



Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics

Kathi Weeks

abstract

Feminist theorists have long been interested in immaterial and affective labor, even if the terms themselves are a more recent invention. Contemporary discussions of the concepts of immaterial and affective labor could be enriched by a better understanding of these lineages. Towards that end, this paper focuses on two pioneering feminist projects: the socialist feminist effort to add a critical account of reproductive labor to a Marxist analysis of productive labor and Arlie Hochschild's addition of the emotional labors of pink collar service workers to the critical analyses of white collar immaterial labor exemplified by the work of C.W. Mills. By focusing on what each of these feminist interventions contributes one can better understand the specificity of labor in the immaterial mode and the difficulties posed by its theorization. The two traditions are instructive for both the achievements and the failures of their analyses. Arguing that both of these critical strategies prove increasingly untenable under the conditions of post-Fordist production, the paper concludes with a brief attempt to imagine the terms of an alternative immanent strategy of critical/political intervention, one that might serve to open another angle of vision on, and frame a different kind of political response to, post-Fordist regimes of work.

Feminist theorists have long been interested in immaterial and affective labor, even if the terms themselves are a more recent invention. Their early explorations of immaterial laboring practices and relations were part and parcel of the struggle to expand the category of labor to include more of its gendered forms. Affective labor in particular has been understood within certain feminist traditions as fundamental both to contemporary models of exploitation and to the possibility of their subversion. Contemporary discussions of the concepts of immaterial and affective labor could be enriched by a better understanding of these lineages. Towards that end, this paper will focus on two pioneering feminist projects: the second wave socialist feminist effort to add a critical account of reproductive labor to a Marxist analysis of productive labor and Arlie Hochschild's landmark addition of the emotional labors of pink collar service workers to the critical analyses of white collar immaterial labor exemplified by the work of C.W. Mills. By focusing on what each of these feminist interventions

contributes, one to Marxist critique and the other to the critical sociology of service work, one can better understand the specificity of labors in the immaterial mode and the difficulties posed by their theorization.

The significance of these two feminist projects, however, lies not only in the quality of their analyses but in the force of their critiques; that is, they continue to be valuable not only for the way they map these developments theoretically but for how they confront them politically. Thus I want to pay particular attention to their contributions to the project of politicized critique: critical evaluations with political intent or analytics that are attentive to possible lines of antagonism. Socialist feminists, for example, built on Marxist political economics to conceive unwaged reproductive labor, particularly household caring labor, both as a locus of exploitation and as a site from which resistant subjects and alternative visions might emerge. Mills and Hochschild drew instead on versions of the Marxist theory of estrangement to gain critical purchase on capital's increasing reliance on immaterial and specifically affective forms of labor.

Both of these critical strategies ultimately fail in my view; but, as it turns out, their failures are as instructive as their achievements. Despite their many breakthroughs, each of the approaches is limited by its recourse to a critical standpoint and notion of political resistance grounded in an outside: in a reproductive sphere separate from capitalist production proper or in a model of the self prior to its estrangement. Regardless of whether or not these approaches were once adequate, such a reliance on an outside proves increasingly untenable under the conditions of post-Fordist production and reproduction.

The first part of this paper will briefly revisit the socialist feminist tradition and the second will take up, in a somewhat longer discussion, the contributions of Mills and Hochschild. In the final section I want to begin to think about the terms of an alternative theoretical approach. Drawing on both the insights and blind spots of these earlier projects, I want to present some very preliminary ideas about how one might approach the development of an immanent strategy of critical/political intervention, one that could perhaps afford another angle of vision on and frame a different kind of political response to post-Fordist regimes of work.

Socialist Feminism and the Exploitation of Domestic Labor

In order both to get a better handle on the concept of immaterial labor and to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges it poses, I think it is useful to return to the Anglo-American socialist feminist tradition, and specifically the analyses that were produced in the period from the late-1960s to the early 1980s. These were some of the earliest attempts to grasp the specificities of immaterial labor in a period still dominated by the paradigm of material production. As a project dedicated to mapping capitalist economies and gender regimes from a simultaneously Marxist and feminist perspective, the tradition was focused on understanding how various gendered laboring practices are both put to use by and potentially disruptive of capitalist relations of production. The literature was fairly broad and diverse; I will treat only two of the specific discourses,

one from the early part of the period and the other developed in the later years. These are the domestic labor debates, which attended to domestic labor in relation to Marx's theory of exploitation, and socialist feminist standpoint theory, which was more interested in the subjects situated within, and agents potentially poised against, the systems of capitalism and patriarchy.¹ At the highest level of generality socialist feminism in this period can be said to have focused on the contradiction between processes of capital accumulation and social reproduction. Although they gestured toward a more expansive notion of reproduction as the work of creating and sustaining social forms and relations of cooperation and sociality, they typically settled for a narrower conception equated with unwaged housework and caring labor, confined to the space of the household. They grappled with the questions of how to understand, assess, and confront the relationship between capitalist production and domestic reproduction. This recognition of the household as a site of social reproduction entailed the important struggle to expand existing notions of work. Certainly one of socialist feminism's major achievements in this period was to rethink dominant conceptions of what counts as labor and attend to its gendered relations in a time when work was typically still equated with waged production of material goods.

But as noted earlier, the 1970s tradition of socialist feminism is instructive not only for its successes, but for its failures as well. In particular I think it is useful to remember how much resistance there was to this feminist expansion of the categories of work and production. The earliest of these projects, grouped together under the heading of the domestic labor debates, is particularly interesting for some of the specific terms of the disagreements and their effects. Although the debates were fairly wide-ranging, over time the arguments came to hinge on the question of whether domestic labor was best conceived as internal or external to capitalist production proper. Was the domestic realm part of a capitalist system or a separate mode of production? Was domestic labor an instance of 'unproductive' labor which, since it does not create surplus value, is not central or fundamental to capital? Or was it a form of 'productive' labor that produces surplus value either indirectly or directly and hence must be conceived as an integral element of capitalist production? Was it subject to or exempt from the law of value and thus marginal or integral to the process of valorization? In short, was domestic labor properly inside or outside capitalist production?² The debate was thus reduced to roughly two positions: the more unorthodox participants conceived the waged labor and household economies in more integrated terms and struggled to challenge the basic map

-
- 1 A third discourse, socialist feminist systems theory, which concentrated on mapping the relation between the systems of capitalism and patriarchy, dominated the period roughly between the domestic labor debates and the early development of socialist feminist standpoint theory. For examples of the domestic labor debates see Malos (1995); for some of the original contributions to standpoint theory in its socialist feminist mode see Harding (2004); for representatives of systems theory see Sargent (1981). Alternative versions of these three projects, which are not subject to the same limitations I go on to outline and which continue to prove valuable today include, respectively, wages for housework (see, for example, Dalla Costa and James, 1972), post-Fordist socialist feminist standpoint theory (see, for example, Haraway, 1985), and unified or intersectional systems theory (see, for example, I. Young, 1981, and Glenn, 1985). Although socialist feminism lives on (sometimes under other labels), the late 1960s to the early 1980s marks the period of its peak.
 - 2 Part of what was at stake here was a question of political strategy: should feminist struggles be autonomous from or integrated within working class organizations and agendas?

of capitalist production, whereas those holding to the more orthodox line, which came to dominate the debate, insisted on some kind of dual systems distinction. Drawing on Marx's original distinction between productive and unproductive labor, the more orthodox authors defended a narrow understanding of capitalist production tied closely to the industrial paradigm.

Given the dominance of this essentially Fordist industrial framework of the domestic labor debates, it is perhaps not surprising that there was a tendency on both sides to privilege the example of housework over affective forms of domestic labor. Indeed, one of the things that is so striking about the literature from a contemporary perspective was how rarely the specificities of caring labor were addressed, a tendency perhaps attributable to the feminization of the work (and hence its status as 'shadow labor'), to the preeminence of a rather orthodox brand of Marxism, and to the hegemony of the Fordist imaginary. Even the more unorthodox participants who claimed the fundamentally capitalist character of domestic work tended to overlook or underemphasize caring labor. On one hand, they recognized that labor was not only activity that created objects; on the other hand, they tended in this period to focus on domestic labor's resemblances to such work, possibly to help make the case that domestic work and the women to whom it was assigned were relevant objects of Marxist analysis and subjects of revolutionary politics. To the extent that housework, for example, could be characterized in terms of the production of use-values for consumption, it was perhaps easier to accept as labor. In this context it was no doubt more difficult to grasp the relationship between caring practices and value-production.

By the late 1970s the domestic debate had exhausted itself on the shoals of the inside/outside controversy. What started as a wide-ranging exploration of the relationship between capitalism and domestic work narrowed down to repeated stagings of the debate about whether domestic practices and relations were integral to or relatively autonomous from capitalist production.³ The more orthodox claim that domestic labor was different from and hence part of a distinct circuit outside capitalist production emerged as the dominant line. Reproductive labor in the domestic realm was then either relegated to a territory outside capitalist production proper or perhaps included inside, but typically insofar as it could be likened to or directly implicated in industrial production. Dual systems logic predicated on a model of separate spheres came to dominate not only the specific terms of this debate but much of the subsequent socialist feminist literature in the period.

Socialist Feminist Standpoint Theory and the Subjects of Resistance

In contrast to the earlier domestic labor debates, socialist feminist standpoint theory – and here I am concentrating on the period of the later 1970s and early 1980s – more often focused on caring labor, embracing its differences from industrial production as a

3 For a useful overview and critical analysis of the domestic labor debates see Ellen Malos' introduction and concluding essay in Malos (1995).

potential source of alternative epistemologies and ontologies. Indeed, standpoint theory is of particular relevance for our purposes here both for its early explorations of affective labor and for its attention to the possibilities of resistance it might enable. Between the spheres of household and economy, the contradiction between the exigencies of capital accumulation and social reproduction gives rise to a variety of disjunctures and conflicts that could generate critical thinking and political action. Where the domestic labor literature concentrated on mapping the gendered patterns of exploitation, early standpoint theories focused more on the possibility that revolutionary projects could emerge from these exploited practices and marginalized subject positions. Reproduction, again typically equated with domestic space, is the site from which feminist political subjects might be constituted and alternative visions imagined.⁴

The terms of the inside/outside division figured differently in this discourse. In the context of the domestic labor debates, the most compelling contributions from a contemporary perspective were those unorthodox arguments that pressed for a more radical reconception of capitalist production that could encompass the domestic sphere as an integral node in the circuit of value creation. But again, given the way the debate was typically framed, domestic labor was often taken to be inside capital to the extent that it resembled and was thus comparable to waged labor in the industrial mode. Standpoint theories, in contrast, explored the differences of domestic laboring practices, embracing the otherness of caring labor as a potential critical lever and site of agency.

This reproductive ‘women’s work’, which is at once necessary to and marginalized by capitalist valorization processes, was posed as a potential source of feminist standpoints: alternative knowledges, resistant subjectivities, and feminist collectivities. The possibility of alternatives was located in the productivity of practices, in a claim about what we do rather than what we are. Insisting that “[t]he production of people is...qualitatively different from the production of things”, Hilary Rose, to cite one example from this period, argues that women’s work in the household involves a distinctive kind of emotionally demanding caring labor, the labor of love (2004: 74). She then explores the possibility of a feminist epistemology that integrates the knowledges gleaned from labors of the hand, brain, and heart. “Bringing caring labor and the knowledge that stems from participation in it to the analysis”, Rose claims, “becomes critical for a transformative program equally within science and within society” (2004: 78).

The problem is that although caring labor and its potentially subversive difference were brought to light, the achievements of the project were hampered by the assumption that resistance must come from the outside and the spatial division between production and reproduction by which that outside was secured. Thus although Rose recognizes waged forms of affective labor, she nonetheless tends to assume that affective labor of the heart is what distinguishes reproductive from productive labor, thereby fastening the distinction between material and immaterial labors to a division of social realms. That is, the specificity of labor in the affective mode was secured by recourse to the same

4 See, for example, the classic essays by Hartsock and Rose (in Harding, 2004). For examples of how standpoint theory continues to be a generative framework after this period see the introduction to and selections in Harding (2004) and Hartsock (1998).

logic of separate spheres that dominated the domestic labor debates. This difference in laboring practices and the subjectivities that might be developed on their basis was at the same time grafted by the logic of separate spheres onto a rather strict two-gender model. Women's laboring practices in the domestic realm, the realm of reproduction, which though necessary, are thereby posed as nonetheless fundamentally different from men's laboring practices in the realm of production. By relying on the logic of separate spheres to posit a radical difference between men's work and women's work, these standpoint theories risked, despite strong methodological commitments to the contrary, replicating undifferentiated and naturalized models of gender. The theories of revolutionary subjectivity were thus hampered by the reliance on gender dualism that was common to the period, as well as the homogenization and reification of gender identities it can enable.

The present utility of each of these older analyses is further called into question by the specificities of post-Fordist labor and production. First, the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, on which the claims about what is inside and outside were predicated in the domestic labor debates, is based in turn on the paradigm of industrial production and the model of a material commodity. Regardless of whether it was ever adequate, especially under the conditions of post-Fordist production, the very same practices deemed unproductive in one site directly produce value in another and thus this simple distinction between what is inside or outside the circuits of capitalist valorization becomes increasingly untenable (see, for example, Negri, 1996: 157). Second, the distinction between men's work and women's work, on which the hope for a feminist standpoint outside capital was based, is similarly troubled by the increasing integration of what were imagined as the separate locations of production and reproduction. The further development of post-Taylorist and post-industrial labor processes, for example, confounds the separate spheres model both in terms of its respective products and in terms of its various labor processes. For example, the merging of reproduction and production is visible in the ways that commodities continue to replace domestically produced goods and services and many forms of caring and household labor are transformed into feminized, racialized, and globalized forms of waged labor in the service sector. Moreover, particularly in the service sectors, processes of production today increasingly integrate the labors of the hand, brain, and heart as more jobs require workers to use their knowledges, affects, capacities for cooperation and communicative skills to create not only material but increasingly immaterial products (see for example, Hardt and Negri, 2004: 108). Thus production and reproduction are more thoroughly integrated in terms of both what is (re)produced and how it is (re)produced. What could once perhaps have been imagined as an 'outside' is now more fully 'inside'; social reproduction can no longer be usefully identified with a particular site, let alone imagined as a sphere insulated from capital's logics.

Nor can reproduction be identified with a particular gender, although the story here is complicated. Whereas women continue to hold primary responsibility for the privatized work of care and tend still to be relegated to the gendered occupational niches that the domestic division of labor helps to secure, the practice of affective labor and presumably the potential political subjects that can be constituted on its basis cuts across the older binary divisions of both space and gender. Women and men are indeed

still often engaged in different laboring practices, but these differences cannot be mapped onto a binary gender schema secured by recourse to a model of separate spheres. Thus this reconfiguration of the gender order in the context of post-Fordism presents the persistence of the gender division of work in a situation in which the binaries of productive versus reproductive, waged versus unwaged, and with them, 'men's work' versus 'women's work' are increasingly inadequate. Under the conditions of post-Fordism, what Donna Haraway once described as the "the paradoxical intensification and erosion of gender itself" (1985: 87) demands more complicated mappings of the gender divisions of material and immaterial labor.⁵

Mills and Hochschild: White Collar and Emotional Labor

One of the reasons these socialist feminist analyses ran into an impasse was their inability to register adequately the passage from Fordism to post-Fordism. By shifting our attention from the early socialist feminist traditions to a different intellectual tradition represented by Mills's and Hochschild's groundbreaking analyses of post-industrial labor, we will move beyond this particular limitation. In turning from the classic socialist feminist texts to these contributions to the sociology of labor the focus changes from Fordism to post-Fordism, from unwaged to waged work, and from the critique of exploitation to the problem of alienation. Although the two texts are comparable in terms of both analytical orientation and critical apparatus, Hochschild's concentration on the specificity of emotional labor and attention to its gendered dimensions enables some crucial insights into the significance of the rise of immaterial forms of labor.⁶

In his 1951 book *White Collar*, Mills offers a prescient analysis of the nature and significance of the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial labor order, a theoretical enterprise for which there were, Mills noted, few instructive precedents or capable guides. "[T]he outlines of a new society have arisen around us," he declares, and the category of the white collar middle class – a class between or beyond both proletariat and bourgeoisie – "is an attempt to grasp these new developments of social structure and human character" (Mills, 1951: xx). As Mills explains it, white collar work – including everything from managerial to teaching, office, and sales work – involves putting subjectivity to work in jobs that are less about manipulating things and more about handling people and symbols (1951: 65). From a contemporary perspective, Mills's insights into what he names the 'personality market', in which "personal or even intimate traits of the employee are drawn into the sphere of exchange" are particularly timely (1951: 182). This trade in personality entails new criteria for hiring based on the

5 This is a project that Haraway (1985), for one, has brilliantly advanced by extending and transforming the tradition of socialist feminist standpoint theory.

6 In comparing the two analyses, it is hard not to be struck by the rather traditional gendering of style. Each of the texts is conducted on a different affective register. One takes the form of a hard-hitting expose, the other is conducted in the mode of sympathetic inquiry; one deploys passion and indignation whereas the other evinces compassion and concern; one is designed to marshal outrage in a time of political complacency while the other seeks also, in the tradition of feminism's insistence on the relation between the personal and political, to invite identification and self-reflection.

assessment of personality rather than skill, a new ideal of successful education for children, a new target for managerial intervention and, above all, a new kind of commodification of the laboring subject. As Mills observes, the rapid expansion of the activity of selling into new social spaces and relationships makes this enlarged market paradoxically “more impersonal and more intimate” (1951: 161).

In many ways Hochschild takes up in 1983 where Mills left off in 1951, though narrowing her focus from the broad swathe of immaterial labor in white-collar occupations to the emotional labor of pink-collar workers, of which the flight attendant serves as an iconic example. In the preface to *The Managed Heart*, Hochschild acknowledges her debt to Mills’s inquiry into how and to what effect we “sell our personality”, while also noting the insufficiencies of his analysis (Hochschild, 1983: ix). The category of emotional labor, which “requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (1983: 7), would, Hochschild suggests, help to bring into focus what Mills’s analysis of the personality market tended to obscure. More specifically, what was missing “was a sense of the active emotional labor involved in the selling” (Hochschild, 1983: ix). Whereas Mills “seemed to assume that in order to sell personality, one need only have it” (1983: ix), Hochschild’s analysis makes clear that this ‘active emotional labor’ is first, a skillful activity, and second, a practice with constitutive effects.

First, unlike Mills, Hochschild acknowledges the specific skills required for emotional labor. Whereas Mills focused on exchange relations in the ‘personality market’, Hochschild’s category of ‘emotional labor’ shifts the focus to the labor process itself. The salesperson or flight attendant, for example, does not only sell his or her personality in return for a wage, but engages in a distinctive kind of labor. Indeed, emotion work is not just a form of labor, but an example of socially necessary labor. When Mills considered these activities only from the perspective of market exchange he found nothing of value in these practices that, as Hochschild notes, are also part of the labor of social reproduction that helps to sustain relations of cooperation and civility. Using a feminist lens, Hochschild recognizes the strategic management of emotions for social effect as an everyday practice which, since it is traditionally privatized and feminized, is not generally recognized or valued as labor. Thus in the ‘private’ realm in particular, efforts to affirm, enhance, and celebrate the well-being and status of others (1983: 165) exist, like housework, as forms of shadow labor (1983: 167). To the extent that the expression of emotion has been not only feminized but in the process also naturalized – as a spontaneous eruption rather than cultivated display – the skills involved in managing it successfully remain difficult to grasp.

Second, as ‘active’ labor Hochschild, in contrast to Mills, offers a compelling analysis of the constitutive effects of immaterial labor. Mills did not acknowledge the skillful practices exhibited by the ‘salesgirl’, for example, which he reduced to the general and pejorative category of manipulation: the predatory behavior of “the new little Machiavellians, practicing their personable crafts for hire” (Mills, 1951: xvii). But in addition, he did not fully understand the labor process as a process of subjectification, let alone the specific performativity of emotional labor. What for Mills was only the production of insincerity in this new “time of venality” (Mills, 1951: 161) is recognized in Hochschild’s account for its deeply constitutive effects. As Hochschild explains, it is

not only about the emotional laborer *seeming to be* but also about his or her *coming to be*; the work requires not just the use but the production of subjectivity. Thus, for example, when the emotional display of the worker is part of what is being sold in service work, “[s]eeming to ‘love the job’ becomes part of the job”; but what is more, “actually trying to love it, and to enjoy the customers, helps the worker in this effort” (Hochschild, 1983: 6). Indeed, as labor that “calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and ... sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality” (Hochschild, 1983: 7), its impact is not even limited to what we do or what we think, to the body’s health and energies or the mind’s thoughts. It extends to the affective life of the subject, into the fabric of the personality.⁷ In Hochschild’s language, it involves not just ‘surface acting’ but ‘deep acting’, practices that have a transformative effect on the doer. The question that guides Hochschild’s investigation, and which remains critically important today, is about what happens to individuals and social relations when techniques of deep acting are harnessed by and for the purposes of capital.⁸

Gender is also produced and productive when personality is put to work. As Hochschild points out, personalities are gendered and that is part of their value to employers. Although Mills reported that women constituted 41% of white collar employees in 1940 (1951: 74-75), he did not seem to grasp the significance of this in terms of the gendering of post-industrial waged work. That said, it is not the case that Mills ignored gender or abstained from gendered rhetoric. Indeed, he appeals to a betrayed masculinity to add punch to his critique of the white collared ‘Little Man’, tapping into a nostalgic ideal of masculine authority to highlight the realities of the new worker’s powerlessness and subordination. Drawing on metaphors of emasculation, the members of the white collar ‘vanguard’ are characterized, in sharp contrast to an image of the heroic proletariat, as “political eunuchs ... without potency and without enthusiasm for the urgent political clash” (1951: xviii). Thus to the extent he recognizes a shift in the gendering of work he represents it as a matter of de-gendering not of re-gendering. As Hochschild so effectively documents, the gender of the workers – feminized flight attendants and masculinized bill collectors in her study – is not so much compromised as it is shaped and put to work.

7 To register the constitutive impact of these practices, the category of affect would be more useful to Hochschild’s analysis than that of emotion. To the extent that the category of affect traverses the divisions of mind and body, reason and emotion, and confounds the ontological containment these dichotomies enable, it can better register the power of the subjectification effect that Hochschild’s analysis reveals. Moreover, as a category that highlights the produced and productive qualities of the phenomenon it can better resist the kind of naturalization of emotion that Hochschild wants to contest. Here one can also see one of the advantages of the focus on affective labor rather than the kind of cognitive labor more often privileged in Mills’s discussion as well as in many contemporary analyses of immaterial labor. Again, as laboring practices that are both expressive and constitutive of affect, their impact is potentially more pervasive than those that seem to signal merely a potential shift in consciousness.

8 Consequently, Hochschild recognized the challenge posed by the new labor order to the ideals of liberal individualism was not only, as Mills claimed, that it reduced the independent individual to a ‘Little Man,’ but was rather its more thorough-going challenge to identity; “so in the country that most publicly celebrates the individual, more people privately wonder, without tracing the question to its deepest social root: What do I really feel?” (Hochschild, 1983: 198).

The Estrangement of Immaterial Labor

Mills and Hochschild, despite their different analyses, employ very similar critical strategies, both relying on a Marxist analysis of estranged labor to provide some perspective on these new modes of cognitive, communicative, and affective labor. Each extends Marx's familiar critique of industrial factory production – which estranges workers from the product, process, self, and others – to new forms of relatively well-paid and high-status work. “The alienating conditions of modern work”, Mill observes, “now include the salaried employees as well as the wage-workers” (1951: 227). As Hochschild explains it, with both manual and emotional forms of labor, there lies a similarity in the possible cost of doing the work: the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of the self – either the body or the margins of the soul – that is *used* to do the work (1983: 7). Together they make a very compelling case that the critique of estranged labor is even more applicable to the conditions of immaterial labor than it ever was to industrial production. The alienation of immaterial laborers from the product and process of labor may be comparable to the experience of industrial work, but work that requires the application and adjustment of ‘personality’ threatens to carry “self and social alienation to explicit extremes” (Mills, 1951: 225). Hochschild too zeroes in on the potential for self and social alienation: the consequences for the individual's sense of self and the quality of social interactions when the “workers' psychological arts” (1983: 185) are subject to the law of value and with it, to the dictates of command and the imposition of standardization. “Estrangement from display, from feeling, and from what feelings can tell us is not simply the occupational hazard of a few”, she notes; rather “[i]t has firmly established itself in the culture as permanently imaginable” (1983: 189). With the increasing interpenetration of production and exchange, of making, serving and selling, the problems of self-alienation and social cynicism are compounded. “Men [sic] are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made: one makes an instrument of himself, and is estranged from it also” (Mills, 1951: 188).

Once again, however, Hochschild's approach proves more timely. Mills uses the critique of alienated labor to make a point very similar to one of the claims that Marx advanced, namely, that the problem with work is that it engages too few of our skills and creative capacities. Given “the boredom and the frustration of potentially creative effort”, we are left to find meaning in leisure activities (Mills, 1951: 236). “Each day men sell little pieces of themselves in order to try to buy them back each night and weekend with the coin of ‘fun’” (1951: 237). This focus on the problem of work that did not engage *enough* of the self was also the version of the critique of alienation that made its way in the 1970s into popular public discourse in the U.S. The new modes of management that were advanced as cures by at least the 1980s – those that promised to engineer work cultures that would expect greater effort, inspire loyalty, and reward creative initiative – produce a whole new set of problems. Hochschild, writing in the context of a more developed service economy, saw what Mills could not yet grasp: when what workers offer for sale and command is “a smile, a mood, a feeling, or a relationship” (Hochschild, 1983: 198), it may be that work requires not too little but too much of the self. Hence we need to attend to the ways that work does not thus simply abandon us to non-work pursuits but is carried by subjects into the temporalities,

subjectivities, and socialities of non-work. Rather than focus solely on the familiar critique of the colonization of life by the market – through, for example, critiques of consumer culture – Hochschild’s analysis extends also to the colonization of life by work.

At some point, however, the critique of alienation proves problematic. Both authors are well aware of the typical limitations of the theory of estranged labor as it was developed in humanist Marxism: a tethering of the critique to a nostalgic ideal of pre-industrial artisanal work and to an essentialist ontology of labor. Leery as they may be of these tropes, however, I would argue that they still deploy them, or variants of them, as standards by which to measure the estrangement of labor in the present context. Just as in the case of the standpoint theorists who grounded their critical analyses in a reproductive outside, we find these authors relying on an outside – in this instance, both a site of unalienated labor and a model of the self prior to its alienation – to animate their critiques.

The first of these traditional anchors of the critique of alienation was what Mills described as the ideal of craftsmanship (1951: 220), a standard of what work should be and mean against which the new forms of immaterial labor could be judged. Although Mills dutifully pursues the exercise, measuring the conditions of post-industrial white collar work against an essentially pre-industrial ideal of craft production, he has no illusions about its contemporary resonance. He knows that since the workers themselves have no memory of the world of work against which the present is assessed, the critique is of little practical consequence to 20th century workforce. “Only the psychological imagination of the historian makes it possible to write off such comparisons as if they were of psychological import” (1951: 228). So even though the distance between this oft-cited ideal of unalienated work and the present reality of work has grown, the classic critique of alienated labor, grounded in an historical outside that is no longer remembered, has been drained of political relevance.⁹

Hochschild, by contrast, does not look backward for an ideal with critical leverage. Instead she finds a standpoint from which to evaluate the conditions of emotional labor in the private realm, in practices, subjectivities, and relations that she suggests are not subject in the same way or to the same degree to the strictures of capitalist valorization. This public/private distinction was indeed central to Marx’s original critique. The confounding of private and public – feeling at home when not at work and not at home when at work – was presented by Marx as one of the most striking symptoms of the alienation of labor.¹⁰ Mills replicates this analysis quite faithfully in his account of the ‘big split’ between life and work. Our dissatisfaction with work, Mills claims, leads us to over-invest in leisure pursuits and consumption practices. Hochschild’s analysis, by

9 This position is in keeping with Mills’s political pessimism and insistence that white collar workers represent a dominant tendency but not a leading edge, an emerging class but not a nascent vanguard.

10 “The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home.... As a result, therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal” (Marx, 1978: 74).

contrast, simultaneously depends on and usefully troubles this private/public distinction. On the one hand, she trains her critical attention on the ‘transmutation’ of a private emotional system to a public one, attending to what happens when “emotion work, feeling rules, and social exchange have been removed from the private domain and placed in a public one, where they are processed, standardized, and subjected to hierarchical control” (1983: 153).¹¹ On the other hand, she also effectively undercuts the very same distinction between social spheres on which she depends for her critique. That is, Hochschild is critical of what happens when the private management of feeling is socially engineered in the public sphere for the purposes of profit while also acknowledging that this private realm of feeling is similarly subject to the imposition of standardized feeling rules, the instrumentalization of affect, and the inequalities of emotional exchange. The differences between the private and the public instances of emotional work – the claim, for example, that in private life we are free to negotiate relations of emotional exchange that we are often obligated to accept in the public realm of work (1983: 85) – is troubled by her own astute observations about the social management and gendered hierarchies of so-called private relations. Thus the private realm serves as an alternative to the capitalist market at the same time that its distinction from that market is called into question.

The critique of estranged labor is traditionally anchored in a second outside as well, not only in a specific ideal of unalienated work but in a certain model of the laboring self from which we are estranged and to which we should be restored. Both authors are dubious of the essentialism of this approach. Mills declines to ground his analysis in “the metaphysical view that man’s self is most crucially expressed in work-activity” (1951: 225) and Hochschild avoids affixing her critique to the authenticity of emotions, insisting that they are never independent of acts of management and thus always already social (1983: 17-18). But despite these misgivings and cautions, the fact remains that the critique of alienation works by evoking a given self, our estrangement from which constitutes a compelling crisis. Mills claims that one can pursue the critique without deploying a metaphysics of labor, yet tends to evoke instead an ontology of the liberal individual to animate his critique of the fate of the ‘Little Man’. One also finds, once again, a tension at the heart of Hochschild’s analysis: she insists on the social construction and malleability of the emotions while also positing them as fundamental to the self such that their alienation is a problem. Her strategy of placing references to the ‘real’, ‘true’ and ‘authentic’ self in quotes paradoxically serves to problematize – albeit in very useful ways – the essentialism on which the analysis, nonetheless, depends. Her argument, in other words, is animated by an ideal of the ‘unmanaged heart’ – associated either with a separate private world of emotional practice and contact or with what one may experience as one’s ‘true’ self – the possibility of which it simultaneously disavows. Both Mills and Hochschild thus recognize the limitations of critical strategies that rely on nostalgic ideals of work and essentialist models of the self, but ultimately end up reproducing them.

11 Posing as Hochschild does a categorical contrast between emotion work and emotional labor, one a public act with exchange value and the other a private act with use value, would seem to suggest that one can use the distinction to judge the latter from the standpoint of the former (1983: 7).

Life, Work, and the Logics of Immanent Critique

These excavations of the two traditions have recovered some important insights and revealed some crucial problems. Turning first to their many lasting contributions, I would mention socialist feminism's emphasis on the contradiction between accumulation and social reproduction, in both its functional moment as a way of realizing and sustaining the exploitation of labor and in its potential dysfunction as a site of antagonism. From the review of Mills's and Hochschild's accounts of white and pink collar work, I find of particular relevance today their focus on the impact of these modes of labor on subjectivity. Hochschild's analysis of the constitutive effects of affective labor and the colonization of life by work is particularly important, it seems to me, for the contemporary project of mapping and contesting the organization of immaterial/affective labor. And finally, from both Hochschild and the socialist feminist tradition we are reminded of the need to attend to the ongoing gendering of labor in the affective mode both in its waged and unwaged instances.

Despite their many contributions, however, these older critiques of reproductive and emotional labor prove limited as guides for future interventions. In predicating their analyses in the respective logics of separate spheres and estranged labor, both depend on a critical standpoint located in an outside: in a site separate from capitalism proper or in a model of the self prior to its estrangement, that is, in some kind of spatial or ontological position of exteriority.

But as I noted earlier, one can learn as much from the shortcomings of these critical strategies as their strengths. Indeed, perhaps the most significant lesson to be drawn from this genealogical exercise is a clearer recognition of our present predicament. Once the model of separate spheres is rendered finally unsustainable the problem is how to develop a politics in the absence of an outside in which to stand. Could different versions of these critical strategies be developed that do not rely on a sphere of existence or model of the subject outside capital? How might one conceive the terms of an immanent critique of and resistance to the post-Fordist organization of labor? If, as Hardt and Negri argue, it is "no longer possible to identify a sign, a subject, a value, or a practice that is 'outside'" (2000: 385), on what ground might one establish a critical standpoint? What are the ways by which one can advance a theory of agency without deploying a model of the subject as it supposedly once was or is now beyond the reach of capital? In Judith Butler's words, "[i]s there a way to affirm complicity as the basis of political agency, yet insist that political agency may do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination?" (1997: 29-30). Finally, there is the perennial feminist problem of how to make visible and contest the gender divisions of labor in relation to the construction of subjectivities and hierarchies without reproducing naturalized models of gender dualism and relying on familiar brands of identity politics.

Socialist feminism's insistent focus on the antagonisms generated at the intersection of capital accumulation and social reproduction can still function as a compelling point of departure.¹² The sometimes competing requirements of creating surplus value and sustaining the relations of sociality on which it depends, give rise to a series of

12 For a current example of this project see Bakker and Gill (2004).

problems the analyses of which can yield important critical levers. This problematic has, for example, served to frame pressing questions about the relative value of practices, including, notably, the undervaluation of caring practices both waged and unwaged in relation to the legacy of their gendering and racialization. But once “social life itself becomes a productive machine” (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 148), the terms of that distinction and its conflicts must be made more complex than once imagined. In contexts where reproduction is no longer identifiable with a particular space or a distinctive set of practices and becomes coterminous with production, there is a need for new ways to pose the antagonism and acquire some critical purchase.

Let me propose – if only in brief and speculative terms – the outline of one such alternative strategy. What if the older division between reproduction and production were to be replaced with the distinction between life and work? How might this different way of mapping the terrain of capitalist relations and lines of antagonism serve to help shift the terms of political analysis? There are, it seems to me, certain potential benefits of such a framework. For one thing, compared to the category of reproduction, life has the advantage of being a more capacious concept. As a more expansive category it does not risk corraling the practices constitutive of social life into the space of the household or, even more narrowly, equate them with the institution of the family. Thus the political struggle that poses life against work is less readily equated with and reduced to the project of re-valuing the private world of the family and defending its traditional values.

But more important to our discussion here, I wonder if the critical distinction between life and work can perhaps better register one of the key insights gleaned from Mills and especially Hochschild’s analyses about work and the construction of subjectivities. Once we recognize that work produces subjects, the borders that would contain it are called into question. It is not only that work and life cannot be confined to particular sites, from the perspective of the production of subjectivity, work and life are thoroughly interpenetrated. The subjectivities shaped at work do not remain at work but inhabit all the spaces and times of nonwork and vice-versa. Who one becomes at work and in life are mutually constitutive. There is no position of exteriority in this sense; work is clearly part of life and life part of work.

This does not mean, however, that work and life are indistinguishable. Indeed, the language of work and life is also used popularly to pose the terms of a conflict between them. Consider the observation that someone who works too much should ‘get a life’. What distinction and antagonism between work and life is referred to in this expression? It is not necessarily about getting something one does not have; presumably one already has a life. Neither is it necessarily about engaging in different practices. If, for example, one’s work involves the exercise of affective labor to construct social relations with clients or customers and this is also what one wants to do in one’s non-work time with family or friends, getting a life does not mean being able to do what one cannot do at work. Rather it would seem that such popular conceptions of antagonism refer primarily to a quality of living that one wants to achieve or expand. What if this familiar line of demarcation were to be made into the basis of a political project? Could this notion of a life that one might want to get that is distinct from and conflicts with work be fleshed out in a way that points in the direction of a liberatory project, one that

strives towards relations of equality and autonomy rather than hierarchy and command? To the extent that it could serve as an immanent standpoint of critique, life would be at once fully implicated in, but nonetheless potentially set against the spaces, relations, and temporalities now dominated by work.¹³ This critical standpoint and political project thus requires not the discovery of a space or defense of a subjectivity that is outside, but the struggle for a different quality of experience.

The question remains, however, of how to register and challenge the gendered organization of labor within this frame. The production/reproduction division was designed to call attention to the gendered division of waged and unwaged service labor, even if not always in terms that could escape equating reproduction with the domestic sphere and ‘women’s work’. For this alternative framework to serve a feminist project, the gender hierarchies and divisions of labor within both work and life must be made visible and subject to contestation. The terms themselves will not secure a feminist content to inquiries framed under their rubric. But perhaps the distinction between life and work could be made to pose important questions, for example, about the status and organization – including the gender division – of unwaged household and caring practices: where in this case might one draw the boundary between what is work and what is life? What counts as work and as life, and the border between them, are not pre-given; they are, rather, matters of political determination and, I would add, important points of focus for feminist struggles. That said, it seems to me that with the continued integration of women into waged work under post-Fordism and the re-privatization of domestic labor under neoliberalism, the project of making visible and contesting the gender, racial, and international divisions of domestic labor is now more difficult (see B. Young, 2001).

Returning to the legacy of Mills and Hochschild’s contributions, I think their analyses of the impact of immaterial labor markets and processes on individuals and society suggest the ongoing importance of a critical standpoint rooted in a discourse of subjectivity and in relation to some notion of an alternative model of the subject. The expansion of affective forms of labor today only makes these critical investigations into its impact on who we become as emotional laborers in relation to the ‘personality market’ and on the texture and quality of social relations in the ‘great salesroom’ more pressing. Once we recognize the constitutive force of labors in the affective mode, once it is subjectivity that is hired and managed and at work “the prescription and definition of tasks transforms into a prescription of subjectivities” (Lazzarato, 1996: 135), questions about how it is governed and who we become are more critical. The problem, it seems to me, is how to focus critical attention on work as a mechanism of subjectification without the conceptual apparatus of alienation and the distinction between existence and essence on which it inevitably depends. How might one formulate a critical assessment of what we are becoming in and through work without depending on a given model of what we truly are?

13 Here the category of life serves a critical function analogous to the way that it served in Nietzsche’s philosophy as a means by which to advance the critique of ascetic values; life was deployed as a kind of shorthand for that which ascetic values – in this case work and its traditional ethics – disavow and which exceeds and disrupts ascetic modes of conceptual and institutional containment.

One approach would be to ground the critical standpoint on subjectivity not in a claim about the true or essential self, but in a potential self. What if this alternative model of subjectivity, from the perspective of which existing models can be critically assessed, were to be imagined not in terms of subjectivities that now exist but in terms of those that might come to be? Once the temporal horizon of a possible future replaces the spatial confines of an existing sphere of practice or model of identity, the standard by which the present is judged could expand to visions of what we might want rather than the defense of what we already have, know, or are. The self at work could thus be judged in relation to a self that one might wish to become and both work and non-work time could be assessed in relation to the possibility of becoming different. What if the critique that had been developed around the logic of alienation were recoded so that it was no longer about a self to save or to recover but one to invent?

Once again, however, there is the question of what would happen to gender if the discursive frame of analysis were to shift in this way. As long as labor is signified and divided by gender, the critique of work as a mode of subjectification must be a feminist project. What this approach does call into question, however, is the adequacy of gender identity as a basis for making political claims and a means of political recruitment. Many have noted, especially with regard to sexuality and race, the problems with those models of feminist identity politics that risk reinforcing exclusive and normative models of gender. But what if feminist political analyses and projects were not limited to claims about who we are as women or as men, or even the identities produced by what we do, but rather put the accent on collectively imagined visions of what we want to be or to do? Confronting the ongoing gendering of work and its subjects would thus be more a matter of expressing feminist political desire than repeating gender identities.¹⁴

Rather than a true self versus its estranged form, or a reproductive sphere of practice separate from a sphere of properly capitalist production, an alternative critical strategy might thus hinge instead on the distinction between life and work and a vision of what subjects in relation could become in contrast to what they are. These would be, in short, critical standpoints grounded not in separate spheres of practice but in the possibility of different qualities of life; not in a claim about who we are but rather in a vision of who we might want to become; not in an essence but in a logic of political desire immanent to existence. These biopolitical standpoints might thus be able to direct us towards more promising lines of critical insight and frame more compelling political responses to the organization of labor under post-Fordism.

references

- Bakker, I. and S. Gill. (eds.) (2004) *Power, Production, and Social Reproduction: Human in/security in the Global Political Economy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brown, W. (1995) *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Butler, J. (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dalla Costa, M. and S. James (1972) *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*. Bristol: Falling Wall Press.

14 Demarcating a similar alternative to feminist identity politics, Wendy Brown asks, “[w]hat if we sought to supplant the language of ‘I am’ ... with the language of ‘I want this for us?’” (1995: 75)

- Glenn, E.N. (1985) 'Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 17(3): 86-108.
- Haraway, D. (1985) 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *Socialist Review*, 80: 65-108.
- Harding, S. (ed.) (2004) *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York: Routledge.
- Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2000) *Empire*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Hardt, M. and A. Negri (2004) *Multitude*. New York: Penguin.
- Hartsock, N. (1998) 'The Feminist Standpoint Revisited', in N. Hartsock, *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Hochschild, A.R. (1983) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lazzarato, M. (1996) 'Immaterial Labor', in P. Virno and M. Hardt (eds.) *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 133-147.
- Marx, K. (1978) 'Estranged Labour', in R. C. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Second Edition. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Malos, E. (ed.) (1995) *The Politics of Housework*, Revised Edition. Cheltenham: New Clarion Press.
- Mills, C.W. (1951) *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Negri, A. (1996) 'Twenty Theses on Marx: Interpretation of the Class Situation Today', in S. Makdisi, C. Casarino and R. Karl (eds.) *Marxism Beyond Marxism*. New York: Routledge, 149-180.
- Rose, H. (2004) 'Hand, Brain, and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences', in S. Harding (ed.) *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*. New York: Routledge, 67-80.
- Sargent, L. (ed.) (1981) *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*. Boston: South End Press
- Young, B. (2001) 'Globalization and Gender: A European Perspective', in R.M. Kelly, J.H. Bayes, M.W. Hawkesworth and B. Young (eds.) *Gender, Globalization, and Democratization*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 27-47.
- Young, I. (1981) 'Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: A Critique of Dual Systems Theory', in L. Sargent (ed.) *Women and Revolution*. Boston: South End Press, 43-69.

the author

Kathi Weeks was trained as a political theorist and is currently an associate professor of Women's Studies at Duke University. She is the author of *Constituting Feminist Subjects* (Cornell University Press, 1998) and is working on a manuscript about the politics and ethics of work.
E-mail: kweeks@duke.edu