundane, relatable reasons that govern everybody else’s lives” (Mac & Smith, 2018, p.46).

From the perspective of Marxist sociology, this epistemological problem finds itself expressed most readily in sociological misinterpretations of ‘class’ and ‘class struggle.’ In his text *Class Matters*, Charles Umney (2018) addresses this problem with force. For Umney (2018), many popular sociologists of work (such as Mike Savage [2015] and Guy Standing [2016]) have reduced the problem of class to individualist terms, utilising class as a way to distinguish between groups of individuals and their characteristics in society as opposed to examining class as a social role dictated by given forces and relations of production in society. The result, for Umney (2018), is the emergence of a hierarchy of ‘classification struggles’ within the sociology of work (replete with terminology such as “the elite, the ‘established middle class’, the ‘technical middle class’, the ‘new affluent worker’, the ‘traditional working class’, ‘emerging service workers’ and the ‘precariat’” [Umney, 2018, p.17]), with social movements in the context of work and employment framed within the struggle of workers to confirm or deny their occupation of a particular place within this hierarchy. For Umney (2018) this is a problem, because it formulates the relationship between work and class as one of individual and occupational characteristics, as opposed to a social relationship dictated by very particular and often unequal social relations:

When talking about class, our objective should not be simply to provide a comprehensive categorisation of groups of people and the differences between them, but *to consider how the interactions between people with different economic roles affects the working of society as a whole*, from the experiences

people have at work, to the development and application of technology, to the economic and social policies pursued by governments (p.21, original emphasis).

For Umney (2018), individualised misinterpretations of class and class struggle risk undermining the ability of the sociology of work to explain exploitation and contemporary social movements in response to it, by bracketing the structural social implications of changes to work and employment in favour of these more individualistic fetishisms.

The Althusserian critique of humanist ideology makes a forceful contribution to this epistemological conversation within Marxist sociology, adding a conceptual repertoire with which to pose and answer these epistemological questions. At the heart of the investigation carried out on the pages of this thesis has been the epistemological question of what the sociology of work sets out to study and analyse. The application of this Althusserian critique and its ability to track and expose the theoretical presuppositions of the sociology of work, has revealed that the object of much of the sociology of work today is in fact *not* the structural social conditions of labour, work and employment, but is instead a particular human subject, about which sociology attempts to draw conclusions through its position in the context of work and its characteristics. With specificity to these debates in Marxist sociology, the critique of humanist ideology would make for a particularly useful interjection here by not only helping to reveal how this individualism obscures the social character of class and class struggle, but also in answering the question in more detail as to *how* precisely this individualist conceptualisation of class can operate so easily within the sociology of work. Through its application in this thesis, the Althusserian critique of humanism has repeatedly demonstrated how the reduction of work to an individualistic as opposed to a social phenomenon has obscured the existence of exploitation and inequality in various ways. But more than this, the application of this critique has been successful in revealing the precise theoretical exercises on which this ideology has relied, be this ‘alienation’, the ‘social’, ‘emotion’ or ‘history.’

As Umney (2018) argues, the posing and answering of these important epistemological questions is crucially important for how social change and social movements in relation to work and employment are viewed empirically. The most important conclusion from Umney’s (2018) research is that inequality and exploitation do not present themselves obviously to the consciousness of the sociologist, but are conditioned by the epistemological framing of social class and how it is seen to be reflected in the social relations of work. For Umney (2018), re-visiting a Marxist sociological method provides a strategy for reflecting critically on how social class is framed epistemologically within the sociology of work and for drawing more accurate conclusions about inequality and exploitation at work from empirical data that is collected. The pages of this thesis have shown how a Marxist critique of humanist ideology, made through an



Althusserian detour, can make a positive contribution to this endeavour and provide a conceptual repertoire through which to further examine the epistemological framing of social class in the sociology of work and employment and make theoretical recommendations for its correction.

## HUMAN EXPERIENCE

If an anti-humanist approach is necessary, does this make human experience unimportant? Do themes of human liberation, human freedom and human autonomy simply become meaningless? On the contrary, it is *only* in a capitalist society that these things are meaningless. Humanism, the valorisation of the human individual and the prioritisation of their wellbeing and independence are all meaningless ideas in a society based upon such severe class inequalities, in which the securing of even the basic means of existence is, for the majority of people, a daily struggle. As Althusser (1996) argued, the bourgeoisie developed these humanist themes of liberation and autonomy “since it hoped thereby to enroll at its side, by their education to this end, the very men it would liberate only for their exploitation” (p.234). Used in this way, ideological themes of liberation and humanism do not produce a fuller understanding of human experience: they mystify it, deployed tactically within a capitalist social formation whose structure is totally at odds with the spirit of these aims. In order for these humanist ideas to have any basis in reality at all, critical investigation must begin with the social conditions that foreclose their realisation in the first place.

Humanism itself has a limited utility in pointing towards an understanding of human experience. In fact, the extent of its utility is precisely in this capacity: as a *pointer* towards the need for further interrogation or analysis. As Althusser (1996) wrote of humanism, “while it really does designate a set of existing relations, unlike a scientific concept, it does not provide us with a means of knowing them” (p.223). Humanism is often a very useful communicative and demonstrative tool through which to designate the need for closer analysis: but it is precisely here, in the completion of closer analysis that extends *beyond* the significations of humanism alone that the realities of human experience become available for closer observation. This is particularly evident in Marx’s (2013) writings in *Capital*. One of the most famous chapters of *Capital* is Chapter Ten, on ‘The Working Day.’ Contained within it were the most detailed and harrowing accounts of human experience under capitalism provided anywhere by Marx in his writings. Through his visits to the factories of industrial Britain and his experience of the realities of working-class life, Marx (2013) draws a picture of existence in which “Dante would have found the worst horrors of his *Inferno*” (p.171). Marx (2013) uses this chapter to develop a picture of industrial working conditions, exposing the existence of rampant poverty, premature death among workers, the spread of disease and illnesses, and the widespread use of child

labour. Marx (2013) describes, in chilling passages such as these, “the motley crowd of labourers of all callings, ages, sexes, that press on us more busily than the souls of the slain on Ulysses, on whom...we see at a glance the mark of over-work” (p.176). In these ways, Marx (2013) uses humanism and an observation of human experience under capitalism as a way of pointing towards the social harms implicated by capitalism.

However, these humanist appeals to the degradation of the human condition under capitalism made by Marx (2013) are bookended by an exploration of the precise social mechanics that inform this experience. Whilst this humanist prose points towards the effects of capitalist exploitation, it is only in Marx’s (2013) analysis of the exploitation of surplus-value and the maximisation of this exploitation by the capitalist through the lengthening of the working-day, the opposition of employers and factory-owners to the implementation of labour legislation and the crushing of the organisational efforts of their workers – all of which, as Marx (2013) argues, are reflections of the historical class struggle raging at the base of capitalism – that Marx (2013) provides his reader with the *knowledge* of this human experience and how it comes to pass. Exploitation cannot, so Marx (2013) argues be located in “the good or ill will of the individual capitalist” (p.186): rather, its origins are found in “the inherent laws of capitalist production” (p.186), which do not bring men alone on stage, but classes, economic structures and “external coercive laws” (p.186). Humanism is helpful, but to a limited extent. Knowledge of human experience demands a movement beyond the ideologies that signify its existence, to the structures that dictate its reality.

Nowhere is this truer than in considerations of liberation, emancipation and revolution. Althusser (1996) was right when he wrote that “the objective of the revolutionary struggle has always been the end of exploitation and hence the liberation of man” (p.221). The attachment of humanist ideology to the prospect of revolution has always made it more attractive and more communicable: qualities that often account for the reasons why many have fallen for its temptations. But as Althusser (1996) wrote,

It is not enough just to register the event, nor to record the concepts...in which the event itself thinks itself. The theoretical claims of the concepts must be tested to ensure that they really do provide us with a truly scientific knowledge of the event (p.223).

Revolution and emancipation cannot themselves be based upon the notion of false beginnings or normative states of being that correspond or appeal to a shared sense of humanity that is lost under the conditions of contemporary social life: “The desire to fully actualise this ‘normal’ state is ideology at its purest and cannot but end in catastrophe” (Žižek, 2015, p.148). Sociology teaches that conditions of apparent ‘normality’ must always be subject to interrogation, as power is always concealed behind normality. It is

here, in the analysis of power and its reflection in the conditions of society, that the achievement of humanist aims becomes an actual possibility.

An anti-humanist approach to the sociology of work does not preclude human experience: it is, rather, the only approach that takes human experience seriously enough to refuse to compromise with ideology, even when it appears to correlate with the ends of its own analysis. It is for this reason that Althusser (1993) wrote that “only theoretical anti-humanism justified genuine, practical humanism” (p.185-186). Humanist slogans will always have a place and a certain utility in the provision of “a practical index” (Althusser, 1996, p.247) with which critique can be guided. However, as Althusser (1996) argued, “we must get down to the concrete problems themselves... if we are to produce the historical transformation whose necessity was thought by Marx” (p.247). In the rapidly changing world of work, this argument seems more necessary than ever.

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