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## MARX WITHIN FEMINISM<sup>1</sup>

### *Preliminary Remarks*

The problem is how to begin and how to proceed in a context where I don't know anything about the level of knowledge both in marxism as well as in feminism. So I will tell something about both, about the Women's Movement and their fights in Europe and abroad as well as on Marx.

It is probably well known that the women's movement of 1968 developed out of the socialist student's movement. The beginning was sort of a push of, a necessary rejection of a lot which was taken for granted in the workers' and the students' movements. There was a specific distinction a hope to do without a party, without a strict organization; the rejection was also directed against Marx, who was hold responsible for the politics of the workers movement. I come back to this later.

After a common beginning, almost all ove the world, around the fights against abortion laws, the Women's Movement split into two strands at first; I do not mention further later splittings here. The bigger strand, called the autonomous movement quickly forgot about Marx. But marxism-feminism as a new very creative strand, which was the fundament for the other part of the movement, remained in lots of countries, especially in the anglo-saxon worlds e.g. in the USA, but also in Latin America. For those who want to know about marxist feminism it is always good to go back to Marx, read his writings and find out for themselves, where there is something to inherit, where to reread forgotten impulses which are still valid and helpful.

I will talk about three points, where lessons can be drawn from Marx that are fruitful for, if not even indispensable to, contemporary, practical feminism:

- (1) the role of "real life," where Marx's theses on Feuerbach are significant to feminist research and criticism of mainstream science;
- (2) the question of Marx's concept of work, where, on the one hand, it has shaped

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<sup>1</sup> Talk at the Complutense University of Madrid in the section of Philosophy, Summer 2003, taken from an elaborated version for print in a book on Marx, which never appeared.

feminist debates up to now and, on the other, it resonates with the current "crisis of labor society"<sup>2</sup> and thus should be more accurately recalled and precisely grasped;

(3) and finally, the elaboration of the Marxian version of family and housework.

Since I already considered myself a marxist at the beginning of the Women's Movement, there is an autobiographical aspect to my account, which I highlight by means of personal anecdote.

### *1. Starting with the Critique of Feuerbach*

In his shortest essential work, "*Concerning Feuerbach*," Marx wrote: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the *object, or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was developed abstractly by idealism - which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach [...] therefore does not understand the importance of the *^revolutionary^*, of the *^practical-critical^* activity."<sup>3</sup> This critique of existing materialism had little significance for the reception of Marxian thought in the labour movement but it now reads like direct instruction for feminist theory and practice of today. The disconnection of science from the real practices of people, the deducing of all human activity from the highest categories, and the neglect of sensuous human activity are major critical points that feminist-informed science asserts against the scientific canon. That the reigning social sciences have been conceptualized without regard for the experiences and practices of women was one of the first critiques by the Women's Movement, one which intervened in existing traditions of thought in revolutionary ways, even if it was not related by the women themselves to Marx's critique of Feuerbach.

I had already studied the theses on Feuerbach and considered them useful for the initial claims of the slowly strengthening Women's Movement. In the large cities of the Western capitalist nations, including West Germany, mass rallies of women regularly

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<sup>2</sup> With the term "crisis of labour society" mainly sociologists and political scientists try to understand the consequences of the enormous development of the productive forces by high technology accompanied by a growing structural unemployment.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, "Concerning Feuerbach", in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, in association with *New Left Review*, 1992 (1975), 421; hereafter cited as "CF".

occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which they would articulate their protests, tribunal-style, with denunciations of their degrading treatment by men. *Violence against women* was one of the insurgent themes that moved these women to rage and indignation. At that time I considered such gatherings to be actions which contributed mainly to despair, not to the force of spoken action that was needed. So I formulated a short text as a political intervention - "Women: Victims or Actors?"<sup>4</sup> - in which I basically tried to apply what I had learned from Marx's Feuerbach theses to the woman question. I drew certain conclusions from theses 3 and 6 that I still maintain are on the whole fundamental to any kind of interventionist thought. From Thesis 3 - "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice." ("CF" 422) - I concluded that personal transformation was a necessary moment and itself an essential component of the alteration of oppressive conditions; it would therefore be crucial that every intervention into society (i.e., each political act) be carried out by those individuals whose liberation was at stake. (Or in the words of Peter Weiß: "If we do not take our liberation into our own hands, it will remain without consequences for us.")<sup>5</sup> I considered this a simple idea but one which indicated how crucial it was for women to take their history into their own hands and not wait for liberation through others, such as workers. Moreover, this idea connected personal, subjective issues to societal interventions for political change, so that neither the interests of and reference to the whole society as the condition of our lives nor ourselves, who were struggling and upholding actors, would get lost.

To my surprise, the double movement of taking self-change as a dimension of revolutionary practice while also thinking of women as political agents aroused an unexpectedly violent reaction in the labour movement organizations. Their opposition continued to be furiously voiced over the next ten years in various journals and newspapers, where I was accused of "bourgeois deviance", among other things, by those men who occupied chairs of even the women's committees. Proclaiming women to be political subjects who wished to articulate themselves was heresy, contravening the dogma of the male worker's organization as the only legitimate representative of the

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<sup>4</sup> This essay, originally published in *Das Argument*, 123 (1980), was based on a talk I gave at the first peoples' university in Berlin. It has since been translated into seven languages and appeared in approximately twenty publications, including, most recently, as "Women, Actors or Culprits?" in my *Beyond Female Masochism*, (London, Verso, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Resistance*

politics from within which the hierarchy of chains to be broken in our fight for liberation should be formulated. "Capital as the principal enemy" as it was then termed, must first be fought jointly, with the woman question - "a subordinate contradiction" - later taking its place on the new society's agenda. The labour movement ultimately directed its criticism at the very existence of the Women's Movement, which was taken to be an aloof, bourgeois troublemaker; hence its real revolutionary dimensions went unrecognized, while the connection between capitalism and women's oppression was never grasped at all.

The self-righteous tone and abstract tenor that prevailed in discussions by labor-organization intellectuals pushed the Women's Movement, practically from its inception, into an oppositional stance toward the Socialist movement out of which it had sprung. The crisis soon became so acute that many women's groups in England, Italy, France, and Germany withdrew from labor organizations, some even reorganizing as parallel groups, which amounted to what Italian feminists called "double militancy." Despite the claims of priority for the Worker's Movement - and for capitalist exploitation as the sole manifestation of power and oppression - men's dominance over women was identified and exposed as historically powerful. This idea rang from the beginning with essentialist assumptions about the higher nature of women, though, and victim theories were formulated in accordance with the denunciation of the abovementioned tribunal-rallies. But the labour movement critique was conducted neither by appeal to nor even under the influence of Marx, who, though officially acknowledged, enjoyed no vivid theoretic moment in the development of organized labor.

Thesis six of Marx's Feuerbach critique seemed to have great potential usefulness for a dialogue between the protests of the Women's Movement and the theory and practice of feminism: "(T)he human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations." ("CF" 423).

This turn from speaking of humanity in the singular, behind which gender relations inevitably disappear, seems to me to have been fundamental to every attempt to formulate the problematic of women in our societies. Over and above this, however, I read it as a research mandate to study the participation of women in their own oppression, their engagement in social relations, their need for self-change, their subjection.

Absorbing the human essence into the social structures and relations that the individual appropriates in order to become a member of the human socius, into which he is then born, marks a departure from metaphysics that allows to immediately recognize the problematic of woman as a historical production in which women themselves have been actors. Their position in society could not, therefore, be understood without taking their own involvement into account. Understanding the connection between different social practices and the culturally supported formation of gender seemed like a research task that could show, more pointedly than before, the gaps left by the absence of the female from the production of knowledge. At the same time, this approach could indicate the extent to which any knowledge about women's socialization must be a liberating knowledge. Ultimately, it would lead to a break with a series of traditions in social scientific research: "real life," or the everyday, coming to be understood as a problematic; the objects of research turning into its subjects, as experts of their own socialization; and remembered history becoming the material with and about which to do research.

In this way I endeavored to develop an empirical methodology that would advance research in which women, as subjects, could collectively figure out the problematic of their position in society - their participation in the reproduction of their own oppression - so that they themselves could determine where change was necessary and possible. With this methodology, which I called "memory work", I developed a praxis from Marx's Feuerbach theses that aimed to overcome the problem of robbing women of their practical-subjective inclusion, that is, of making them research objects on the order of insects. It was important to bring women's implicit knowledge to the fore and make it public. This methodology also worked against the essentialism then emerging in feminism (i.e., the "higher nature of women" thematic), attempting instead to track a connection between self change and social change. The Feuerbach theses provided a space in which the vexed questions of a developing feminism could be posed - questions that are no less valid today and that continue to urgently recommend themselves for feminist research. Since concrete research on them has only just begun, in fact, they are by no means fully answered yet. With respect to Marx, however, it is always better to study him not as a theorist who has already done our thinking for us, but rather as one whose ways of intervening in conventional thought can teach us the art of shifting the subject of knowledge for the sake of a greater knowledge.

## *2. Marx and Work*

The initial feminist wrath against Marx, which finally resulted in a renunciation of Marxist thought, was not directed, however, at his theses on Feuerbach (whose importance for a scientific feminism has never been elaborated anywhere, so far as I know), but rather at Marx's concept of work and his theories of the production of surplus-value. What are we to make of feminist concerns that Marx's concept of work excludes women and prevents them from perceiving the reality of their oppression? Feminist criticism has focused primarily on Marx's arguments about the "dual character of work." The idea of work as a force which can create both use-value and exchange-value is fundamental to his analysis of capitalism and its dynamic, as well as to his theory of revolution. A society driven by the desire to turn living labor into dead labor (to use Marx's own imagery) — and then to endow that dead labor with power over the living in the form of capital, machines, and factories — would maneuver itself into catastrophe unless radical measures were taken. Such measures would have to destroy the basic structures of social regime, that is, profit as the driving force and the corresponding domination of value over living labor on the basis of the division of labor and the rule of property. In his analysis of the dual character of work, Marx focuses on wage labor as the dominant mode of life-deforming activity, with the first step toward change being the abolition of private ownership of the means of production. His analysis had the effect of focusing too narrowly on the male worker's historical role as family breadwinner and on the working class as the political subject. Women's protests against this theoretical configuration seem justified, for even if we agree that such a situation is the product of capitalist society rather than the creation of Marx's analysis of it, his terms are remarkable for a certain vacuity and silence on women.

The domestic-labor debate of the late 1960s, which in a way is still percolating in the late 1990s on the Internet (at least in the United States), and has been taken up in a publication of Lise Vogel in 2000 (*Domestic Labor revisited*) broadened the scope of a complaint about the centrality of the male worker into an evaluation of the validity of Marx's theory of value as a whole.

Widely discussed since 1973 when Maria Rosa dalla Costa published a violent article<sup>7</sup> Marx's theory was extended to include domestic labor, which can be considered "productive" because it reproduces labor-power as a commodity in the form of personal services and, accordingly, allows surplus-value to be increased behind the back of

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industrial production. Women's work is thus rendered invisible as *family work*; moreover, women also produce more value than is necessary for their own reproduction, the gratis appropriation of which then flows into capital's profit (a consequence not considered by Marx). In these analyses, then, the family becomes central to social production. (Domestic labor was later emphasized as "a blind spot in the critique of political economy.")

However, wage discrimination against women was supposedly justified by their producing less value than men, for although women reproduced men, that entailed a withdrawal of their own reproduction from their labor-power. In this respect, men literally had more value for their employers, since in purchasing the commodity male labor-power they also got a bonus ration of women's work. This overlooking of the work performed by women in the home was based on disregarding an essential component of the surplus-value appropriated by the capitalist. If the secret of the commodity labor-power was its ability to produce more than it needed for its own reproduction, then this must also be true of women's labor-power; what remained to be discovered was how it contributed to the capitalist-manufactured commodity (Pohl, 1984). One practical consequence of this analysis was the demand for domestic labor's compensation as wage labor, on the one hand, and for simply doing away with this sphere of unpaid female labor altogether, on the other. In 1985, Christel Neusüss added a further twist to the argument when she calculated that the commodity labor-power, as something belonging to the worker, could not figure in any account of commodity production and value because it rendered the work of *mothers* (i.e., giving birth to children) invisible together with domestic labor (Her book includes a survey of ideas from the history of the labor movement, all of which show an absolute ignorance of the production of life, as well as domestic labor.) While the plausibility of such arguments cannot be denied, it seems problematic to me that they sort of ended in a purely academic debate, which became more and more complicated but led to no corresponding political strategy.

The other line of argument pursued in the domestic-labor debate, namely, that

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housework was productive and should be socially acknowledged as such by being compensated like any other form of wage labor, proved to have political potential: the demand that wages be paid for domestic labor was embraced by the more conservative parties in West Germany because it enabled them both to promote "family values" and, in the face of rising unemployment, to uphold their seemingly ever more justified opposition to include women into the labour-force. But with this support for compensating domestic labor almost everything else with which the Women's Movement had begun its struggle was given up: the critique of family form, of the gendered division of labor, of the alienated form of wage labor, and of capitalism itself. Claiming that domestic labor was productive could presumably — if only by the magic force of conceptualization — remove the stain from a division of labor that denied women the possibility of existing without a male breadwinner as long as they remained housewives.

The debate continued for the most part in the United States. In 1994, Fraad, Resnick, and Wolff published *Bringing It All Back Home: Class, Gender and Power in the Modern Household*, where they tried to apply the concept of class to household practices and concluded that such an approach was a fertile one. As these authors saw it, two different modes of class production from two different eras were operating together in the present: a feudal mode alongside a capitalist one. This point of entry allowed them to depict separate practices as possibly self-contradictory and the structure of demands by those who inhabit both the domestic and the public sphere as nonhomologous. While not incompatible with Marx, this representation shifts the analytic weight from the critique of the ruling mode of domination and economy to the problematic of the coexistence of differently organized power relations. But Marx had also spoken of the fact that being a productive worker would be no luck but misfortune. Before I suggest another approach to the question of the function of unpaid housework for the reproduction of capitalist society as a critique of Marx, however, let me return to the original series of arguments that arose from the domestic-labor debate in relation to his concept of work. In my opinion, they relate less to Marx than to the Marxism of the labor movement. That would in itself pose no problem had not Marx made some important points for feminists to take into account precisely on the question of work — which therefore brings me to a rereading of Marx himself.

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From the philosophical tradition and the latter-day developments in political economy (e.g., Smith, Ricardo), Marx drew a concept of work in relation to a significantly controversial sphere. Work was the activity of the poor: it was laborious toil that exhausted people's lives; indeed, for many it had replaced life. But work was also the source of wealth and of all value:

>[B]ut it is the interest of all rich nations, that the greatest part of the poor should never be idle, and yet continually spend what they get [...] Those that get their living by their daily labour [...] have nothing to stir them up to be serviceable but their wants which it is prudence to relieve, but folly to cure [...] From what has been said, it is manifest, that, in a free nation, where slaves are not allowed of, the surest wealth consists in a multitude of the laborious poor<sup>c</sup> (Mandeville)

Work as the connecting link between poverty and wealth, as the contradictory foundation of both — Marx begins by elaborating on the position of work in this provocative contradiction. He sees it as a dimension of domination: "[T]he emancipation of society [...] is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*" because "the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are nothing but modifications and consequences of this relation." In Marx's early writings, we find a number of statements that, in the language of the day, define work as alienation: "For in the first place labour, *life activity, productive life* itself appears to man only as a *means* for the satisfaction of a need, the need to preserve physical existence. But productive life is species-life"; and, "all human activity up to now has been labour, i.e. industry, self-estranged activity" ("EPM" 328, 354). This idea, that work is domination does not differentiate between the material side and the economic forms and therefore leads to the logical conclusion, that work itself should be abolished: "One of the greatest misunderstandings is to speak of free, social, human work, of work without private property. 'Work' is by nature unfree, inhuman, unsocial, activity which is both controlled by private property and which creates it. The abolition of private property, therefore, only becomes reality when it is seen as the abolition of work." Finally, from the conception of history we have sketched,

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we obtain these further conclusions: "In all revolutions up till now the mode of activity always remained unscathed and it was only a question of the distribution of this activity, a new distribution of labour to other persons, whilst the communist is directed against the preceding *mode* of activity, does away with labour."

I do not think that Marx actually contemplated the abolition of work as man's metabolic interchange with nature, promising eternal idleness, or that he imagined the abolition of industry to be compatible with the survival of the race. But thinking of work in formal conceptual terms compels us to reconstruct what has become deformed in his concept of work, and hence what "substance" remains to be liberated. In work's alienated form Marx found the free expression and enjoyment of life, the free, spontaneous activity of the human community, the opportunity to know oneself affirmed in the thought and love of another; the development of each individual into a whole person, the intercourse of individuals as such (*GI* 86—87), and free, conscious life activity as species-life ("EPM" 329). The emphasis is on "free activity," or "self-activity," and this is always connected to the life of the species as a species-specific characteristic. As species-beings, people are active on each other's behalf, which determines their intercourse with one another and with the community, as well as their development as individuals. This free activity is a pleasure; life itself is a pleasurable, productive activity.

Taking such statements as our starting point, we could posit self-activity as "the primary need of life," conceive of the community as a productive framework, and speak of the development of individuals through their own free activity—but we would never thereby arrive at the modern, defensive sociological reaction to work as what should no longer stand at the center of social theory (as it allegedly did for Marx), but rather as what is to be replaced by "communication" or "way of life" (life-world). It is crystal clear that Marx never distinguished between life-world and "work-world," having been more concerned with revolutionizing what is nowadays called our "way of life," which he understood as the collectively active, enjoyable union of the individuals in a community (including the form of their intercourse—love and life itself—although by "life" he always meant *active* life).

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Our way of life is distorted by the relations of production, the means by which people produce their material lives, as they have done throughout the course of history, initially so that some could indulge in free activity whilst their material existence was produced by others (*GI* 84ff.). (Deutsche Ideologie, MEW 3, 67)

Self-activity, as a perspective on liberation, is related to the production of material life, and this relationship is essential to conceiving the possibility of life without domination. The production of material life passes through a number of stages and forms, one of which is work: the most direct form of perversion, the "negative form of self-activity" (*ibid.*). Thus does life become divided against itself. Enfolded in this negative form are the analytical categories that Marx would later deploy in *Capital*:

"Thus through *estranged, alienated labour* the worker creates the relationship of another man, who is alien to labour and stands outside it, to that labour. The relation of the worker to labour creates the relation of the capitalist—or whatever other word one chooses for the master of labour—to that labour. *Private property* is therefore the product, result and necessary consequence of *alienated labour*, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself." ("EPM" 331—32)

Although we can already see here his later linguistic usage, in subsequent writings. The global condemnation of labour is substituted by the older Marx by a differentiation of its being determined by form on the one hand and natural necessities on the other. About work Marx would go on to say in *Capital*: "Labour, then, as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself" (*C1* 133). Labour has always an anthropological dimension: because the working individual changes external nature, it changes his own nature at the same time. (vgl. MEW 23, 192). In its alienated form work has a dual nature. On the one hand, it is a producer of use-values, purposive and, in that sense, independent of social formations. On the other, it produces exchange-values and creates wealth, but only under certain social conditions. The distortions or alienations that arise as a consequence are thoroughly analyzed in *Capital*. The dual nature of work is fundamental to capitalism as a system that produces commodities, but what remains decisive in Marx is the production of material existence as a form of free activity. It

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includes the idea of production without domination and hence the elimination of private property (the accumulation of exchange-values) as a regulative principle, as well as the reconciliation with nature by understanding its laws. The emancipation of men is the developing spending of force for a common selfdetermined goal. This thought connects his early writings with his late ones.

At stake in the idea of free activity, conceived as a process, is the relationship between freedom and necessity. As an aspect of material production, the bounds of necessity should be pushed back as far as possible for the sake of free activity. Work, in the realm of necessity, is a problem of distribution—everyone should perform an equal share of necessary labor. In the realm of freedom, however, the activity is of a different kind, one to which the traditional divisions of labor—above all, its division into mental and manual labor—no longer applies. The route from one realm to the other proceeds via the development of the productive forces which will moderate the aspect of necessity in the production of material existence. And it proceeds likewise through the division of human labor, its alienation, for alienated labor has to be overcome in a process whereby human beings take comprehensive possession of the productive forces that they themselves have created. All the relations of production have to be overturned, since these have distorted the human species to the point where all development, all wealth and culture, and the actual conditions of work have become objective realities that oppose the workers and gain power over them. This contradiction can be resolved only by rupture.

In the "Critique of the Gotha Programme," Marx sketches the cooperative phase of society (social ownership of the means of production), which—precisely because it has emerged from capitalist society—bears the birthmarks of that society "in every respect, economically, morally, intellectually." He goes on to describe a more advanced "communist society," a community in which the distortions of labor have been overcome, and it is in this context that we encounter the reference to work as "the primary need of life":

"[W]hen the enslaving subjugation of individuals to the division of labour, and thereby the antithesis between intellectual and physical labour, have disappeared; when labour is no longer just a means of keeping alive, but has itself become the primary need of life; when the all-round development of individuals has also increased their productive powers and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow

more abundantly—only then can society wholly cross the narrow horizon of bourgeois right and inscribe on its banner: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!"

These remarks have led to widespread misunderstandings. On Marx's authority individuals could be accused of a "work-shy" mentality and then "reeducated" as people for whom work was "the primary need of life." Worse yet, the final proclamation, "to each according to his needs," triggered both hopes and fears. Had Marx been expressing a yearning for a society in which needs which had been molded by capitalism and superfluous production, on the one hand, and by poverty, on the other should be satisfied? The context, however, makes his meaning unambiguously clear. If human beings succeeded in liberating themselves from domination, the production of material life would become a source of productive pleasure and an opportunity for people to experience this "primary need" and, to that extent, realize their humanity. This would include the abolition of those divisions of labor which had served to institute our social formations: manual versus mental labor, men's versus women's labor, in urban against rural labour, and finally the ruling pseudo division of labour, the class-division of society in working and non-working people and people out of work.

It is self-evident that when we speak of work we should take its (frequently overlooked) formal character into account. The failure to make distinctions when we think and talk about work is the source of most misunderstandings. We speak of "wage labor," imagining it as the be-all and end-all of the matter, and - with this understanding in mind - are critical of any talk about work as "the primary need of life." But conversely, educating people to view work as this primary need is not only senseless; for the most part it is no more than educating them to accept wage labor in its various guises, which is to say, teaching them to submit to the discipline of industry. When we speak of work's "substance," which in our societies has been submitted to paid work in a division-of-labor system, we really ought to use the cumbersome phrase "self-activation in the production of material existence."

### *3. Feminist Issues*

My own studying and rethinking of the arguments in the domestic-labor debate since

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the 1960s — more recently the materialist-feminist discussion on the Internet (in August/September 1997 and March 1998, see the *mat.fem* list and the *marx.fem* list) — has led me to develop Marx's arguments about work more consistently and to look at them from a feminist perspective. Consequently, I have underlined and stressed here some ideas of his that have been forgotten in the heat of debate and to which we should give more weight. Instead of hastily consigning Marx to the rubbish bin of history, we should step back and see whether the Women's Movement could not make good use of his formulation about "enjoyable free activity in the production of material existence," for Marx in fact placed the question of women's oppression squarely in the context of alienated labor: "This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first property, but even at this early stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others" (*GI* 44).

Here we can easily see that Marx speaks of all human activities to analyse capitalist society and not only of wage labour as most feminists assume. Is not the framework Marx proposed for human society and the individuals who live in it so constructed as to enable the oppression of women, with its mixture of "natural" and social origins, to acquire a tremendous dynamism? The sexual division of labor is inscribed in an altogether diabolical fashion as the division between the production of life and the production of the means of life, as well as in the major division between work and free activity. The sphere of actual life is marginalized from the vantage point of the social production of the means of life, and with it those people — women — who largely inhabit it. Meanwhile, at the center of society, activity is alienated such that all hope of liberation is displaced onto the living activity at the margins of society. Women, who are still being oppressed, are irrationally expected to bear the weight of society's hopes for a better life, for enjoyment and sensuous pleasure.

In Marx we find the worker described as "at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working" ("EPM" 326). Not without some justification, feminists have made this remark a target of criticism. Does Marx not speak here from the standpoint of the male worker while overlooking the situation of the other half of humankind, who do indeed work at home and therefore are at home when they are working? However, this criticism overlooks the problems hinted at by Marx, particularly the double cleavage of sensuous pleasure and the meaning of life from work along with paid work, from work

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that (apparently) counts for nought. This is implicit in the metaphor of the worker who "is not at home when he is working." In this deformation women occupy the home, the marginal realm which is also a refuge, a deformed place of hope. The oppressive idealization of women becomes essential to the survival of the male wage-laborer — an idealization that is then reinforced by the cooperation of the two sexes within the family. Would it not be a revolutionary act to introduce some disorder into this system so as to establish the basis for a new order? If we are to salvage the marginalized realms of life, they must be universalized and hence revalorized. At the same time, the privileged realm of social labor must now be occupied by women and its authority weakened. The very sharing of the different spheres of activity by both sexes would deal a blow to one element of domination that has up to now affirmed the old destructive order. In my view, this is a precondition for bringing love back into the realm of work, a rehumanization of society for which the Women's Movement is crucial.

Although the domestic-labor debate has introduced a considerable number of necessary and healthy rebellious notions into established Marxism, this very rebellion should be used to rethink the role and function of women's oppression in the reproduction of capitalist society. Both Marx's early hopes concerning labor and his sharp analysis of its fate as wage labor (i.e., the main source of profit and hence of capitalist progress) are of real value now in this time of modern capitalism. I do not think that the situation of women would be improved by smuggling domestic labor in under the laws of wage labor and thereby attributing to Marx's analysis the problematic of unpaid female labor in the home. Rather, our critique should proceed the other way around, beginning with an understanding of housework and its role in the different stages of capitalism, which will uncover another problematic in Marx.

#### 4. *Family Work/Housework and Domestic Labor*

While the feminist argument with Marx took issue with his analysis of wage labor, no connection was made to Marx's or Engels's position on housework (a critical deficit that I hope to remedy here). Marx and Engels conceptualized housework primarily as wage labor performed in the home, treating as "family work" what in the twentieth century has generally been understood as housework. (In order to account for this difference, we need to formulate it as a "double concept": family work/housework.) It is nonsensical in the context of such work to limit the discussion — and the critique — to Marx when the ongoing reception of Engels's ideas within feminism makes it obvious

that the latter should be addressed as well.

In his preface to the first edition of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels sketches what he considers the "production and reproduction of immediate life": "On the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species." In using "production" in both cases, Engels provided a starting point for a theory of women's oppression, the elaboration of which he blocked, however, by formulating the two forms of production as *on the one hand [...] labor, on the other [...] the family*. Dividing the labor of producing food, clothing, shelter, and so on, from the family rendered the latter, for Engels and thus for any theory of women's oppression he might have developed, exclusively a matter of biological processes and their incorporation into the law and the state; family labor was not a consideration. Consequently, he examines the organization of procreation, but not how the work performed within the family relates to the totality of labor and to the reproduction of society. (He therefore, very close to the autonomous women's movement thinks women's subjection as sexual exploitation and violence.)

Elsewhere, Engels makes his awareness that labor is also performed within the family perfectly clear. In *Anti-Dühring*, he takes a historical perspective: "The entire development of human society beyond the stage of animal savagery dates from the day when the labor of the family creates more products than were necessary for its maintenance, from the day where a part of the labor, no longer used in the production of bare means of subsistence could be diverted to production of means of production." Engels was not interested in the consequences of this diversion for the remaining part, which he calls "production of bare means of subsistence," but only in whatever social effects might come of the surplus produced by labor over the cost of labor's maintenance, which he considered the basis of all "continued social, political and intellectual progress" (ibid.).

Marx is a different story. In the first volume of *Capital* he recognizes family work, if only in passing, and describes the organization of work typical of manufactory;

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performed in small, family-operated workshops, this "family work" is still distinguished from agriculture today. It involves the transformation of the "life time" of all family members, even children, into "work time." In connection with the achievement of factory legislation, Marx wrote about the "regulating (of) so-called 'domestic labour' [...] as a direct attack on the *patria potestas*, or, in modern terms, parental authority," a step "which the tender-hearted English Parliament long affected to shrink from taking": "The power of facts, however, at last compelled it to acknowledge that large-scale industry, in overturning the economic foundation of the old family system, and the family labour corresponding to it had also dissolved the old family relationships" (*C1* 620). Marx also speaks here of the "rights of the children," his target being the decomposition of the family through commodity production and, with it, the collision of two different modes of production and ways of life — the logic of the market, which presupposes the free commodity owner, and family work, with the relative disenfranchisement of women and children: "Previously the worker sold his own labour-power, which he disposed of as a free agent, formally speaking. Now he sells wife and child. He has become a slave-dealer"; and, in a footnote to the same page, he observes that, "in relation to this traffic in children, working-class parents have assumed characteristics that are truly revolting and thoroughly like slave-dealing" (*ibid.*, 519 and n. 122). Marx quotes a number of factory reports specifically on children, all of which show how "the spheres of handicrafts and domestic industry become, in what is relatively an amazingly short time, dens of misery." Then we come to his well-known perspective sentence: "However terrible and disgusting the dissolution of the old family ties within the capitalist system may appear, large-scale industry, by assigning an important part in socially organized processes of production, outside the sphere of the domestic economy, to women, young persons and children of both sexes, does nevertheless create a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes" (*ibid.*, 620).

Marx's gaze here is focused ahead to the societal organization of production and the necessary elimination of old, interfering forms. He takes absolutely no account of labor performed within the family, aside from the production of commodities, nor of how such labor of caring for humankind and nature contributes to the societalization process. He conceptualizes wage labor within the household as "household trade," and in this context he also speaks of "domestic industry," meaning an "external department of the factory, the manufacturing workshop, or the warehouse" (*ibid.*, 591; cf. 533, where he

shows some interest in housework as a "hybrid form" that is not directly subordinated to capital, but is susceptible to pressure from "usurers" or "merchants"). Finally, references to family work as separate from and in conflict with wage labor outside the home can be found in two footnotes. Writing of a report on the cotton crisis during the American Civil War, Marx says:

He [Dr. Edward Smith, F.H.] reported that from a hygienic point of view, and apart from the banishment of the operatives from the factory atmosphere, the crisis had several advantages. The women now had sufficient leisure to give their infants the breast, instead of poisoning them with "Godfrey's Cordial" (an opiate). They also had the time to learn to cook. Unfortunately, the acquisition of this art occurred at a time when they had nothing to cook. But from this we see how capital, for the purposes of its self-valorization, has usurped the family labour necessary for consumption. (Ibid., 517 n. 38)

The conceptual proposition "family labour necessary for consumption" makes it possible to understand *family labor* as distinct from *wage labor*, yet Marx does not elaborate on this or on the "leisure" necessary for breastfeeding babies who would otherwise be "poisoned" instead of nourished. In other words, the question of what qualities of life are destroyed through the time-saving measures that rule in capitalist economy is not pursued. Marx treats the issue of breastfeeding only in terms of wages or profitability: "Since certain family functions, such as nursing and suckling children, cannot be entirely suppressed, the mothers who have been confiscated by capital must try substitutes of some sort. Domestic work, such as sewing and mending, must be replaced by the purchase of ready-made articles. Hence the diminished expenditure of labour in the house is accompanied by an increased expenditure of money outside" (ibid., 518 n. 39). What interests Marx here is that since women's inclusion in the capitalist production process brings no additional revenue into the family, it is not really worth the cost. Nevertheless, the repeated mention of "substitutes" opens up a space for further analysis.

In Marx's analysis of the division of labor, we can discern the beginnings of a theory of family work:

"For an example of labour in common, i.e. directly associated labour, we do not need to go back to the spontaneously developed form, which we find at the

threshold of the history of all civilized peoples. We have one nearer to hand in the patriarchal rural industry of a peasant family which produces corn, cattle, yarn, linen and clothing for its own use. These things confront the family as so many products of its collective labour, but they do not confront each other as commodities. The different kinds of labour which create these products — such as tilling the fields, tending the cattle, spinning, weaving and making clothes — are already in their natural form social functions; for they are functions of the family which, just as much as a society based on commodity production, possesses its own spontaneously developed division of labour. The distribution of labour within the family and the labour-time expended by the individual members of the family are regulated by differences of sex and age as well as by seasonal variations in the natural conditions of labour. The fact that the expenditure of the individual labour-powers is measured by duration appears here, by its very nature, as a social characteristic of labour itself, because the individual labour-powers, by their very nature, act only as instruments of the joint labour-power of the family." (Ibid., 171)

It is astonishing that Marx made no further examination of this finding that the various products were not measured and estimated as more or less valuable according to the time spent on them, even though it certainly had consequences not only for the sexual division of labor, but also for the capitalist model of civilization. After all, the calculation of time spent also makes value a curse for some products, and gives rise to the need to ^protect^^ products from value. In the end, the only things that can withstand the social test of capitalism are those that eat up as little time as possible, making this a model of both progress and pauperization. At the same time, we get a hint of the still existent yearning to validate the family and to guarantee its continued existence, for it is the one place where production is not calculated solely in terms of labor costs.

Nowhere in Marx is there any analysis of the problem arising from the subordination of all those activities not subject to the wage structure under the logic of cost/benefit calculations — a problem in terms of both human needs and the development of humankind itself (i.e., of that which is regarded and acknowledged as socially meaningful). In his enthusiasm for comprehensive economizing, Marx basically subordinates all work and its valuation to the rationalization that he considers necessary for the further satisfaction of "life claims": "The more the productivity of labour increases, the more the working day can be shortened, the more the intensity of labour

can increase. From the point of view of society the productivity of labour also grows when economies are made in its use. This implies not only economizing on the means of production, but also avoiding all useless labour" (ibid., 667; For another, almost identical expression of this view, see Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, 36). This statement conflicts with the belief (expressed in his "Critique of the Gotha Programme") that in some future society time will no longer be geared to wealth.

The gender-specificity of the division of labor emerges only at the margins of Marx's analysis of work under capitalism. He describes it as "naturally springing up" and, "based on a purely physiological foundation," as developing through exchange into two, mutually dependent branches, but he does not pursue the configuration of these separate spheres that proved so crucial to the capitalist model of civilization. It seems equally odd that Marx and Engels failed to work out their dominative notion of the gender-specific division of labor articulated in *The German Ideology*: "This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first form of property, but even at this stage it corresponds perfectly to the definition of modern economists, who call it the power of disposing of the labour-power of others" (GI 46). For it was on this basis that a social formation developed in which only those things that proved more or less profitable were produced and that any work which could not be accommodated to this logic of time — and thus could not be rationalized, automatized, or accelerated — such as cherishing and nurturing nature or humankind, came to be neglected or left to women's (unpaid) provision. Today, we can proceed on the assumption that the crisis associated with both the unrestrained (and now uncontrollable) development of the forces of production and the ruinous exhaustion of nature is due to the logic of profit, which rests on women's oppression. The critique on Marx is, that the onesided analysis of waged labour instead of the correlation of socially necessary labour and its hierarchy results in an insufficient analysis of the reproduction of capitalist societies and the forces which support it. Here feminists have a lot to contribute and rearrange.

There was no further analysis of the relationship between family labor and wage labor by Marxists. (The study of "women's work" within the family was taken up instead by ethnologists such as Claude Meillassoux<sup>#</sup>) Rosa Luxemburg pretty much followed Marx's lead on this issue, seeing the family as something out of which proletarian women are "seized,": "It was capitalism which seized women out of the family and

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threw them under the yoke of social production, on other peoples land, in workshops, construction sites, offices, factories and warehouses." (See the small text "Die Proletarierin", Werke 3). And Lenin was interested in the family only as a site of stupidity from which women had to be removed. (Werke, 30, 401). - It was not until the late 1970s that Women's Studies emerged and began to take up the analysis of family work in the general context of social relations. This was the period during which Maria Mies, Veronica Bennholdt-Thommsen, and Claudia von Werlhoff (see note 6), among others, suggested that a practical generalization of subsistence work could provide a solution to the global problem arising from the production of commodities and extending to the exploitation of the Third World.

From today's standpoint, the development of humankind in relation to those products and activities that could pass the market test — and on which it therefore seemed worthwhile to spend time — led to the corresponding situation whereby those products and activities requiring extensive amounts of time without yielding anything sufficiently grand fell by the wayside. Most agricultural and nature-conservational activities, not to mention the rearing of children, were deemed incompatible with the logic of continually reduced expenditures of time. Although many such products may be indispensable for even the short-term survival of humankind, their development has also widened the gap between those members of the species who can pass the market test and those "partial people" who live at a level considerably lower than is now typical of the industrialized world. Here we find the Third World countries, with their continued immiseration becoming even worse in the wake of neoliberal globalization. The First World, on the other hand, is experiencing different and apparently more complex developments, while the women in these countries are still being kept economically dependent on the same breadwinner discussed by Marx and Engels more than a century ago, though he himself ceases to exist. Most women, if employed, fill low-paying "female" jobs below the poverty-line and perform time-consuming tasks that would otherwise simply remain undone.

In this respect, humankind has not progressed; on the contrary, as the forces of production have developed with industrialization, creating ever-new human needs in the capitalist West, a monstrous brutalization of humankind has occurred. Crime, drug addiction and alcoholism, and child abuse (including the prostitution of children) are just the visible signs of a model of civilization in which human development has been utterly subordinated to rationalization and market forces, to the needs devised and the

products generated to satisfy them under the rule of profit. The material progress realized by enhanced forces of production, far from freeing people to take up their development as human beings, has rather made such human development a mere by-product of industrial development and of the work done by women. To this extent, the claim that human liberation can be measured by the degree of liberation women achieve is completely realistic today. For women's liberation affects human interaction at every level, as well as human needs related to sensuality, to nature, to the work of hands and heads, and to women themselves as human beings.

### *Conclusion*

Marx within feminism - the text wanted two things: to elaborate where Marx could be used and was already criticized within feminism, where we could inherit from him where he should be repudiated, where to be improved. His methodological and theoretical break with metaphysics is for sure a fundament without which feminist research is hardly conceivable. We speak it as "starting from experience" or from "everyday life", Marx named it to start with "the language of real life". Therefore his theses against Feuerbach belong to the basic texts of every serious feminism. Everybody who deals with the relationship of feminism and marxism has to discuss the domestic labour debate and the critique of the theory of surplusvalue. Ironically this critique has led to a withdrawal of feminism from a critique of capitalism. A new reading of Marx' ideas on labour can show instead that it is more than useful in all dimensions for feminist thinking and never gets caught in the trap to subject all activities under the wageform which is in fact the case with the demand to pay for housework. Here a lot is to be gained for a contemporary feminism.

This is different when we look instead at Marx' and Engels' paragraphs on domestic labour/familywork, which have not been discussed within feminism. Here we can watch Marx as a patriarch, always forgetting the qualitative side of housework, the real activity, the language of real life, and instead quickly switch to the fate of labour, which is done as wage labour. This has consequences for the critique of political economy, for the analysis of capitalism. Because here Marx does not understand that it is one of the crucial elements of capitalism to subject the production of life the work with the living as an interferent factor (Störfaktor) for the production of profit, to marginalize it, to destroy it. A solid critique of the capitalist mode of production needs the analysis of the interrelation of these two modes of production, that of the means of production and

that of life itself - and only here the feminist questions are both selfevident and fundamental.

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