

Session III.

Rhythms of Time and Work: Commoning Care

Themes:

- The significance of culturally constructed notions of time in relation to narratives of acceleration
- Clock-based work
- Task-based time
- Labour, home and care
- Commoning care work: community and post-developmental perspectives

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*Workin' 9 to 5,
What a way to make a livin'
Barely gettin' by
It's all takin' and no givin'
They just use your mind
And they never give you credit
It's enough to drive you crazy
If you let it
- Dolly Parton*

A Introduction

The economic framework shapes our lives and livelihoods, and vice versa. In this session, we will look at how notions of time influence work patterns. We will look at the close affinity between linear notions of time and work patterns shaped by the industrial revolution, and between tasks and cyclical notions of time with an affinity to indigenous ways of life. We will then delve into explorations of care economies from a feminist perspective and highlight the commons and the role of communities as a possible point of convergence. From this perspective, we can begin to co-produce radically different degrowth paradigms that centre communal care.

A.1 Clock-time and Work

While the majority of folk in Scotland and across the UK no longer strictly work 9 to 5 as in Dolly Parton's lyrics, the demands made on workers' time still largely conform to a strictly measured number of hours. The popular saying "time is money" indicates how closely time is associated with the economy in the cultural psyche. Mechanised, optimised time effectively works as a growth enabler.

How do we make sense of the relationship between time, work and the economy? The linear structure of time as measured by the clock was a necessary feature of the industrial revolution, to enable the centralised management of factories and workforces. The logic of capitalist production created and enforced a division between the domains of work and social or 'home' life. Tim Ingold argued in his 1995 article "Work, Time and Industry" that "clock time is as alien to us as it is to the people of pre-industrial societies: the only difference is that we have to deal with it" (p.5).

Waged labour, organised by clock time, is homogenous and quantitative: "effected by the logic of capitalist relations, the sociality of work is dissolved" (Ingold 1995, p.12). This does not mean that there are no social relations between colleagues at the workplace. Rather, the social structures that comprise communities and family units are denied "within the straitjacket of a 'Western' or commodity-based institutional and ideological framework that seeks at every turn to deny the reality of situated social experience" (Ingold 1995:27). Ultimately, Ingold argues, "we are human beings whose lives are caught up in the painful process of negotiation between ... the dwelling and commodity perspectives. In this process lies the temporal dynamic of industrial society" (1995: p. 27).

However, upholding the framework of time-measured waged labour is the substantial un(der)valued body of work performed in the domestic sphere, largely

by women (→ **see Overview Reading on Degrowth and Feminism: B1, p. 9**). Ingold describes how the rhythms of the householder, a role still predominantly performed by women, are not wholly attuned to the clock and hence has not fully moved out of pre-industrial society's conventions.

“The domain of householding, although by no means confined within the four walls of the house or dwelling, was until quite recently (though less so today) centred upon the figure of the ‘housewife’ who certainly used to enjoy no division between work and leisure. For her, work was indeed life, and consisted in a multitude of tasks of child-rearing and domestic maintenance. Moreover, unlike the industrial worker, the housewife remained formally in command of her own working capacity: although her work was necessary and unavoidable, often punishing in its demands of energy and endurance, it was *not* done under external imposition.” (Ingold 1995, p.17)

Overlapping with the householding domain, care work is another area of work that is mostly performed by women, highly invisible, often unpaid with little control over the timing and over the amount of work that is being performed (Akbolut 2017) → **see Overview Reading on Carework as Commons: B2, p. 12**. In its most straightforward sense, care work is defined as “labor performed to fulfill the needs of those who cannot do so themselves, such as food provision, cleaning, health, etc” (Akbolut 2017). However, more broadly, care work is best understood as “*paid and unpaid labour that ensures social reproduction in general*” (Akbolut 2017), whereby ‘social reproduction’ includes the intergenerational continuity of existing inequalities, including patriarchal relations.

An artificial division between the domains of waged labour and householding/care work and leisure is self-perpetuating. We labour for money in order to be able to afford basic needs such as housing, and we are incentivised to labour more by the promise of more exciting leisure pursuits. High rent, land and house prices force people into seeking waged employment, while leaving less room for activities that serve to secure subsistence in other ways. Meanwhile, householding and care work remains unpaid or underpaid, not only perpetuating the gender pay gap but also forming a backdrop of overwhelm which became especially evident during the lockdown phases of the covid-19 pandemic.

What are the lessons for degrowth or postgrowth? In a nutshell, Mair et al. suggest that we need to work more but differently, producing less in the process:

“The key to creating a post-growth utopia lies in addressing the issue of labour productivity growth. Labour productivity growth is implicated in the

violation of biophysical limits, the degradation of work, the generation of inequality, and the devaluing of reproductive work. Tackling labour productivity growth enables us to transition to a world of less environmental damage, and stronger social bonds.” (Mair et al. 2020) → **see In-depth Reading on work in a postgrowth society: C1, p.15**

A.2 Task-orientation and Time

Before and in parallel to the establishment of clock-time, the perception of time was centred on tasks. Ingold argues that “task-orientation remains central to the experience of work in industrial society, even though the reality of that experience is systematically denied by the ‘Western’ discourse of freedom and necessity” (1995: p.5). Tasks are inherently skills-driven, objective-focused and embedded in social relations.

“Machines don’t perform tasks, but people do. Thus with a task-orientation the human subject, equipped with a competence acquired through practicing alongside the more experienced hands, is situated right here at the centre of productive activity. Second, tasks are defined primarily in terms of their objectives, without necessarily entailing any explicit codification of the rules and procedures to be followed in realizing them. And these objectives, far from being independently prescribed in the form of exercises in problem-solving (as in the entirely artificial tasks of ‘testing’ in the school or psychological laboratory), themselves arise through the agent’s involvement within the current of social life. Third, the particular kinds of tasks that a person performs are an index of his or her personal and social identity: the tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks *makes* you the person you are. And, finally, tasks are never accomplished in isolation, but always within a setting that is in itself constituted by the co-presence of others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one’s own.” (Ingold 1995: p.8-9)

Conceiving of work as task-based rather than driven by clock time softens or dissolves the division between external labour, the home and care work. It also allows for a more organic relationship to time.



Indigenous conceptions of time tend to be cyclical rather than linear. This is reflected, for example, in the Life Plan community planning model (film: Life Mosaic) pioneered by the Misak, an indigenous Colombian people, and taken up by other indigenous

communities across Latin America. Jeremias Tunubalá Ullune and Liliana Pechene Muelas, two Misak leaders, travelled to different community groups in Scotland in 2018 to teach this model. Their cyclical notion of time manifests itself in the practice of cultural memory at the heart of all community planning, and in how stages of life are understood. Liliana, sharing their epistemology in a residential on the Isle of Bute in 2018, elaborated on this non-linear, cyclical concept of time. In this way of being in the world, the community's older people- their Elders- are associated with the future, as their practices, memories, heritage and traditions are considered to be crucial to the future flourishing of their territory and community. Conversely, children are conceptually associated with the past, as they represent the continuation and regeneration of the ancestral wisdom that they are born into. This is in striking contrast to cultural concepts in which 'senior citizens' can be perceived as burdens that have outlived their productive working lives, or children seen as necessary workers for future economic growth.

Indigenous Scottish practices of working the land also follow cyclic rhythms. The film 'Land Makar' directed by Margaret Tait about crofter Mary Graham Sinclair portrays the life on a croft on the edge of a small loch where swans and other birds nest in the grass. It was filmed over a number of seasons and portrays sequences of work in the traditional crofting style, mostly done by one woman's labour. Task-orientation and a cyclical perception of time allows for a better integration of different areas of work in home and community life.

A.3 Commoning Care: Community-centred Perspectives

Weaving together the different threads of rhythms of time and work, a degrowth economy can formulate and restore a healthier relationship to care, community and the commons.

Challenging and dismantling the gendered aspects of care work necessitates a shift towards acknowledging care work as a practice of mutuality, sharing, reciprocity and the commons: "the most fundamental basis of social reproduction to which we all contribute and to which we all owe our existence." (Akbulut 2017)

The 'commons' are loosely defined as that which has been previously a shared resource, often enclosed and removed from such shared use by capitalist economic forces (Berge and Van Laerhoven 2011).

What are the Commons?

The term 'commons' itself has had "various histories, from property to shared spaces to notions of democratic ideals. It refers to the house of British Parliament representing nontitled citizens, and agricultural fields in England and Europe prior to their enclosure. In the United States, commons refers to public spaces such as the New England town square, campus dining halls, and concepts of the "common" good. In almost all uses, the term has been contested." (Hess and Ostrom 2003: p.115) For their long-term longevity and proper use, commons must be collectively and skilfully managed or governed.

"The commons" is not a precisely defined concept, and maybe less so today than it was when Hardin (1968) popularized the metaphor of the "Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin's (1968) explanation for the need to enclose the commons confounded the resource with its governance regime (Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975). By 1990, the concept of a common pool resource (Ostrom and Ostrom 1977) had emerged as a key to understand under what conditions it can be expected that resource governance regimes may result in more sustainable forms of resource use (Ostrom 1990). The core problem of commons regimes is of course related to the governance of individual rational action in a context where outcomes are dependent on the actions of all other resource users. This is in essence "the" problem of collective action." (Berge and Van Laerhoven 2011)

Among degrowth thinkers and practitioners from the global south, commoning is part of a post-development discourse. This must be contextualised in the competition for ownership of knowledge that was previously in the public domain, which Hess and Ostrom (2003) called an 'intellectual land grab'.

"Multiple forces are vying for capture and restriction of traditionally available knowledge: corporations versus indigenous peoples, such as Monsanto owning the patent on the genetic structure of the neem; federal and state governments versus citizens regarding balancing encryption and digital surveillance with individual privacy; universities versus professors as to whether institutions or individuals will own intellectual property; and publishers versus libraries in the ephemeralization of library collections through licensing, bundling, and withdrawal of information." (Hess and Ostrom 2003: p.112)

The production of traditional ecological knowledge has an affinity with the commons, as it is transmitted between generations. Traditional ecological knowledge arises from and reinforces an "ethic of reciprocal respect and obligations between humans and the nonhuman world" (Wall Kimmerer 2002).

The wealth of this information is under threat from those wishing to patent it, while there remains a vast body of traditional knowledge we are only beginning to learn from.

“The scope of traditional ecological knowledge includes detailed empirical knowledge of population biology, resource assessment and monitoring, successional dynamics, patterns of fluctuation in climate and resources, species interactions, ethnotaxonomy, sustainable harvesting, and adaptive management and manipulation of disturbance regimes (Berkes 1999). Case histories of the utility of TEK in conservation biology span a range of biomes from the tundra to the tropical rainforest.” (Wall Kimmerer 2002)

Radical human ecology aims to follow the principles of traditional ecological knowledge in the sense that “when Human Ecology becomes radical it invites us elementally to integrate our perception of Earth, as the physical exteriority of reality, with Spirit, as its metaphysical inferiority. As such, our Human Ecology must be very grounded in the scientific physical basis of reality, but equally grounded in the metaphysics - the “behind,” “beyond” or “transformed-from-within” physics of our deep humanity” (McIntosh 2012).

Feminist thinkers have argued that there can be no commons without community, which tallies with the folk wisdom that it takes a village to raise a child. If “commoning” necessitates the collective management of resources for the common good, we need to learn, in Federici’s words, to produce ourselves as a common subject:

“This is how we must understand the slogan “no commons without community.” But “community” not intended as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests separating them from others, as with community formed on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Community as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals” (Federici 2010) → **see In-depth Reading on Feminism and the Commons: C2, p.34**

In relation to care work, Akbulut understands commons as “non-commodified modes of social reproduction (2017) that include relationships, networks, practices and struggles from radical childcare co-operatives to neighbourhood and community-based care provision. They are accessible to all and not mediated by the state or the market. The mutual aid groups during the covid-19 pandemic are one such example.

In practice, “commoning care would mean organizing carework in a non-patriarchal, egalitarian and democratic way. In this sense, the commoning

perspective does not only locate care within collective-cooperative production and use, but highlights the fundamental gender dimension implicated especially in carework” (Akbulut 2017).

Commoning care can involve learning from indigenous visionaries and communities and others who hold a set of common values that includes “collective working and solidarity, respect for diversity and pluralism, the dignity of labour, empathy and respect for the rest of nature, simplicity, equity and justice, rights with responsibilities, self-reliance, and others.” (Kothari 2016).

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A.5 Additional Resources

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B Overview Readings

6 pages

B.1 Degrowth and Feminism¹ by Corinna Dengler and Birte Strunk

How a feminist degrowth approach can alleviate ecological and gender injustices

Is it possible to reconcile sustainable development, a fair distribution of both paid and unpaid work among genders, and an economic strategy based on growth? In our article “The Monetized Economy versus Care and the Environment? Degrowth Perspectives on Reconciling an Antagonism”, a contribution to the 2018 Feminist Economics Special Issue on “Sustainability, Ecology, and Care”, we argue that the growth paradigm perpetuates existing gender and environmental injustices. We offer ‘degrowth’ as a potential candidate for a Feminist Ecological Economics perspective that could pave the way towards a ‘caring economy’. However, in order to live up to this potential, we argue, degrowth must necessarily become more feminist.

The Conceptual Framework

Our argument builds upon an adapted version of the triangle-shaped ICE model developed by Jochimsen and Knobloch in 1997.

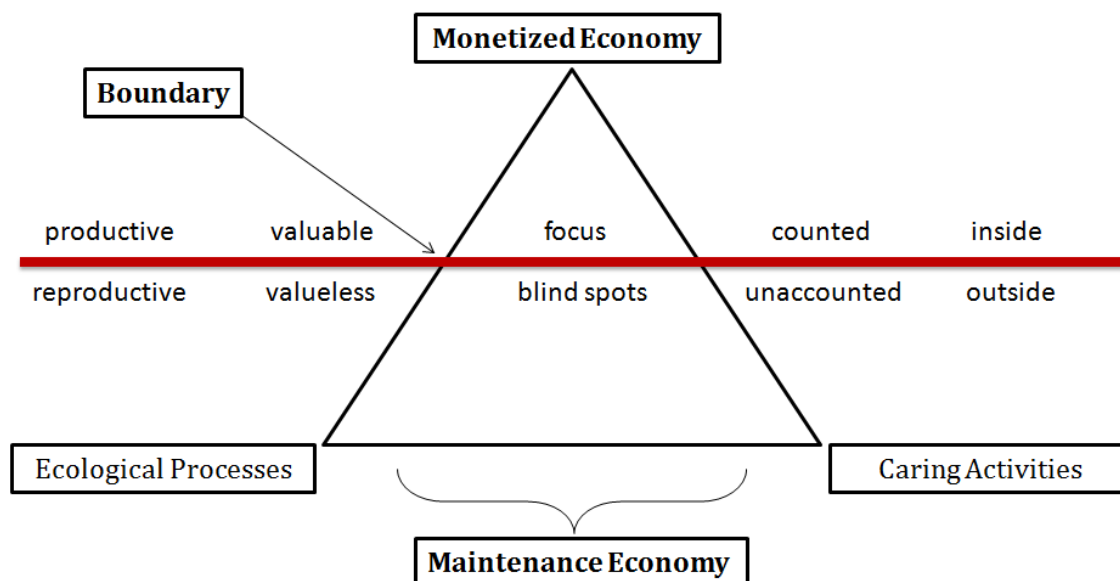


Figure 1: [Adaption of the ICE Model by Maren Joachimsen and Ulrike Knobloch]

¹ What follows is a copy of an article appeared on Degrowth.info, and it can be retrieved from here: <https://www.degrowth.info/en/2017/11/degrowth-and-feminism/>

The model divides the economy into the ‘maintenance economy’, consisting of caring activities and ecological processes, and the formal ‘monetized economy’. While the former is necessary for the latter to exist, the monetized economy tends to ignore or devalue the maintenance economy. We argue alongside other feminist scholars that the boundary between those two spheres needs to be overcome in order to arrive at a ‘caring economy’, as envisioned by both degrowth and feminist scholars, and thus at environmental and gender justice.

The Ecological Critique: Sustainability in a Growth Paradigm?

We proceed by analyzing how the growth paradigm undermines and devalues ecological processes (ecological critique) and caring activities (feminist critique). The ecological critique we provide in the article very much resembles the growth critique in the degrowth discourse. We describe how the concept of sustainable development is frequently regarded as a means to address environmental injustices in a growth paradigm. A ‘Green Economy’ is meant to reconcile the social, the ecological and the economic sphere and is proposed as a panacea for environmental challenges. However, empirical evidence shows that until today decoupling production from negative environmental consequences happens only in relative (per unit) but not in absolute terms.¹ We illustrate how an unchallenged acceptance of economic growth as the yardstick for economic development contributes to a perpetuation of the boundary between the monetized and the maintaining.

The Feminist Critique: Gender Equality in a Growth Paradigm?

The other side of the coin, the feminist critique, illustrates how in a growth paradigm, the boundary between visible wage labor and invisible unpaid labor remains intact. Trying to overcome the boundary by simply including women into the uncontested category of work is not a solution to the problem, as it often leads to a double burden for women, who are faced with both paid and unpaid work responsibilities. If instead care work is outsourced to paid care providers, the boundary might no longer be strictly dividing (white, middle-class) women and men, but nonetheless persists between the vulnerable and the profiting, and thus the boundary itself remains unchallenged. Hence, a narrative change that encourages a fair division of work in paid and unpaid sectors is necessary. We illustrate that this narrative change is difficult to achieve within a growth paradigm, where the focus on GDP increase only captures what is quantifiable. This is the first argumentative step towards our claim that a degrowth paradigm, which proposes different societal norms beyond quantifiable measures, carries the potential of alleviating gender injustices if taking feminist concerns seriously.

Degrowth: A Way Forward?

We thus use parallel critiques of feminist and ecological economists to show that both lines of thought recognize the difficulty of overcoming the boundary between the monetized and the maintaining in a growth paradigm. We argue that degrowth offers ground for structurally re-evaluating ecological processes and caring activities by challenging core tenets of the monetized economy, primarily the reliance on GDP growth as an indicator for economic and societal well-being. But how can degrowth concretely inform policy-making? We demonstrate this with the case of work-sharing, a degrowth proposal for reducing working hours. Using a feminist-ecological lens to analyze different work-

sharing proposals, we argue that work-time reduction schemes should focus on the working day (i.e. reducing working hours per day) rather than on the working week (i.e. working less days a week). While ecological benefits would be present in both, the feminist call for dividing paid and unpaid work more equally among the genders is better supported by a work-sharing proposal focused on the day, due to the daily nature of caring activities. Now, we want to be clear: A work-sharing proposal alone will bring about neither gender equality (especially if we fall into the old trap to reproduce the often criticized ‘work = wage work’ formula!) nor can it alone lead the way towards a degrowth society. However, as part of a broader transformation it can constitute a step into the right direction and we argue that it is a practical example to demonstrate how feminist concerns in the degrowth discourse have been, so far, ‘add-ons’ rather than integral parts.

A feminist degrowth approach

Research on how to make degrowth more feminist is still rare, however, over the last two years the topic has received increasing attention. The formation of the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA) at the 2016 Degrowth Conference in Budapest has opened up the floor for a wider debate. With our article, we hope to advance this debate in the degrowth community one step further and, at the same time, to introduce the idea of degrowth in the Feminist Economics community. We see much potential for cross-fertilization between the two discourses and hope that this link will be further elaborated upon in future research on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

This article is part of a small series around the JoinInConference “Caring for Change” from 17.-19. November 2017 in Leipzig (Germany).

B.2 Carework as Commons: Towards a Feminist Degrowth Agenda²

Bengi Akbulut

The debates around post-growth transitions to just socio-ecological futures – while undoubtedly variegated – all emphasize that such a transition will involve a fundamental change in the way we organize economic relations and processes. At a first glance, this implies both a nominal and a structural change with corresponding shifts in production, labor and consumption patterns. Whereas nominal change is understood as a reduction in the volume of material and energy throughput, structural change is a shift in the relative importance of economic sectors. At the same time, it also implies reorienting economic relations and processes towards other objectives than growth with different motivations.

Care and carework have gained heightened attention within this context: emphasis is put on care labor and care-centering of communities, understood not only as caring between humans, but also between humans and the non-human environment. In the words of Kallis, Demaria and D’Alisa, “the degrowth imaginary centres around the reproductive economy of care”^[1] A similar emphasis on care and broader reproductive activities is found within other central debates of the degrowth proposal, such as those on conviviality, worksharing, commons, etc.

Recognition is not enough

Such focus on care and carework is crucial, especially in broadening the existing notions of labor and production and recognizing that reproductive activities are essential forms of work that contribute to our well-being. Yet recognition, though welcome, is not enough. What is largely missing from the celebration of care as the cornerstone of the post-growth transition is how carework is to be organized in a socio-ecologically just future. This is crucial, since re-centering a society around care does not imply gender justice. Quite the contrary, carework has historically been one of the most exploitative, flexible and invisible forms of labor performed by women.

Especially at a time when the need for building alliances between degrowth and feminism is being stressed, problematizing care from a feminist perspective is imperative for the degrowth proposal. Feminist economists, among others, have for long emphasized that gender implies different constraints and opportunities in the face of socio-economic change. And a post-growth transition, envisaged to reorient both the motivation and the organization of economic processes, is one such change.

What I propose here is to approach carework from the perspective of commoning as a possible starting point for a feminist agenda for degrowth.

What is Carework?

The most straightforward (yet admittedly narrow) definition of carework is labor performed to fulfill the needs of those who cannot do so themselves, such as food provision, cleaning, health, etc. Broader

² What follows is a copy of an article appeared on Degrowth.info, and it can be retrieved from here: <https://www.degrowth.info/en/2017/02/carework-as-commons-towards-a-feminist-degrowth-agenda/>

understandings of carework stress that such work is often performed in tandem with and complementary to other types of (unpaid) reproductive labor and cannot be considered separate from the broader sphere of social reproduction. That is to say, carework is better seen as the more comprehensive field of paid and unpaid labor that ensures social reproduction in general.

A long tradition of feminist activism and scholarship has problematized carework, in particular its gendered performance, its high invisibility and flexibility. Carework is often performed by women as unremunerated labor under patriarchal relations. Gender norms and gendered division of labor often make it difficult for women to bargain away carework responsibilities. Even when care services are provided via the state or the market they are highly feminized; and subsidized by the substantial amount of unpaid carework that continues to be performed by women within households. On the other hand, women rarely have control over the timing, amount and the conditions of the care labor they perform. That care is predominantly seen as a part of the reproductive rather than the productive domain and the fact that it is usually unremunerated serves to codify it as non-work and renders it invisible.

Carework as Commons

Yet the field of care is not only a realm of immense value and production, but it is arguably the largest and the most fundamental commons on which all of us depend. Carework is a basic form of labor that sustains social life and enables any kind of social system to function; it is a field that all of us draw upon to survive. All of us have relied and continue to rely on care provided through families, friends, and other types of social networks and relations. In return, all of us perform carework and contribute to the sustenance and well-being of others. Relations of mutuality, sharing, and reciprocity that sustain our daily lives and social interactions (as well as economic transactions) all involve an element of care. In that sense carework is a commons: it is the most fundamental basis of social reproduction to which we all contribute and to which we all owe our existence.

Carework, just like other types of commons, has historically served to support capital accumulation. Especially when it is performed as unpaid and flexible labor, carework serves to lower the monetary cost of labor's reproduction for capital: the cost of sustaining the laborer such as healthcare or eldercare are not shouldered by the capitalist, but rather shifted to the households. This is particularly so within the contemporary era where state-supported care services (e.g. healthcare, childcare, eldercare) are increasingly withdrawn. Seen in this way, carework commons resonate closely with ecological commons insofar as they provide unpaid goods and services that support capital accumulation.

However, what distinguishes carework most significantly from other types of commons are perhaps the egregious inequalities involved in its production (rather than its consumption). Many have discussed commons from a social justice perspective by focusing on who can access them and who can appropriate their benefits (e.g. enclosures). Yet who is involved in the production and reproduction of the commons, and what this implies in terms of social justice are questions that have received remarkably little attention. And this is arguably a more pressing issue for carework as a commons.

Commoning Care

Locating carework within the perspective of commoning offers a way to not only draw attention to the inequalities in its production, but also to complement the degrowth emphasis on care. This perspective is outlined, for example, in the works of Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, Massimo de Angelis and the broader Midnight Notes Collective on commons and commoning.[2]

These works emphasize an understanding of the commons not only as fixed entities between the market and state to include an amalgam of social relations and practices. This perspective conceptualizes commons as non-commodified modes of social reproduction, accessing resources and fulfilling social needs. As such, they include forms of relationships, networks, practices and struggles (in addition to shared forms natural and social wealth) that provide varying degrees of access to means of material and social reproduction – outside the mediation of the market.

This perspective also stresses the particular characteristics of the social practices constitutive of the commons: open to all who contribute to their reproduction; sustained and reproduced by collective and cooperative labor and regulated non-hierarchically. More specifically, then, commons are defined as spaces and processes of social reproduction that are non-mediated by the state or the market and ensure equitable access. Their reproduction and production take place under collective labor, they provide equal access to means of (re)production and they are marked by egalitarian forms of decision-making.

By organizing carework in a way that is not mediated by market or state, commoning care implies a range of practices that provide various degrees of autonomy from both. It involves performing care labor – whose benefits are to be received and shared by all – collectively and cooperatively. Perhaps most importantly, commoning care would mean organizing carework in a non-patriarchal, egalitarian and democratic way. In this sense, the commoning perspective does not only locate care within collective-cooperative production and use, but highlights the fundamental gender dimension implicated especially in carework.

Existing practices of commoning care can be found in radical childcare cooperatives, neighborhood care collectives, and community-based care provision. One notable example within this context is the Regeneración Childcare Collective in New York City. Regeneración aims to link household laborers, radical parents and immigrant and queer families active in social struggles. It was originally founded to provide care services to low-income queer and minority parents so that they could participate in social struggles. Today, Regeneración collaborates with other independent childcare collectives and cooperatives to foster relations of collective self-management and mutual empowerment across care workers and radical parents, especially within the field of care.

Feminism Here and Now

In their piece on the commons, De Angelis and Harvie write “it is difficult today to conceive emancipation from capital – and achieving new solutions to the demand of buen vivir, social and ecological justice – without at the same time organising on the terrain of commons, the non-commodified systems of social production.”[3] This resonates closely with the centrality of both care and the commons within the degrowth debates. Yet, romanticizing care (and reproductive activities in general) can also serve to mask the gender injustices implicated within it. It is this junction of

feminism and degrowth that calls for more thinking and action; something commoning care can be part of.

On the other hand, perhaps the most important point illuminated by the experience of Regeneración is that commoning care can effectively support and strengthen struggles in other fields, including those for degrowth. In that sense, commoning care is not only a vision for a post-growth future, but a necessity to be organized here and now in order to realize potential paths towards that future.

C In-depth Readings

25 pages

C.1 A tale of two utopias: Work in a post-growth world³

Simon Mair, Angela Druckman and Tim Jackson

Abstract

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the literature on post-growth futures. Modern imaginings of the future are constrained by the assumptions of growth-based capitalism. To escape these assumptions we turn to utopian fiction. We explore depictions of work in Cokaygne, a utopian tradition dating back to the 12th century, and William Morris's 19th century *News from Nowhere*. Cokaygne is a land of excessive consumption without work, while in *News from Nowhere* work is the route to the good life. These competing notions provide inspiration for a post-growth vision of work. We argue that biophysical and social dynamics mean that in a post-growth economy we are likely to have to be less productive and work more. But, this can be a utopian vision. By breaking the link between work and consumption at the level of the individual, we can remove some of the coercion in work. This would free us to do jobs that contribute to the social good, rather than generate exchange value, and empower us to fight for good work. Finally, we draw on eco-feminist analyses of capitalism to argue that by challenging labour productivity growth we can also challenge wider forces of oppression.

Keywords: Utopia, Post-growth, Environmentalism, Environmental limits, Work, Employment, Futures, Post-work, Post-capitalism, Feminism

1. Introduction

To achieve sustainable societies we are likely to have to move beyond growth based economies. Historically, economic growth has been coupled with environmental impact. It is extremely unlikely that we will be able to decouple one from the other (Hickel and Kallis, 2019; Jackson and Victor,

³ What follows is a copy of an article published on the journal *Ecological Economics* under a Creative Commons license, and can be retrieved from here: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S092180091930415X>

2019). There are a number of dynamics that drive the growth-environment coupling. One key example is that the socio-economic structures that incentivise resource efficiency gains also incentivise using those gains to fuel further growth in production. Under such dynamics, efficiency gains ultimately drive up resource use (Jackson, 2017; Mair, 2019; Sakai et al., 2019). Addressing this and other drivers of growth will have major implications for how we live. In this paper we take the issue of work as a case in point.

1.1. Work beyond growth?

Currently, work is bound up with growth dynamics. Take, for example, the ‘productivity trap’ (Jackson and Victor, 2011). To reduce their costs, grow profits and break into new markets, firms attempt to increase labour productivity. The net result of labour productivity growth is that fewer people are needed to produce the same amount of goods. This means that without growth people are made unemployed. Under the political economy of growth-based capitalism, unemployment means a loss of social status and only limited access to the material goods of life. Consequently, the political economy of work in wealthy capitalist economies puts pressure on all of us to support growth.

A second example is the way that work is organised to support growth. When economists and politicians speak of growth they are usually discussing increases in ‘real’ GDP (Kallis, 2017). GDP is primarily designed as a way to measure and understand market activity (European Commission et al., 2008). Consequently when our economies are organised to drive growth, this results in the expansion of markets and market work – often at the expense of non-market forms of work (Dengler and Strunk, 2017). Feminists and ecological economists have for a long time argued that endless pursuit of market growth degrades other forms of work, notably ‘reproductive’ work. This is the work done by nature, and that done in the commons and in the household. This work is essential to the reproduction of society but is rarely rewarded financially. It is not coincidental that the forms of work that are degraded are those that came to be associated with women in the Middle Ages (Federici, 2014; Saunders and Dalziel, 2017).

Ecological economists have put forward two key ideas for how work might function in a post-growth or degrowth economy. 1) Reducing the number of hours worked and 2) reducing the amount of goods and services produced for each hour worked. In other words, we can reduce working hours (Hayden, 1999; Jackson and Victor, 2011; Victor, 2012; Dengler and Strunk, 2017; Zwickla et al., 2016). We can stop, reverse, or slowdown labour productivity growth (Jackson and Victor, 2011; Nørgård, 2013; Ferguson, 2016; Jackson, 2017). Or we can do both.

In this paper we bring a new perspective to these debates. We use an exploration of depictions of work in historical utopian fiction as the basis for a discussion of work in post-growth futures. We argue that the most fruitful focus for research, policy, and activism towards post-growth futures is to challenge the dynamic of labour productivity growth.

1.2. The value of utopian thought

We turn to utopian fiction because we believe that a central challenge of post-growth economics is the difficulty of finding appropriate models in today's economic structures, which are dependent on

growth. Utopian fiction is a valuable resource for critically rethinking socio-economic structures and drawing inspiration for new ecologically sound and socially just post-growth economic futures.

Utopian fiction in particular, and literary analysis more generally, has been underused by ecological economists. However, there are a few notable exceptions that point to the possibilities that utopian fiction opens up for ecological economics.

Kallis and March (2015) use the anarchist society described in Le Guin's (1974/1987) *The Dispossessed* to explore the political appeal and purpose of the degrowth concept. Other ecological economists have pointed to the utopian impulse of ecological economics (Martinez-Alier, 1992; Ingebrigtsen and Jakobsen, 2012). Recent contributions from Foster (2017) and Levitas (2017) engage with utopian fiction and pick up themes familiar to ecological economists. Foster uses William Morris's *News from Nowhere* to discuss possibilities for work in a sustainable future. Levitas argues for the potential of utopian fiction to help us envisage the radical social change required for a 'sustainable prosperity'. In this paper we aim to build on these works and show how utopian fiction can be a useful part of the ecological economics toolkit.

We aim to show that utopian fiction can be used to expand our collective economic imaginations. Fictional narratives have ethical impacts on readers, changing how they engage with the world (Gregory, 1998; Johns-Putra, 2016). Utopian fiction in particular provides a critical distance from today's problems, encouraging us to view how we live now in the light of how we might live tomorrow (Levitas, 2017). These qualities are essential for developing a forward-looking ecological economics.

We live under a form of 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009) – the collective belief that there is no way to organise social relations other than those we see under capitalism. Under such conditions the utopian act of imagining a future, with different social institutions, is itself a form of resistance and struggle (Davies, 2018). Yet it is one that is extremely hard to do – more often than not, future visions are either apocalyptic, or based on technological, rather than social, innovation (Slaughter, 2004). By virtue of being written at different points in time, historical utopian fiction has the advantage of distance from the apocalyptic and tech fuelled economic imaginaries that permeate our everyday experiences. In this way it enables us to achieve critical distance from today's economy. This is essential for constructing post-growth economic theory which must be radically different from the economics we live with day-to-day.

We treat historical utopian fiction as analogous to economic theory. Historian of economic thought Warren Samuels argues that economic models and utopian novels are similar in form. Both tell a "story not about actual economies but of an abstracted rational reconstruction" (Samuels, 2003, p. 204). And, like models, utopias are often explicitly informed by economic thinking. For example, utopian author Kim Stanley Robinson's recent work was informed by green and ecological economists including: Hazel Henderson, Herman Daly and E.F. Schumacher (Robinson, 2016). Here we seek to uncover these economic elements in the work of William Morris, and in the utopian tradition of Cokayne. Like studying the history of economic thought or interrogating an economic model, bringing the economic ideas embodied in historical utopian fiction into conversation with modern insights can be a useful way of developing new economic theory.

1.3. Aims and contribution

In this paper we ask what a positive future of work could look like in a post-growth society. To this end we focus on visions of work in two contrasting utopias. First, we explore a variety of interpretations of the depiction of work in the Cokaygnian tradition of folk utopias. Cokaygnian tales span the 12th and 21st centuries and are all set in a land of plenty where work is forbidden. We then explore the concept of work in *News from Nowhere*, a late 19th century English utopia written by the socialist and romantic William Morris. In contrast to Cokaygne, *News from Nowhere* makes work a central route to the good life. Finally, we bring the ideas of Cokaygne and *News from Nowhere* into conversation with insights from ecological and feminist economics. On this basis we sketch our own ideas on the role of work in a post-growth economy.

Our vision of a post-growth future is one in which we work more, but radically differently: we are less 'productive'. We argue that this is necessary because labour productivity growth is a dynamic that is symbiotic with growth and degradation of the environment. Consequently, a move to a post-growth economy must also be a move to a low labour productivity growth economy. However, this symbiosis also means that labour productivity growth is also implicated in over production, and the degradation of work. By removing coercive market forces we can improve working conditions and reduce levels of production by freeing people to work in socially useful ways. Drawing on eco-feminist analysis, we then show that labour productivity growth is implicated in patriarchal oppression. Therefore, challenging labour productivity growth will allow the post-growth movement to build a broad-based coalition of interests against growth based capitalism and towards greater equality and happier lives.

2. Cokaygne: utopia without work?

Cokaygne⁴ is the setting for a long tradition of folk utopias, a fantastical land of plenty where people feast on self-roasting geese and sleep all day. Cokaygne is well known in the utopian literature, but has received little attention in ecological economics or futures studies. Here we introduce readers to the tradition and a selection of its varying interpretations. The multiple interpretations of the Cokaygnian tradition demonstrate the richness of utopian writing on the economics of work.

The Cokaygnian tradition peaked in popularity in 12-16th century Europe (Lochrie, 2016). One of the earliest surviving Cokaygnian manuscripts is the French poem 'De Cocaingne', written as a performance piece in 1250. *De Cocaingne* (reprinted in Parsons, 2015) establishes numerous tropes that are characteristic of later Cokaygnes. These include linking idleness to monetary reward, and animals that cook themselves. Slightly later comes 'The Land of Cokaygne', a Middle English poem written in Ireland around 1300 (reprinted in Millett, 2003). 'The Land of Cokaygne' takes the imagery of *De Cocaingne* and sets it in the context of a monastery. An example of Cokaygne from later in this period (1567) is 'The Land of Cockaigne', a painting by the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Fig. 1).

⁴ We use an English term *Cokaygne* throughout this paper. In French it is *Cocaingne*, or *Cucagna*; in Spanish *Jauja*; German *Schlaraffenland*; and in Dutch *Luilekkerland* (Lochrie, 2016). There are variations on the spelling of these terms and other names outside of Europe.



Fig. 1. The Land of Cockaigne, Pieter Bruegel, 1567. Image Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a5/Pieter_Bruegel_d._%C3%84._037.jpg.

The Cokaygnian tradition survives in more modern cultures. Perhaps the most established modern Cokaygne is *The Big Rock Candy Mountains*⁵, a folk song describing a hobo's⁶ paradise, a land filled with cigarette trees and whisky lakes. The song was brought to prominence in 1928 by the singer Harry McClintock, but was written in 1905 based on earlier oral traditions (Raulerson, 2013).

The thread connecting all Cokaygnian tales is a land where the link between labour and production has disappeared. For example, in *De Cocaingne*, “the more you sleep the more you earn” (Parsons, 2015 lines 26–28). Alternatively, *The Big Rock Candy Mountains* does away with the means of production: “there are no short-handled shovels, no axes, spades or picks”. Presumably these were disposed of when the residents “hung the jerk/That invented work” (Raulerson, 2013 Verse 3 lines 6–7). But the lack of workers and means of production does not mean that Cokaygne is a place of material restraint.

Cokaygne is a land where everything is produced without labour and consumption is spectacular. In Medieval Cokaygnes it is common to find rivers, lakes and streams “Of oil and milk, honey and wine” (Millett, 2003 line 46). More modern Cokaygnes have “lemonade springs... And a gin lake too.” (Raulerson, 2013 verse 1 line 6 and verse 4 line 6). So it is unsurprising that we don't find dairy farmers or distillers. Likewise, in Cokaygne there are no cooks, but they aren't missed because the animals of Cokaygne prepare themselves to be eaten. *De Cocaingne* has “Fat geese, turning/All by themselves, and fully ready” (Parsons, 2015, lines 38–39) and Bruegel's *The Land of Cockaigne* features a roast pig walking around with a knife strapped to its side. Similarly, the preparation of

⁵ Harry McClintock's polite version can be heard at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqowmHgXVJQ> and is reprinted in [Raulerson \(2013\)](#).

⁶Here Hobo is the name for a North-American subculture defined by a transient nature and a commitment to work. See [Raulerson \(2011\)](#).

places to feast happens with no servants in sight. For example, in *De Cocaingne* (Parsons, 2015, lines 41–44),

“...at all times / In the streets and in the lanes / You find tables already laid / And spread over with white cloths”

In short, Cokaygne is a land where no-one ever appears to work but where everyone consumes extravagantly.

2.1. Between utopia and moral instruction

Cokaygne's extravagant consumption most likely started life as a satirical take on paradise myths. Manuel and Manuel (1979) and Kumar (1991) argue that the roots of Cokaygne are in satirical mockings of the Ancient Greek myth of the Golden Age. Medieval Cokaygnes mock the relative poverty of the Judaeo-Christian paradise. For example, *The Land of Cokaygne* (Millett, 2003, lines 5–8) opens with:

“Though Paradise is fair and bright, / Cokaygne is a finer sight.”

The poet then goes on to contrast the sparseness of heaven, with the luxury of Cokaygne (Millett, 2003, lines 9–17):

“Though paradisaic joys are sweet, / There's nothing there but fruit to eat; / No bench, no chamber, and no hall, / No alcoholic drink at all.”

The poet continues this comparison at some length, finally concluding that “Cokaygne offers better fare” than heaven.

Cokaygne's extravagance has also been used to satirise excessive consumption. For Lochrie (2016), Cokaygne started life as a utopia, but became increasingly moralised as the Middle Ages progressed. By the time of Bruegel's painting (Fig. 1), Lochrie argues that Cokaygne has ceased to be a utopia. Rather, Bruegel's lifeless figures warn us away from Cokaygne's life of excess. For Parsons (2015) this narrative is only partially correct. Cokaygne hasn't become a moral lesson, it has always been a moral lesson. Discussing *De Cocaingne* (written three centuries prior to Bruegel's painting), Parsons notes that two out of the three original manuscripts are found alongside poems that have moral intent. Based on this and what he terms its “grotesque imagery” (p. 173), Parsons concludes that Cokaygne “is in essence an exercise in *reductio ad absurdum*, taking the belief that happiness can be attained in the material world to its most ridiculous possible extreme in order to direct its reader towards more spiritual ends” (p. 180).

However, this view is far from settled – where Parsons sees grotesquery, others see a ‘carnival spirit’ (Kendrick, 2004). In this view, rather than being a warning to avoid a life of materialism and leisure, Cokaygne is seen as depicting a desirable life. This utopian reading sees Cokaygne's combination of fantasy and comedy as expressions of desire that overwhelm any moral intent. There is some contextual evidence to support this idea: one early copy of *De Cocaingne* is introduced as and included

alongside several French ‘fabliaux’, known for their obscene humour (Parsons, 2015; Lochrie, 2016). However, the utopian case for Cokaygne is more usually based on its imagery and content.

Most authors who see a utopia in Cokaygne do not argue against its satirical intent, but maintain that this is undermined by the use of rich imagery and appealing central concept. For example, Kumar (1991) argues that Cokaygne ends up looking like a drunken feast of the type enjoyed by medieval peasants. Manuel and Manuel (1979, p. 79) suggest that this comes about because the writers of Cokaygne are too close to their audience to “dismiss their vulgar aspirations with philosophical contempt”. The result is that even if Cokaygne started life as a cautionary tale of excess, its writers got so caught up in the imagery that things “quickly got out of hand, and the satire was swallowed up in the Utopia” (Morton, 1969, p. 17).

2.2. Cokaygne as a critique of inequality

The utopian reading of Cokaygne is facilitated by the assumption that the Cokaygnian audience are those who have worked long hours and lived in material poverty. In this vein, Cokaygne is seen as the utopia of “those at the bottom of the social hierarchy” (Sargent, 2015, p. 21). The idea here is that utopias are an expression of desire for a better way of living. Therefore, a utopian vision is one free from the struggles that most plague its audience.

From this perspective, Cokaygne – the land of abundance and idleness – makes sense as a utopia for those who are burdened with arduous work and poverty. Following this logic, Medieval Cokaygnes are often thought of as the utopia of peasant farmers (Levitas, 1990; Pleij, 2001). In the USA, the Cokaygnian tradition is thought to belong to various poverty-stricken groups: African-American slave communities, Native Americans (after colonisation), and the unemployed of the Great Depression (Sargent, 2015). Cokaygne makes sense as utopia for these groups because “for people who were constantly hungry, with little or no chance of earning money to buy food, and dependent on handouts, these images [of Cokaygne] have an obvious appeal” (Sargent, 2015, p. 32). Because of this basis in appealing imagery, the Cokaygnian utopia has been interpreted as a naïve compensatory fantasy (Parsons, 2015; Lochrie, 2016).

However, the view that Cokaygne's audience is primarily the overworked and marginalised poor lends itself to a more critical utopian reading. This interpretation does not dispute the base pleasures of Cokaygne's materialism or idleness, but it argues that alongside this is a critique of inequality and injustice (Morton, 1969; Kendrick, 2004; Lochrie, 2016). In contrast to the real world, in Cokaygne people have everything they need regardless of their wealth or status. For example, *The Land of Cokaygne* states that “All is common to young and old/To strong and stern, to meek and bold.” (Millett, 2003, lines 63–64). Similarly, in *De Cocaingne* (Parsons, 2015, lines 45–56):

“You can drink, and eat as well, / As much as you want with no problem, / With no challenge, and no refusal. / Nor does anyone have to pay the bill / After he eats, for no-one keeps count.”

The explicit recognition in this passage that consumption has nothing to do with the ability to pay, can be seen as a critique of the way that actually existing economies of the time distributed goods in ways

that excluded the poor. This interpretation roots Cokaygne's utopianism in a critique of economic inequality.

A central element of the critical utopian reading of Cokaygne is the way it takes the lifestyle of the aristocracy and makes it available to the poor. Lochrie (2016) interprets the way that Cokaygne disrupts the work-production relationship as redistribution, taking the lifestyles of the wealthy and making them available to all. From this perspective, De Cocaingne's maxim 'the more you sleep, the more you earn' can be seen as a reflection of the lives of medieval European aristocracy writ large. In Medieval Europe, almost all economic surplus was taken from peasant farmers by the aristocratic class (Milanovic et al., 2010). By contrast, in Cokaygne everybody has access to material comfort.

Some authors go a step further, arguing that rather than distributing goods to everybody, Cokaygne distributes goods only to the poor. Morton (1969) argues that rich people cannot access Cokaygne. Sargent (2015) makes the same point, noting that in several Cokaygnian texts, to get to Cokaygne the traveller has to endure trials that reflect everyday experiences of peasants but are alien to the aristocracy. To get to The Land of Cokaygne, for instance, a "Gentlemen, well-bred and kind" (Millett, 2003 line 183) must spend seven years wading "through pigshit to his chin" (Millett, 2003 line 181). For Morton (1969, p. 24), the meaning of such imagery "is clear enough: the land of Cokaygne is, like the Kingdom of Heaven, harder for a rich man to enter than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

2.3. Cokaygne as a sham utopia

Finally, it is useful to turn to an interpretation of Cokaygne which serves to connect the critical utopia and the moral lesson. Cokaygne as a moral lesson points to the emptiness of Cokaygne's lifestyle. Cokaygne as a social critique highlights the way that Cokaygne inverts existing economic relationships to make consumption more widely available. The final interpretation we raise here is also based on a critique of economic relationships but is more critical of Cokaygne's lifestyle than the utopian reading.

The central relation in the 'sham' interpretation of Cokaygne is exploitation. This is particularly clear in some versions of The Big Rock Candy Mountains which bookend the verses about the wonders of Cokaygne with interactions between an older 'jocker' and younger 'punk'. These interactions reframe Cokaygne as a lie told by the older man in order to convince the younger man to join him on the road (Raulerson, 2013). Eventually the punk refuses:

"I've hiked and hiked till my feet are sore, / I'll be God damned if I hike any more, / To be buggered sore, like a hobo's whore, / In the Big Rock Candy Mountains."

Raulerson (2013) argues that as well as highlighting exploitative sexual politics that can be found in hobo culture, these additional verses support a wider political intent from McClintock. McClintock was a member of the revolutionary global union the Industrial Workers of the World. In the versions of Cokaygne with the additional verses, Cokaygne represents the lie told by the employer class to workers. There is no Cokaygne, at least not for the working class. This is a perpetual lie, a false promise designed to keep workers in line. The punk's retort represents the working class becoming aware of their oppression and refusing to go along with the lie of Cokaygne.

2.4. Leaving Cokaygne

We are not arguing here for one or other of these interpretations as correct. Nor is our discussion here comprehensive – there are other interpretations of Cokaygnian tales. Texts take on a life of their own, and are always ambiguous in their meaning. In part this is the usefulness of Cokaygne specifically and utopian studies more generally. Reading various Cokaygnes and seeing how they are interpreted by others gives us an insight into multiple possible understandings of work. Engaging with multiple interpretations gives us space to reflect on work in the here and now. In Section 4 we will reflect on some of the themes of Cokaygne in the light of our understanding of today's economy. But first we turn to another utopia with an altogether different depiction of work.

3. News from nowhere - work as prosperity?

Written by William Morris, *News from Nowhere* is a late 19th century utopia. Morris takes us into 'Nowhere' through the eyes of 'William Guest', who one-day finds himself in a post-revolutionary England. Guest tours this strange new land and finds that communist revolution has transformed England into a classless, stateless and moneyless utopia populated by artisans. Unlike Cokaygne, *News from Nowhere* is relatively well known in sustainability circles (e.g. Miller, 2011; Foster, 2017). While the previous sections served primarily to introduce an unfamiliar utopian tradition and the multitude of ways its view of work can be interpreted, in this section we demonstrate how engaging with the economic thought embodied in utopian fiction can provide a basis for new economic theorising. To this end we present our account of the economic thought underpinning the depiction of work in *News from Nowhere*.

At the heart of *News from Nowhere* is a theory of work as key to human wellbeing – a position re-emphasised recently in relation to prosperity (Jackson, 2017; Foster, 2017). Throughout his travels in *Nowhere*, Guest meets people engaged in various forms of work (mending roads, studying mathematics, blowing glass). Although much of this work has instrumental value, people undertake it primarily because they derive something from the work itself. This is most explicitly illustrated in an exchange between Guest and 'Hammond' (a resident of *Nowhere*),

“how do you get people to work when there is no reward of labour, and especially how do you get them to work strenuously?” / ‘No reward of labour?’ said Hammond, gravely. ‘The reward of labour is life. Is that not enough?’” (Morris, 1890b emphasis in original)⁷

Hammond goes on to tell Guest that people work in *Nowhere* in order to create, and the reward of creation is “the wages which God gets” (Morris, 1890b). Through this and other interactions we learn that in *Nowhere* people find meaning through their work. However, Morris's theory of work in *News from Nowhere* should not be read as an endorsement of the reality of work in the 19th century.

In fact, the theory of work as prosperity is one of the most utopian elements of *News from Nowhere*. Morris saw most work in late 19th century England as “useless toil” characterised by a lack of pleasure (Morris, 1884b). Morris believed that capitalist dynamics made work bad by pushing the division of labour (that is, the simplification of tasks, and specialisation of workers) to its extreme, and through

⁷ We are using the versions of Morris's writings made freely available by the Marxists Internet Archive. They do not have page numbers.

the production of unnecessary goods. Consequently, in *News from Nowhere* the economy is reimagined: there is no consumerism, and production is motivated by art and need rather than profit.

3.1. Morris on the division of labour

Morris's principle argument against the division of labour is that it takes creativity and variety out of work. This argument draws heavily on his mentor John Ruskin's belief that the division of labour improved productivity by taking thought out of work:

“You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; and to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind: but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, to consider if he cannot find any better in his own head, he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong; ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being.” (Ruskin, 1853/2009, p. 161)

For Ruskin, thought is not only the process by which we make mistakes in work, it is also the process which makes us human. Consequently, he argues that a loss of productivity from less specialised labour organisation is justified because when you give a worker the freedom to think, you make “a man of him ... He was only a machine before, an animated tool” (p. 161).

Morris's interpretation of Ruskin was that work would be good when made so creative that it became art (Kinna, 2010). In the preface to an 1892 reprint of Ruskin's *The Nature of Gothic*, Morris (1892) wrote: “the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour”. In his own writing, Morris argues that ‘art’ is not restricted to “pictures, statues, and so forth, but has been and should be a part of all labour in some form or other” (Morris, 1888). In *News from Nowhere*, Morris realises this ideal: in *Nowhere*, there is no longer a word for art “because it has become a necessary part of the labour of every man who produces” (Morris, 1890b).

To enable the condition of art as work in *Nowhere*, Morris limits the division of labour. Residents of *Nowhere* are artisans who move between occupations as they please (Kinna, 2000). Early in *News from Nowhere*, we are introduced to this idea through Bob “a weaver from Yorkshire, who has rather overdone himself between his weaving and his mathematics” because both are “indoor work” (Morris, 1890b). Consequently, Bob has decided to spend time working as ferryman: outdoor work. But despite having the freedom to practice multiple occupations, the residents of *Nowhere* are not self-sufficient and there is still a substantial division of labour. Bob cannot survive on rowing, weaving, and mathematics alone: some people are engaged in cooking, cleaning and growing food. Consequently, Morris is not describing a complete removal of the division of labour. Rather he is advocating what he sees as the ideal level of the division of labour, closely modelled on his view of medieval artisans (Breton, 2002). This limits the division of labour to a level which allows substantial variety and creativity in work.

3.2. Over-production and over-work

It is worth comparing Morris's views on the division of labour with those of Adam Smith. Though Smith had reservations about its social effects, he believed that the division of labour was necessary to

increase material wealth. Book I of the *Wealth of Nations* is largely concerned with the benefits of the division of labour for economic growth. In the opening lines Smith (1776)⁸ argues that “the greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour ... seem to have been the effects of the division of labour”. The fundamental difference between Morris and Smith is that where the latter sees a need for increased levels of production Morris believes that 19th Century England is over-producing.

In much of Morris's writing he is railing against the wastefulness of an emergent consumer capitalism. Consumer capitalism is an economic system that seeks growth and profits by attempting to subsume all other wants into the desire for new and immediate pleasures that lack wider social value (Fisher, 2009; Jackson, 2017). We see these themes in Morris's writing. For example, Morris thought that the profit motive had led to most production being socially useless (Kinna, 2000). Speaking to Leicester Secular Society in 1884, Morris argued that in order to get and maintain profits, capitalists must sell a “mountain of rubbish...things which everybody knows are of no use”. In order to create demand for these useless goods, capitalists stirred up:

“a strange feverish desire for petty excitement, the outward token of which is known by the conventional name of fashion—a strange monster born of the vacancy of the lives of rich people”. (Morris, 1884a)

By contrast, in *Nowhere*, nobody makes goods “on the chance of their being wanted; for there is no longer any one who can be compelled to buy them. ... Nothing can be made except for genuine use” (Morris, 1890b). Morris never uses the term, but his description of a production system driven by the consumption of novel goods in a vain attempt to foster personal wellbeing parallels modern understandings of consumer capitalism.

3.3. How Morris limits the division of labour

To understand how Morris limits the division of labour in *News from Nowhere*, it is useful to look at his historical analysis of the transition from feudal society to industrial capitalism. In large part, Morris's analysis falls under ‘traditional commercialisation’ accounts, where the transition from feudalism to capitalism is the result of the expansion of market forces (Wood, 2002). For example, Morris (1890b) argues that in the early Medieval period “Capitalism does not exist”, because “there is no great all-embracing world-market; production is for the supply of the neighbourhood, and only the surplus of it ever goes a dozen miles from the door of the worker”. This changes with the rise of a “commercialism” and a turn to “foreign commerce” (Morris and Hyndman, 1884; Morris, 1890a). Morris argues that the quest for profit and the rapid expansion of overseas markets was a key driver of the privatisation of commonly held land. As markets expanded, “the landed nobility... so got hold of the lands and used their produce, not for the livelihood of themselves and their retainers, but for profit” (Morris, 1890a). For Morris, this rapid expansion of markets and the giving over of land to the production of goods for profit was the key to the rise of industrial capitalism and the extreme division of labour.

⁸ As with Morris, we are using the version of *The Wealth of Nations* made available by the Marxist Internet Archive. Consequently there are no page numbers.

Specifically, Morris believed that market expansion led to the breakdown of the artisan guilds, and it was this breakdown that enabled a greater division of labour. On the one hand, the displacement of peasants from their land meant that “the towns were flooded by crowds of the new free labourers” (Morris, 1890a) who would provide the larger workforce required to split production into smaller, more specialised stages. Simultaneously, Morris argued that the rapid expansion of the world market required an increase in production levels, which meant a “wider organisation of labour was needed, and, therefore, ... a more and more regulated division of labour, supplanted the old handicraft.” (Morris and Hyndman, 1884). For Morris, these processes were complete and a global market established by the 18th century.

The key consequence of the transition to a global capitalist system for Morris was that it established labour as a resource. This is outlined through Hammond in *News from Nowhere*, who says that under the World-Market:

“it became impossible ... to look upon labour and its results from any other point of view than one - to wit, the ceaseless endeavour to expend the least possible amount of labour on any article made.” (Morris, 1890b)

For Morris, this is the final and most fundamental consequence of the expansion of markets: the reconceptualisation of labour into a form of economic capital to be squeezed through the extreme division of labour. This historical analysis frames the solutions that Morris proposes in *News from Nowhere*.

In order to limit the division of labour in *Nowhere*, Morris scales back of the geographical scope of production, and removes market exchange altogether. Hammond tells Guest

“men make for their neighbours' use as if they were making for themselves, not for a vague market of which they know nothing; and over which they have no control... [and] there is no buying and selling” (Morris, 1890b)

In short, having identified the expansion of markets as the ultimate degrader of working conditions, Morris does away with them altogether in *News from Nowhere*. Under Morris's historical analysis, there can be no profit if there is no exchange, and there is no need to gain productivity if there is no pressure to supply an expanding world market. So, by getting rid of these mechanisms, Morris removes what he sees as the key drivers of the extreme division of labour. In doing so he attempts to create the conditions under which work can become art, and useless production disappears.

4. The post-growth utopia: let's be less productive⁹

Our vision of a post-growth utopia is one with more work, not less. We see a post-growth future as being more dependent on a greater quantity of human labour in order to function. Reducing the energy and material throughput of society and living more satisfying and meaningful lives requires us to work more but differently. Inspired by the visions of work we find in both Morris and some interpretations

⁹ The subtitle for this section was taken from an article in the New York Times:
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/27/opinion/sunday/lets-be-less-productive.html>

of Cokaygne we believe that a world with more but better work can not only be utopian in the best sense of the word but can provide a platform from which to agitate for a post-growth society.

The key to creating a post-growth utopia lies in addressing the issue of labour productivity growth. Labour productivity growth is implicated in the violation of biophysical limits, the degradation of work, the generation of inequality, and the devaluing of reproductive work. Tackling labour productivity growth enables us to transition to a world of less environmental damage, and stronger social bonds.

4.1. In a post-growth economy, productivity growth must fall

Labour productivity growth is an endogenous dynamic of fossil-capitalism. Labour productivity growth has historically had a symbiotic relationship with capitalist markets and fossil-energy. Economic histories locate the transition to fossil fuels as a key dynamic in the transition from a low productivity to a high productivity economy. The low labour productivity period is characterised by the use of wood and water, the high labour productivity period by fossil fuels (Wrigley, 2016; Malm, 2016). Fossil fuels were a dense energy store that greatly improved the productivity of other economic processes (Hall and Klitgaard, 2012; Smil, 2017). But fossil fuels alone are not enough to drive growth. China had widespread coal use in its economy at the time the industrial revolution started in Britain. However, Britain's labour productivity and growth rapidly expanded in the 1700's while China's remained steady (Broadberry et al., 2018).

The explanation for this is in the difference of the social structures of Britain and China at the time. Coal in China:

“did not create new social needs, did not constantly push the borders of its own market outwards...proto-industrialisation and economic growth were remarkable achievements but failed to generate an accelerated division of labour.” (Debeir et al., 1991)

On the other hand, in Britain, the consolidation of a new set of social relations meant that the energy of fossil fuels was used to create new markets and restructure the organisation of labour to make it more productive. This can be interpreted in Marxian terms as fossil fuels being used as a tool of social control by the capitalist class (Malm, 2016), or in liberal terms as the result of new institutions and cultural attitudes that afforded social status to entrepreneurs (McCloskey, 2010). Either way, labour productivity growth has historically been bound up with both the use of highly dense energy sources, and the dynamics of capitalist markets.

Because of the way that productivity growth emerges from fossil-capitalism, it is hard to disentangle productivity growth from the overproduction that drives ecological crises. The endogenous view of productivity growth that we propose here suggests that productivity growth emerges from the same dynamics that drive endless economic expansion. This is not to say that labour productivity growth is a necessary consequence of economic growth. Rather, the dynamics that enable economic growth are a necessary (but not sufficient) pre-condition for labour productivity growth.

Both work sharing and reduced productivity proposals threaten to disrupt key dynamics of capitalist economies in ways that may also act to prevent future productivity growth. Both cases seek greater

redistribution of surplus and less production. This will reduce profits. Capitalist markets are competitive environments which encourage producers to re-invest their profits in ways that reduce their costs and increase their sales. This is necessary for survival on the micro-level – firms have to be profitable to survive. A corollary of this is that productivity gains are necessary for the survival of the macro-economy as we know it. Firms without profits eventually stop investing, triggering economic collapse (Gordon and Rosenthal, 2003; Binswanger, 2009). This story sees productivity growth as emerging from the concentration of wealth and in the pursuit of over production. Consequently, even those work sharing proposals that do not see a need for productivity growth reductions (e.g. Schor, 2015) may end up leading to declining or stagnating productivity growth. But this is not the only reason to focus on productivity dynamics. We also face another, more bio-physical, threat to productivity growth.

Fossil-capitalism has been able to generate enormous productivity growth because fossil fuels have high energy return on energy invested (EROI). EROI is a measure of energy quality. It is a ratio of energy outputs to energy inputs. Fossil fuels have been able to drive productivity growth because we have to invest relatively few resources to get large amounts of energy out of them.

We may be entering an era in which the quality of available energy sources is declining. Though the science is not yet settled, we appear to be on the edge of a precipitous decline in EROI values (Rye and Jackson, 2018; Brockway et al., 2019). Estimates suggest EROI has been declining over time as energy production shifts to more unconventional sources (Hall et al., 2014; Jackson, 2019). Renewables are also thought to have low EROI, especially when issues such as intermittency are addressed (Victor and Sers, 2019). It is possible that in the near future EROI could reach such low levels that the energy sector effectively ‘cannibalises’ other sectors (Sers and Victor, 2018). That is, it is possible that EROI could fall so low that in order to maintain the levels of energy use we see today, we have to put so much energy and other economic resources into energy generation that the resources available to be used in other economic activities will be severely reduced. If this happens, a reduction in overall productivity levels is likely to be forced upon us (Elkomy et al., 2019).

Whether we run up against physical limits, or we successfully transform our societies such that they are more equal and no longer built around chasing output growth, we are likely to continue to face falling productivity growth. In either case, we must be prepared to work more. Can this be a utopian vision?

4.2. Free from the threat of hunger: working more, but working better

Both Cokaygne and News from Nowhere offer inspiration as to how working more could be utopian. Specifically, both can be read in such a way as to see them as being about the social conditions around work rather than work itself.

The key dynamic that could make work utopian is the removal of coercive forces. We see this in both Cokaygne and News from Nowhere. In both utopias, no-one can be forced to work because they have access to everything they need. Cokaygne achieves this with recourse to the supernatural, breaking the link between labour and consumption altogether. Though unrealistic, this serves an important lesson drawing our attention to the freedom that comes with material security. News from Nowhere achieves

the same freedom but in a more promising way. In News from Nowhere, there is still a link between work and consumption – but this link is at the societal rather than the individual level. In News from Nowhere, each worker produces not to secure their own material conditions, but instead as part of a collective effort to construct a society capable of providing for all its inhabitants. On the surface, Cokayne and News From Nowhere are very different. But they share at least one key attribute: those who do not work, do not sacrifice their ability to meet their material needs.

By removing the threat of material loss from any individual worker if they do not work, we weaken the coercive powers that force people into work. This is why some feminist and other radical scholars have called for a universal basic income (e.g. Weeks, 2011; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). They argue that a universal basic income hands power to workers by allowing them to refuse work they do not want to do. For this reason, a universal basic income has been characterised as a ‘utopian demand’, capable of destabilising the capitalism (Weeks, 2011). This comes about because a genuinely universal basic income creates the security for individuals to refuse work.

Removing the coercive forces that push people into work will benefit individuals and society as a whole. Without having to fear losing our access to material goods, we will be free to refuse work with conditions that we do not like. We will be free to demand better working conditions and to form new ways of working. At the societal level, removing coercion will also help put a stop to the over production that threatens to take us beyond biophysical limits.

A lack of coercion creates the conditions under which we are free to refuse work that serves no social purpose. People working in jobs they believe to be socially useless often express unhappiness and a desire to work more usefully (Graeber, 2018). Conversely, people working in undeniably useful jobs – such as nursing – often put up with very low material reward and unpleasant working conditions. This is because they are primarily motivated by the knowledge that they are performing a socially useful task (Folbre and Smith, 2017). Unfortunately many of these people are eventually forced out of such jobs by their material conditions (Morgan et al., 2013). This suggests that if people are free to choose, they are likely to choose work they believe is socially useful. Moreover, it suggests that people will choose this work even if that it is commonly believed to be challenging, difficult or simply unenjoyable (as is often the case with care work).

Much work in modern Western society is something we are coerced into doing in order to secure our individual material conditions. Removing coercive forces enables workers to safely and securely refuse work, creating the conditions for a radical reimagining of work as something done out of a desire to contribute to the social good.

4.3. Challenging productivity, challenging the master subject of capitalism

So far we have discussed the removal of coercion via a separation between work and consumption at the level of the individual. This is effectively the removal of the coercion associated with markets. However, not all forms of coercion are purely market based. The gendered nature of work is largely ignored in both the utopias we have discussed. Both lack substantive discussion of reproductive work: care work and housework. This work is not free from coercion simply because it resists market reasoning (Weeks, 2011; Dengler and Strunk, 2017). Non-market work also emerges from a history of

violent coercion (Federici, 2014). While not purely market driven, however, the market and productivity are implicated in these other forms of coercion.

Feminism offers us an analytical framework with which to understand the interlinked nature of coercion in market work, coercion in non-market work, and the origin of environmental crises. Using a feminist framework we can locate productivity as a part of the oppressive force of growth based capitalism, and outline the ways it is implicated in patriarchal as well as capitalist forces of oppression.

One key idea for thinking through the implications of labour productivity is the ‘master subject’ of capitalism. Introduced by Hartstock (1990) and Haraway (1991), and elaborated by Plumwood, 1993a, Plumwood, 1993b the master subject of capitalism is a logic of domination that sits at the heart of capitalism. One of the reasons it is so difficult to escape capitalist structures in our thinking is because our thinking has been colonised by the ways of knowing that gave us capitalism (Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). This domination of our thought is ‘the master subject of capitalism’ and it confines our ways of knowing to a limited and specific form, while presenting itself as objective and universal (Haraway, 1991).

The perspective of the master subject relies on a logic system based on false dualities (Plumwood, 1993b). The core duality is the association of ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’ with the master subject (who is human, masculine, white and western), while nature, animality and emotion are associated with the other (who is inhuman, feminine, of colour, and non-western). In this way, Plumwood argues, nature and the feminine are bound up together and seen as less valuable, less than human. While there are many aspects to this dualism, here we focus on production vs. reproduction, a key feature of the concept of labour productivity.

The master subject of capitalism privileges certain forms of work and production while backgrounding and delegitimising others. The transition to capitalism, as Morris recognised, is marked by production for the market, rather than for use (Wood, 2002). In this way, capitalist production separates work for ‘production’ from work for ‘reproduction’. This separation is unique to capitalism (Federici, 2014). The separation of productive and reproductive work enables a distinction to be made between market work which is termed ‘valuable’ and work carried out by nature and in the household which is not considered valuable. The feminization of nature is older than capitalism. For example, in Ancient Greek mythology, the earth is feminised as a ‘mother’ and the heavens masculinised as a ‘father’ (Hamilton, 1942). But it is under capitalism that ‘feminine’ reproductive work becomes effectively valueless.

Federici (2014) provides the relevant historical context for this framing, arguing that the development of capitalism required not only the division of labour in terms of work-tasks, but also in terms of gender. Prior to the complete takeover of market-based production, Federici argues that work for production and work for reproduction were not understood as separate and the work itself was not gendered. Rather, as all work was in aid of supporting the household, it was participated in by both men and women. In addition, although gendered discrimination did take place, women's dependence on men was limited by the fact that they had access to resources held in common – principally land. Capitalist social relations developed by excluding women from waged work. Federici sees land enclosures as a relatively minor part of the development of capitalism and is critical of theories that

place large emphasis on them. However, she does note that land enclosures meant the loss of non-market subsistence for women. Many men lost access to land, but they gained access to the women who were now dependent on them. As a result: “women themselves became the commons, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations” (Federici, 2014, p. 97).

The systematic devaluation of feminised non-market work is found throughout the history of labour productivity. Histories of productivity often refer to Adam Smith's notion of productive and unproductive labour (Bleischwitz, 2001; Abbott, 2018). While Smith (1776) does not explicitly deal in gendered terms he is clear that ‘productive’ labour is that which directly supports the accumulation of wealth – either by producing material goods or by producing goods that can be sold. On the other hand, unproductive labour is that which supports maintenance of the household – reproductive labour (Blaug, 1990). As Smith writes in the opening lines of Book 2 Chapter 3 of *The Wealth of Nations*:

“The labour of a manufacturer adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master's profit. The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing.”

This way of thinking remains codified in the national accounts today, which exclude inputs to production from nature and the household (Waring, 1988; European Commission et al., 2008; Saunders and Dalziel, 2017). Labour productivity (conventionally measured as market output divided by hours worked in the labour market) is intimately linked to the dominating logics of capitalism.

By challenging the value of labour productivity, we therefore challenge a powerful part of the master subject of capitalism. Power (2004) argues that the proper starting point for economic analysis should be as a system of social provisioning: the way in which societies organise to meet their collective needs. Similarly, Weeks (2011) argues that we must reclaim the economy by directing it away from generating profit to generating the conditions to support life. From these perspectives, what matters is not how much market value is created for how little resources, but how well society is able to care for all its inhabitants. This stands in stark opposition to the working of modern labour productivity chasing economies, where people are forced to work jobs they believe to be useless, or to leave jobs they believe to be useful because of a need to access the market to maintain their livelihoods (Druckman and Mair, 2019). We have already argued that the removal of coercion may lead to more care work being done, because this work is socially useful. Note that care work resists the market mentality, more often than not being the preserve of the public and charitable sector. Note also that care is a profession that requires emotional as well as ‘rational’ intelligence (Druckman and Mair, 2019). In these ways, the removal of coercion challenges the master subject by challenging productivity.

4.4. Work without coercion may be less productive

Removing the threat of coercion may reduce labour productivity growth. Though it originally came from the abstract notion of the production of ‘value’, productivity has become synonymous with the production of market value (Foster, 2016; Abbott, 2018). A useful post-growth project may be to reject the current notion of productivity, arguing instead that we should care about life rather than exchange value. The proliferation of ‘bullshit jobs’ suggests that socially useful work will not coincide with

market work (Graeber, 2018). At the very least, the experience of the health and care sectors suggests socially useful work is unlikely to coincide with the most profitable forms of market work (Druckman and Mair, 2019). A reduction in market activity could drive a reduction in labour productivity growth.

Moreover, improvements in working conditions may also reduce productivity growth. Economists have believed since Adam Smith that measures that improve productivity can have negative impacts on workers. Although he believed it necessary to increase material production, Smith (1776) himself thought that highly specialised labour would degrade our capacities for moral and mental reasoning. And, as we have seen, Morris and Ruskin believed specialised work to be dehumanising. Modern sociological accounts of work argue that autonomy is key to good work – the ability to have control over what and how we do our work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Specialisation and the division of labour limit this. Consequently, it is unlikely that free people would consent to work in highly specialised roles and thus would be less productive.

Finally, as a strategy that challenges the master subject of capitalism, freeing workers from coercion is a challenge to the very idea of productivity. The modern notion of productivity is hard to understand outside a market context. The frameworks we use for measuring productivity do not work in non-market contexts (Diewert, 2018). What may develop in its place is unclear. But it is unlikely to follow the dynamics we see today.

4.5. Towards an ecological utopia?

Removing coercive forces and overthrowing the productivity drive leaves us with questions not adequately answered by Cokaygne, or News from Nowhere. Namely, how do we decide what to produce, how it should be produced, and how do we get there?

These questions return us to old debates around socialist calculation, but with new elements introduced by the frame of environmental limits. The socialist calculation debates revolve around the possibility of determining the collective economic needs in the absence of capitalist markets, and specific mechanisms for doing so. On the one hand, the fact that we have likely already crossed some planetary boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015) shows us the deep problems that come with leaving production decisions to markets. But this does not mean that we should endorse central planning. When the socialist calculation debate is occasionally revisited, it is sometimes noted that we now have much increased computing power with which to approach socialist calculation (e.g. Srnicek and Williams, 2015). This notion has also been explored in utopian fiction (e.g. Le Guin, 1974/1987). But while it may be possible to use algorithms to determine how many goods people want, acknowledging environmental limits to production provokes a more radical question. In this case, we must decide not only what to produce but when to stop. Environmental limits mean that we have to decide what not to produce. This is not a question that can legitimately be left to a machine. Rather, it requires debate and deliberation (O'Neill, 2002; Hammond, 2019). The question of what and how to produce are normative, not technical, questions.

The need for democratic apparatus in work is highlighted in feminist works. One example of this is Weeks's (2011) life centred economy. One of Weeks's primary concerns is that many forms of work happen outside the market economy. So it is not sufficient to get rid of the market and assume that a)

the distribution problem will solve itself and b) that we will be free from compulsive forces. Rather we must construct new ways of working and being that are free from coercion. This raises the distributive question of how we as a society decide how much of our resources go into these new structures. Morris ducks this issue by assuming that in localised economies people's needs are immediate and obvious. It is not clear that this is actually the case, particularly when we consider an expanded understanding of work from the feminist perspectives of social provisioning or the reproduction of life.

In this context it is also useful to recognise that we are dealing with multiple intersecting systems of oppression. The forces that compel us into work are not only capitalist, they are also patriarchal. The discussion of feminist work in Section 4.3 highlights that the development of capitalist markets went hand in hand with the degradation of working and daily life for women. We must also be aware that many men actively participated in the degradation of life for women. This was partly as a way to retain their own power as it was diminished by the expansion of markets. Indeed in Federici's (2014) account of the development of capitalism this was the intended outcome: proto-capitalist states deflected antagonism between the classes into an antagonism between genders.

This has practical insights for how we organise a post-growth society. On the one hand we must seek to rebuild broad-based class support (Collard and Dempsey, 2018; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). This means recognising that growth-based capitalism seeks and maintains growth by creating differences within classes (Collard and Dempsey, 2018). Our response to this must be to build what Fraser (2019) calls 'progressive populism'. This requires building an inclusive politics that recognises power differentials within classes and couples this with a radically egalitarian economic vision. We must also be aware that if this vision threatens existing economic and social power structures, it will be actively opposed – as it has been since before the emergence of capitalism (Federici, 2014). Building this kind of broad-based support can be done by recognising that the drivers of both social and ecological challenges have shared roots.

Based on the above analysis we suggest that a post-growth movement centered on challenging the productivity growth dynamics would be well positioned to build such a broad base of support. Labour productivity growth has its roots in capitalist practices that degrade work, the environment and gender equality. It therefore offers us a new front on which to struggle and begin to build broad based class solidarity.

Work in a post-growth utopia should combine an understanding of work as a means of social provisioning with the view that the economy must be materially restricted. This allows us to build away from a system of labour productivity growth predicated on capitalist and patriarchal oppression and towards a life centred economy built on a democratic basis. In a life centred economy, work becomes something we do to create meaning (as in Morris) but also something we do to produce collective goods and collective freedoms (as in Weeks). In this way we can understand the problem of the economy not as a calculable question of how we produce the things we want, but as a normative question of what we want to produce and how we want to do it. In this view the utopian demand is for an economy in which we can all negotiate a meaningful life.

5. Conclusion

In this paper we have explored utopian ideas of work, using an analysis of depictions of work in the Cokaygnian tradition and in *News from Nowhere*. Cokaygne is a fanciful land where labour has been taken out of the production process: so no-one ever works. But whether this is a utopian or a dystopian lesson is disputed. For those who see Cokaygne as a moral lesson its imagery is a caricature of consumption and reveals the emptiness of a life without work. On the other hand, the utopian interpretation of Cokaygne points to the hardships endured by the presumed audiences of Cokaygne. Utopian readers suggest that what was intended as a moral lesson could look like a utopian dream to overworked and poverty stricken peasants. Some interpretations of Cokaygne go further, taking Cokaygne out of the realm of fantasy by grounding it in a critique of economic inequality. This perspective views Cokaygne as the ultimate land of redistribution – a land where everyone lives like the 1%.

News from Nowhere differs from Cokaygne in that it sees work as the proper route to fulfillment. Morris, following Ruskin, argued that work could be meaningful and creative, and *News from Nowhere* is his attempt to set out a society in which work fulfills these roles. However, *News from Nowhere* and the utopian reading of Cokaygne are not entirely at odds. Both recognise that in the real world, work can be painful. Where they differ is in their solutions to this problem. Morris understands that although there is pain in work, work is also valuable in personal and social terms. Consequently he focuses his utopia on transforming work into something good.

Drawing inspiration from Cokaygne and *News from Nowhere* we sketched the outline of work in a post-growth utopia. The key to this vision is that we work more rather than less, but we work less productively. We argued that this was necessary for both biophysical reasons, and because all proposals for work in post-growth economies are likely to reduce productivity growth. However, Cokaygne and *News from Nowhere* both share dynamics that enable us to see how more work could be made utopian. In both utopias, a key coercive element is removed. People can no longer be forced to work because their individual consumption is not dependent on their individual production.

Removing coercion, such as through something like a universal basic income, is likely to reduce productivity growth. As a result, it could contribute to ending over production, improve working conditions, challenging the master subject of capitalism and the patriarchy. We pointed to evidence suggesting that workers desire socially useful jobs but remain locked in jobs that do not fulfil this criterion due to the threat of losing their livelihoods. We further argued that the concept of productivity is implicated in Plumwood's (1993b) master subject of capitalism: it is bound up in the human-nature duality by its adherence to 'production' over 'reproduction'. Removing the coercive forces that push workers into market work challenges this story. Moreover, by giving workers the ability to refuse work that is useless or in bad conditions, removing coercive forces is likely to undermine productivity and the very idea of productivity itself. In these ways working more comes to be seen as part of a project for a better, more equal world with an economy more in line with the feminist notion of social provisioning. However, achieving this means engaging with questions left open by the utopian literature around how we as a society decide how to produce the means of daily life.

C.2 Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation¹⁰

Silvia Federici

Introduction: Why Commons

At least since the Zapatistas, on December 31, 1993, took over the zócalo of San Cristóbal to protest legislation dissolving the ejidal lands of Mexico, the concept of the “commons” has gained popularity among the radical Left, internationally and in the United States, appearing as a ground of convergence among anarchists, Marxists/socialists, ecologists, and ecofeminists.

There are important reasons why this apparently archaic idea has come to the center of political discussion in contemporary social movements. Two in particular stand out. On the one side, there has been the demise of the statist model of revolution that for decades has sapped the efforts of radical movements to build an alternative to capitalism. On the other, the neoliberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world in which we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through the cash-nexus. The “new enclosures” have also made visible a world of communal properties and relations that many had believed to be extinct or had not valued until threatened with privatization.

The new enclosures ironically demonstrated that not only commons have not vanished, but new forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced, also in areas of life where none previously existed, as for example the Internet. The idea of the common/s, in this context, has offered a logical and historical alternative to both State and Private Property, the State and the Market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities. It has also served an ideological function, as a unifying concept prefiguring the cooperative society that the radical Left is striving to create. Nevertheless, ambiguities as well as significant differences exist in the interpretations of this concept, which we need to clarify, if we want the principle of the commons to translate into a coherent political project.

What, for example, constitutes a common? Examples abound. We have land, water, air commons, digital commons, service commons; our acquired entitlements (e.g., social security pensions) are often described as commons, and so are languages, libraries, and the collective products of past cultures. But are all these “commons” on the same level from the viewpoint of devising an anticapitalist strategy? Are they all compatible? And how can we ensure that they do not project a unity that remains to be constructed? With these questions in mind, in this essay, I look at the politics of the commons from a feminist perspective, where feminist refers to a standpoint shaped by the struggle against sexual discrimination and over reproductive work, which (quoting Linebaugh) is the rock upon which society

¹⁰ Chapter in Federici, Silvia, 2012. *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle*. Oakland, PM Press. Licensed under the Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. Reproduced from [https://midnightnotes.memoryoftheworld.org/Silvia%20Federici/Revolution%20at%20Point%20Zero_%20Housework,%20Reproductions%20and%20Feminist%20Struggle%20\(102\)/Revolution%20at%20Point%20Zero_%20Housework,%20Repro%20-%20Silvia%20Federici.pdf](https://midnightnotes.memoryoftheworld.org/Silvia%20Federici/Revolution%20at%20Point%20Zero_%20Housework,%20Reproductions%20and%20Feminist%20Struggle%20(102)/Revolution%20at%20Point%20Zero_%20Housework,%20Repro%20-%20Silvia%20Federici.pdf)

is built, and by which every model of social organization must be tested. This intervention is necessary, in my view, to better define this politics, expand a debate that so far has remained male-dominated, and clarify under what conditions the principle of the common/s can become the foundation of an anticapitalist program. Two concerns make these tasks especially important.

Global Commons, World Bank Commons

First, since at least the early 1990s, the language of the commons has been appropriated by the World Bank and the United Nations, and put at the service of privatization. Under the guise of protecting biodiversity and conserving “global commons”, the Bank has turned rain forests into ecological reserves, has expelled the populations that for centuries had drawn their sustenance from them, while making them available to people who do not need them but can pay for them, for instance, through ecotourism.

On its side, the United Nations, in the name again of preserving the common heritage of mankind, has revised the international law governing access to the oceans, in ways enabling governments to consolidate the use of seawaters in fewer hands. The World Bank and the United Nations are not alone in their adaptation of the idea of the commons to market interests. Responding to different motivations, a revalorization of the commons has become trendy among mainstream economists and capitalist planners, witness the growing academic literature on the subject and its cognates: “social capital,” “gift economies,” “altruism.” Witness also the official recognition of this trend through the conferral of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 to the leading voice in this field, the political scientist Elinor Ostrom. Development planners and policy-makers have discovered that, under proper conditions, a collective management of natural resources can be more efficient and less conflictual than privatization, and commons can very well be made to produce for the market. They have also recognized that, carried to the extreme, the commodification of social relations has self-defeating consequences. The extension of the commodity-form to every corner of the social factory, which neoliberalism has promoted, is an ideal limit for capitalist ideologues, but it is a project not only unrealizable but undesirable from the viewpoint of the long-term reproduction of the capitalist system. Capitalist accumulation is structurally dependent on the free appropriation of immense areas of labor and resources that must appear as externalities to the market, like the unpaid domestic work that women have provided, on which employers have relied for the reproduction of the workforce. Not accidentally, then, long before the Wall Street “meltdown,” a variety of economists and social theorists warned that the marketization of all spheres of life is detrimental to the market’s well-functioning, for markets too—the argument goes—depend on the existence of nonmonetary relations like confidence, trust, and gift-giving. In brief, capital is learning about the virtues of the “common good.” In its July 31, 2008 issue, even the London Economist, the organ of capitalist free-market economics for more than one hundred and fifty years, cautiously joined the chorus. “The economics of the new commons,” the journal wrote, “is still in its infancy. It is too soon to be confident about its hypotheses. But it may yet prove a useful way of thinking about problems, such as managing the internet, intellectual property or international pollution, on which policymakers need all the help they can get.” We must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the guardian of the planet.

What Commons?

A second concern is that, while international institutions have learned to make commons functional to the market, how commons can become the foundation of a noncapitalist economy is a question still unanswered. From Peter Linebaugh's work, especially *The Magna Carta Manifesto* (2008), we have learned that commons have been the thread that has connected the history of the class struggle into our time, and indeed the fight for the commons is all around us. Mainers are fighting to preserve their fisheries and waters, residents of the Appalachian regions are joining to save their mountains threatened by strip mining, open source, and free software movements are opposing the commodification of knowledge and opening new spaces for communications and cooperation. We also have the many invisible commoning activities and communities that people are creating in North America, which Chris Carlsson has described in his *Nowtopia*. As Carlsson shows, much creativity is invested in the production of "virtual commons" and forms of sociality that thrive under the radar of the money/market economy.

Most important has been the creation of urban gardens, which have spread, in the 1980s and 1990s, across the country, thanks mostly to the initiatives of immigrant communities from Africa, the Caribbean or the South of the United States. Their significance cannot be overestimated. Urban gardens have opened the way to a "rurbanization" process that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our food production, regenerate our environment and provide for our subsistence. The gardens are far more than a source of food security. They are centers of sociality, knowledge production, cultural and intergenerational exchange. As Margarita Fernandez writes of gardens in New York, urban gardens "strengthen community cohesion," as places where people come together not just to work the land, but to play cards, hold weddings, have baby showers or birthday parties. Some have a partnership relation with local schools, whereby they give children after school environmental education. Not last, gardens are "a medium for the transport and encounter of diverse cultural practices," so that African vegetables and farming practices (e.g.) mix with those from the Caribbean.

Still, the most significant feature of urban gardens is that they produce for neighborhood consumption, rather than for commercial purposes. This distinguishes them from other reproductive commons that either produce for the market, like the fisheries of the "Lobster Coast" of Maine, or are bought on the market, like the land-trusts that preserve the open spaces. The problem, however, is that urban gardens have remained a spontaneous grassroots initiative, and there have been few attempts by movements in the United States to expand their presence, and to make access to land a key terrain of struggle. More generally, how the many proliferating commons, being defended, developed, fought for, can be brought together to form a cohesive whole providing a foundation for a new mode of production is a question the Left has not posed. An exception is the theory proposed by Negri and Hardt in *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and more recently *Commonwealth* (2009), which argues that a society built on the principle of "the common" is already evolving from the informatization of production. According to this theory, as production becomes predominantly a production of knowledge organized through the Internet, a common space is formed which escapes the problem of defining rules of inclusion or exclusion, because access and use multiply the resources available on the net, rather than subtracting from them, thus signifying the possibility of a society built on abundance—the only

remaining hurdle confronting the “multitude” being presumably how to prevent the capitalist “capture” of the wealth produced. The appeal of this theory is that it does not separate the formation of “the common” from the organization of work and production as already constituted, but sees it immanent in it. Its limit is that it does not question the material basis of the digital technology the Internet relies upon, overlooking the fact that computers depend on economic activities—mining, microchip and rare earth production—that, as currently organized, are extremely destructive, socially and ecologically. Moreover, with its emphasis on science, knowledge production and information, this theory skirts the question of the reproduction of everyday life. This, however, is true of the discourse on the commons as whole, which has generally focused on the formal preconditions for their existence but much less on the possibilities provided by existing commons, and their potential to create forms of reproduction enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations.

Women and the Commons

It is in this context that a feminist perspective on the commons is important. It begins with the realization that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended more than men on access to communal resources, and have been most committed to their defense. As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), in the first phase of capitalist development, women were in the front of the struggle against land enclosures both in England and the “New World,” and the staunchest defenders of the communal cultures that European colonization attempted to destroy. In Peru, when the Spanish conquistadores took control of their villages, women fled to the high mountains, where they recreated forms of collective life that have survived to this day. Not surprisingly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the most violent attack on women in the history of the world: the persecution of women as witches. Today, in the face of a new process of Primitive Accumulation, women are the main social force standing in the way of a complete commercialization of nature. Women are the subsistence farmers of the world. In Africa, they produce 80 percent of the food people consume, despite the attempts made by the World Bank and other agencies to convince them to divert their activities to cash-cropping. Refusal to be without access to land has been so strong that, in the towns, many women have taken over plots in public lands, planted corn and cassava in vacant lots, in this process changing the urban landscape of African cities and breaking down the separation between town and country. In India too, women have restored degraded forests, guarded trees, joined hands to chase away the loggers, and made blockades against mining operations and the construction of dams. The other side of women’s struggle for direct access to means of reproduction has been the formation, across the Third World—from Cambodia to Senegal—of credit associations that function as money commons. Differently named, “tontines” (in parts of Africa) are autonomous, self-managed, women-made banking systems, providing cash to individuals or groups that can have no access to banks, working purely on the basis of trust. In this, they are completely different from the micro-credit systems promoted by the World Bank, which functions on the basis of shame, arriving to the extreme (e.g., in Niger) of posting in public places the pictures of the women who fail to repay the loans so that some have been driven to suicide. Women have also led the effort to collectivize reproductive labor both as a means to economize on the cost of reproduction, and protect each other from poverty, state violence and the violence of individual men. An outstanding example are the *ola* communes (common kitchens) that women in Chile and in Peru set up in the 1980s, when, due to stiff inflation, they could no longer afford to shop alone. Like collective reforestation and land

reclamation, these practices are the expression of a world where communal bonds are still strong. It would be a mistake, however, to consider them as something prepolitical, “natural,” a product of “tradition.” In reality, as Leo Podlashuc notes in “Saving the Women Saving the Commons,” these struggles shape a collective identity, constitute a counterpower in the home and the community, and open a process of self-valorization and self-determination from which we have much to learn. The first lesson to be gained from these struggles is that the “commoning” of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. It is also the first line of resistance to a life of enslavement, whether in armies, brothels or sweatshops. For us, in North America, an added lesson is that by pooling our resources, by reclaiming land and waters, and turning them into a common, we could begin to de-link our reproduction from the commodity flows that through the world market are responsible for the dispossession of so many people in other parts of the world. We could disentangle our livelihood, not only from the world market but from the war-machine and prison system on which the hegemony of the world market depends. Not last we could move beyond the abstract solidarity that often characterizes relations in the movement, which limits our commitment and capacity to endure, and the risks we are willing to take. Undoubtedly, this is a formidable task that can only be accomplished through a long-term process of consciousness raising, cross-cultural exchange, and coalition building, with all the communities throughout the United States who are vitally interested in the reclamation of the land, starting with the First American Nations. Although this task may seem more difficult now than passing through the eye of a needle, it is also the only condition to broaden the space of our autonomy, cease feeding into the process of capital accumulation, and refuse to accept that our reproduction occurs at the expense of the world’s other commoners and commons.

Feminist Reconstructions

What this task entails is powerfully expressed by Maria Mies when she points out that the production of commons requires first a profound transformation in our everyday life, in order to recombine what the social division of labor in capitalism has separated. For the distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat or wear, or work with, have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded.

In other words, we need to overcome the state of constant denial and irresponsibility, concerning the consequences of our actions, resulting from the destructive ways in which the social division of labor is organized in capitalism; short of that, the production of our life inevitably becomes a production of death for others. As Mies points out, globalization has worsened this crisis, widening the distances between what is produced and what is consumed, thereby intensifying, despite the appearance of an increased global interconnectedness, our blindness to the blood in the food we eat, the petroleum we use, the clothes we wear, the computers with which we communicate. Overcoming this oblivion is where a feminist perspective teaches us to start in our reconstruction of the commons. No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life, our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed if “commoning” has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject. This is how we must understand the slogan “no commons without community.” But “community” not intended as a gated reality, a grouping of people

joined by exclusive interests separating them from others, as with community formed on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Community as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals. Certainly, the achievement of such community, like the collectivizing our everyday work of reproduction, can only be a beginning. It is no substitute for broader antiprivatization campaigns and the reconstitution of our commonwealth. But it is an essential part of the process of our education for collective governance and the recognition of history as a collective project—the main casualty of the neoliberal era of capitalism. On this account, we must include in our political agenda the communalization/collectivization of housework, reviving that rich feminist tradition that we have in the United States, that stretches from the utopian socialist experiments of the mid-nineteenth century to the attempts that the “materialist feminists” made, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, to reorganize and socialize domestic work and thereby the home, and the neighborhood, through collective house-keeping—efforts that continued until the 1920s, when the “Red Scare” put an end to them. These practices, and the ability that past feminists have had to look at reproductive labor as an important sphere of human activity, not to be negated but to be revolutionized, must be revisited and revalorized. One crucial reason for creating collective forms of living is that the reproduction of human beings is the most labor-intensive work on earth, and to a large extent it is work that is irreducible to mechanization. We cannot mechanize childcare or the care of the ill, or the psychological work necessary to reintegrate our physical and emotional balance. Despite the efforts that futuristic industrialists are making, we cannot robotize “care” except at a terrible cost for the people involved. No one will accept “nursebots” as care givers, especially for children and the ill. Shared responsibility and cooperative work, not given at the cost of the health of the providers, are the only guarantees of proper care. For centuries the reproduction of human beings has been a collective process. It has been the work of extended families and communities, on which people could rely, especially in proletarian neighborhoods, even when they lived alone, so that old age was not accompanied by the desolate loneliness and dependence that so many of our elderly experience. It is only with the advent of capitalism that reproduction has been completely privatized, a process that is now carried to a degree that it destroys our lives. This we need to change if we are put an end to the steady devaluation and fragmentation of our lives. The times are propitious for such a start. As the capitalist crisis is destroying the basic element of reproduction for millions of people across the world, including the United States, the reconstruction of our everyday life is a possibility and a necessity. Like strikes, social/economic crises break the discipline of the wage-work, forcing upon us new forms of sociality. This is what occurred during the Great Depression, which produced a movement of hobo-men who turned the freight trains into their commons seeking freedom in mobility and nomadism. At the intersections of railroad lines, they organized “hobo jungles,” prefigurations, with their self-governance rules and solidarity, of the communist world in which many of their residents believed. However, but for a few “box-car Berthas,” this was predominantly a masculine world, a fraternity of men, and in the long term it could not be sustained. Once the economic crisis and the war came to an end, the hobo men were domesticated by the two grand engines of labor-power fixation: the family and the house. Mindful of the threat of working class recomposition in the Depression, American capital excelled in its application of the principle that has characterized the organization of economic life: cooperation at the point of production, separation and atomization at the point of reproduction. The atomized, serialized family-house Levittown provided, compounded by its umbilical appendix, the car, not only sedentarized the worker, but put an end to the type of autonomous workers’ commons the hobo jungles had represented. Today, as millions of

Americans' houses and cars have been repossessed, as foreclosures, evictions, the massive loss of employment are again breaking down the pillars of the capitalist discipline of work, new common grounds are again taking shape, like the tent cities that are sprawling from coast to coast. This time, however, it is women who must build the new commons, so that they do not remain transient spaces or temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction. If the house is the oikos on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the house-workers and house-prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a center of collective life, one traversed by multiple people and forms of cooperation, providing safety without isolation and fixation, allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and above all providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction. As already suggested, we can draw inspiration for this project from the programs of the nineteenth century "materialist feminists" who, convinced that the home was an important "spatial component of the oppression of women" organized communal kitchens, cooperative households, calling for workers' control of reproduction. These objectives are crucial at present: breaking down the isolation of life in a private home is not only a precondition for meeting our most basic needs and increasing our power with regard to employers and the state. As Massimo de Angelis has reminded us, it is also a protection from ecological disaster. For there can be no doubt about the destructive consequences of the "uneconomic" multiplication of reproductive assets and self-enclosed dwellings, dissipating, in the winter, warmth into the atmosphere, exposing us to unmitigated heat in the summer, which we now call our homes. Most important, we cannot build an alternative society and a strong self-reproducing movement unless we redefine in more cooperative ways our reproduction and put an end to the separation between the personal and the political, political activism and the reproduction of everyday life. It remains to clarify that assigning women this task of commoning/ collectivizing reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of "femininity." Understandably, many feminists would view this possibility as "a fate worse than death." It is deeply sculpted in our collective consciousness that women have been designated as men's common, a natural source of wealth and services to be as freely appropriated by them as the capitalists have appropriated the wealth of nature. But, quoting Dolores Hayden, the reorganization of reproductive work, and therefore the reorganization of the structure of housing and public space is not a question of identity; it is a labor question and, we can add, a power and safety question. I am reminded here of the experience of the women members of the Landless People's Movement of Brazil (MST), who when their communities won the right to maintain the land which they had occupied, insisted that the new houses should be built to form one compound, so that they could continue to share their house-work, wash together, cook together, taking turns with men, as they had done in the course of the struggle, and be ready to run to give each other support if abused by men. Arguing that women should take the lead in the collectivization of reproductive work and housing is not to naturalize housework as a female vocation. It is refusing to obliterate the collective experiences, knowledge, and struggles that women have accumulated concerning reproductive work, whose history has been an essential part of our resistance to capitalism. Reconnecting with this history is today for women and men a crucial step, both for undoing the gendered architecture of our lives and reconstructing our homes and lives as commons.