

An Affective Feminist Materialism?: Reproduction, Marxist Feminism, and Affective Capacity

John McMahon, The Graduate Center, CUNY
jmcmahon@gradcenter.cuny

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Abstract:

How can affect theory – particularly a notion of the body understood in terms of affective capacity – extend Marxist feminist concerns with social reproduction? To what extent can affect contribute to different elaborations of Marxist feminism? I answer these questions by theorizing Marxist feminism through affect theory’s embodied concepts of capacity, force, and power. If one of the central tasks of Marxist feminism is to analyze the material basis of patriarchal control, then I contend that affect theory and Marxist feminism are essential to achieving each other’s critical potential. The first part of this paper analyzes the Marxist feminist concept of “social reproduction” in terms of affect. The second part engages an affective reading of three thinkers in the Marxist feminist tradition, rearticulating one particularly vital concept developed by each: Gayle Rubin and the sex/gender system; Lise Vogel and social reproduction; and Rosemary Hennessy and the need for sensation and affect. I conclude by sketching the implications of my reading for the concept of freedom, which is complicated by Black feminist critiques of Marxist feminism. Ultimately this paper – by exploring both the generative connections and the distinct disjunctions between affect and thinkers within Marxist feminism – argues for the continued vitality of Marxist feminism for inquiry into affect, into Marx, into labor, into materialism, and into capitalism.

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Introduction

Not all bodies circulate, produce, and affectively interact in the same way within the relations and modes of capitalism. Gendered, sexualized, racialized, colonized bodies experience and are constituted by the affective structures of any mode of production in polyvalent ways. That is, there is not a singular capitalist body, proletariat body, or bourgeois body. Through an affective reading of Marxist feminism,¹ this paper asks two major questions: first, how can affect theory – and particularly a notion of the body in terms of affective capacity – extend Marxist feminist concerns with social reproduction in the term’s multiple valences; second, to what extent can affect contribute to different elaborations of Marxist feminism?

In pursuing these and related questions, I take seriously Kathi Weeks’s contention that our discussions of affective and immaterial labor today can and should be enriched by thinking through the lineages of these critical projects located in Marxist feminism, which in her account sought in many ways to grasp what we today call immaterial or affective labor (2007, 233). I would broaden her claim to argue that Marxist feminism anticipates some of the concerns of affect theory as such, and does so especially as it rethinks labor and reproduction. This essay hence renders explicit connections between notions of affect and Marxist feminism, in a way that expands Marxist feminism. In this theoretical revisiting, I follow Weeks’s call in her engagement with the Wages for Housework movement to construct a “nonlinear” and “multidirectional” relation to feminist pasts, even (perhaps especially) to trajectories such as Marxist feminism that contemporary narratives about feminism posit as something irretrievably essentialist or superseded and transcended by more recent feminisms (2011, 115–18).² Heidi Hartmann

contends that one of the central tasks of a Marxist-oriented feminism is to explore the material basis of patriarchal control found in social structures through which the labor of women is controlled and directed (1979, 11–12). I argue that an account of affect – in terms of affective capacity drawing on Spinoza, Deleuze, and Marx – proves to be a vital component of the material base for patriarchy, and this paper reveals the continued importance of Marxist feminism for inquiry into affect, into Marx, into labor, into materialism, and into capitalism.

After providing an overview of the concept of affect that I work with and sketching the Marxist feminist critique of Marx, I construct an affective, gendered account of the crucial category of social reproduction. In the rest of the paper, I engage in an affective reading of three major works in the Marxist feminist tradition, rearticulating one particularly vital concept deployed by each: Gayle Rubin (1975) and the sex/gender system; Lise Vogel (2013 [1983]) and social reproduction; and most of all Rosemary Hennessy (2000) and the human need for sensation and affect. I put these Marxist feminist concepts on the same plane with affect theory in order to explore the extent to which they are concerned with affect and the ways that attention to affect reanimates or extends particular components from this mode of theorizing. This reading, by exploring both the generative connections and the disjunctions between affect and thinkers within Marxist feminism, concludes that affect theory most productively works to extend and supplement central Marxist feminist concepts by rearticulating them in an affective register; this additional facet to a Marxist feminist theorizing can deepen the reach and impact of its critical project. I conclude by briefly sketching the implications of my account for the Marxist feminist version of the concept of freedom, which is complicated by the whiteness of Marxist feminist theorizing.

The Reproduction of Affect

In general, affect theory thinks through embodiment, materiality, and sensation in an interactive way. It contests significant tropes in Western thought, including Cartesian dualism, a conception of the subject as atomistic or bounded, a rigid dichotomy between the individual and the social or the biological and the cultural, and purely cognitive conceptualizations of emotion or feeling. While there are various strands of affect theory, the kind I engage most closely in this paper is perhaps the most prominent one, which understands affect as an autonomic and asubjective intensity or force. Tracing its lineage from Spinoza through Deleuze (and Guattari), such a notion of affect is found in the work of Patricia T. Clough (2010) and Brian Massumi (2002), among many others. For example, Clough elaborates affect as “pre-individual bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body’s capacity to act” that point to a “dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally” (2010, 207). In this conception, affect does *not* refer back to a subjective emotion or feeling (Massumi 2002, 27–28; Clough 2010, 207; 224n1). It is instead “transpersonal or prepersonal”, entailing “bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities,” and an “affective subject” or self as that which “enfolds the intensities it finds itself in” and as a “collection of trajectories and circuits” (Stewart 2007, 128; 58–59).³

A somewhat more specific concept of “affective capacity,” a body’s “capacities for affective and being affected” forms the basis for my engagement with Marxist feminism (Deleuze 1988, 124). In Deleuze’s reading of Spinoza, the individual is understood as a “degree of power” manifested in terms of affective capacity, the “power of acting” and the “power of being acted upon”; it is this capacity that “defines” bodies (Deleuze 1988, 27).⁴ We must define individuals by their characteristic relations and essential power, where “all power [*potentia*] is inseparable from a capacity for being affected” (97). In my reading of Marxist feminism, I

deploy of the notion of the body in terms of affective capacity in order to explore the interaction between this theoretical movement and affect theory.

One of the central contentions of Marxist feminism broadly understood is that we must focus not only on production or productive labor as they read much of Western Marxism doing, but also reproduction and reproductive labor. More specifically, Marxist feminists regularly claim that conceptualizing productive and reproductive labor as clearly distinct and more or less mutually exclusive contributes to the oppression of women, especially when a gendered (and/or colonial, and/or racialized) division of labor is overlaid on top of the distinction (Rubin 1975; Hartmann 1979; Mies 1986, 31; Petchesky 1990, introduction; Hennessy 2000, 37–41; Berg 2014, 162–63). In doing so, one of the most frequently turned-to passages from Marx (e.g. Vogel [1983]2013, 52; Petchesky 1990, 8–10) is an early discussion from he and Engels in *The German Ideology* on life, sociality, and production. Here, one can distinguish the fundamental “three aspects of social activity”, all “determined by changing material conditions and social relations” (Petchesky 1990, 8-9). For Marx and Engels, these are: the “production of material life itself,” that is the production of means for satisfying needs; the “creation of new needs” through the “action” and “instrument” of satisfying those prior needs; and the fact that “that men [*sic*], who daily re-create their own life, begin to make other men, to propagate their kind: the relation between man and woman, parents and children, the *family*” (*German Ideology* [*GI*], 47-48). Here, reproduction is deeply connected to production, as they all require and are constituted by one another; they comprise three enfolded “moments” or “aspects” of “social activity” that “have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first” humans, and “which still assert themselves in history today” (48). The simultaneity and inextricability of production and

reproduction makes this formulation promising, as Marx emphasizes that we should not sever these moments from one another, nor set them into successive stages.

Thinking about production and reproduction in affective terms clarifies the importance of their connection. Whether reproduction refers specifically to the reproduction of humans or to the reproduction of labor and the social conditions and relations of labor, affect inheres in these processes. What results when people “re-create their own life” and “propagate their kind” (*GI*, 48) includes bodies understood in terms of affective capacities. If we think of the Marxian human body as interacting essential powers or capacities for affecting and being affected, then the process of creating new humans involves interplay of those very bodies and their powers. More broadly, re-creating life or social relations entails the replication of conditions, relations, objects, and modes of interacting capacities to affect and be affected.

One of the arguments of this paper is that attention to affect helps break down too-sharp distinctions between production and reproduction. Gayle Rubin insists that there are processes of both production and reproduction in what is traditionally considered to be the mode of production, such that this distinction is not particularly useful (1975, 166–67). In the account of Marx and affective capacity I have constructed thus far, affective capacity itself cannot be bifurcated into productive affective capacity and reproductive affective capacity. Bodies as essential powers and capacities for affecting and being affected resist splitting into distinct zones of activity, for affective capacity is not localizable into discrete, separate units. The affective capacities shaped by the production of material life or the creation of new needs are the same affective capacities involved in the way humans “daily re-create [their] own life” (*GI*, 49). Affective capacity or essential powers can only be said to inhabit and act within and trafficking between different realms – whether productive and reproductive labor, or other distinctions such

as a liberal division between public and private – if the social organization of those capacities, powers, and bodies channels them into discrete zones in that matter. That is, there is no necessary warrant for bifurcating production and reproduction, but patriarchal capitalist relations may seek to channel affective capacity into dichotomous and disjunctive spheres of activity. Affect itself works across any attempted divisions, and there can be modes of affective exploitation and domination in and across both realms.

In the reproduction of labor itself, the affectivity of production and reproduction persists. One set of the “conditions of labour” that Marx (*Capital [C] Vol. III*, p. 926) insists must be reproduced in the labor process itself is, I argue, the capacity to affect and be affected, that vital force of labor capacity of the dynamic, generative laboring body. If capitalism amplifies affective capacities but directs those toward the enrichment of the bourgeoisie while enervating the bodies of the proletariat, then the capacity that is to be captured must be recreated anew for the continuance of capitalist processes. If the enervated proletarian body was only depleted and destroyed, then it could no longer be a useful source of living labor with which to valorize material for the purposes of profit. Those vital forces themselves must be recreated. Marx provides some elaboration of this reproduction specific to capitalist formations. He writes that the “labour-power withdrawn from the market by wear and tear, and by death, must be continually replaced by, at the very least, an equal amount of labour power” (*C Vol. I*, 275). In its destructiveness and power, capitalism demands a mass capture of the sustaining capacities of the body to affect and be affected, and consequently those capacities must be recreated and/or replaced. Because capitalism so enervates affective capacity such that workers are injured or die rapidly, the burden to reproduce more capacity and more bodies to actualize those vital forces

increases. Affective reproduction may therefore prove to be especially important within capitalism.

At the most basic level, the “maintenance and reproduction of the working class remains a necessary condition for the reproduction of capital” (*C Vol. I*, 718). This includes, I would argue, the reproduction of certain kinds of bodies, affective capacities, and essential powers. Their capacity to affect and be affected, as living labor capacity, composes an absolute prerequisite for capitalist production, and must be continually regenerated as such. The reproduction of the working class involves replicating a specific mode of affective relationality and social conditions that structure the capacity to affect and be affected of a particular group of people in a specific way, constituting them as a class. Marx continues from the above quote by noting “the capitalist may safely leave” this reproduction of the proletariat to “the worker’s drive for self-preservation and propagation” (718). By leaving the proletariat’s reproduction to some unspecified drive for self-propagation as opposed to an intervention by capitalist, Marx opens up more space for an affective reading to supplement his account, one accounting for the reproduction of the objects, relations, etc. that sustain bodies and their affective capacities. Capitalism requires the reproduction of the working class, including the affective relations of that class and the affective capacities of the individuals comprising that class.

Before proceeding to sketch a framework for a theory of affect and reproduction, it is important to briefly overview central Marxist feminist critiques of Marx. To (over-)simplify a multi-faceted literature, we might summarize the critiques into four categories. First, they note a tendency especially in the late Marx to reduce all labor to productive labor understood as the production of surplus value, in a way that erases non-wage labor, domestic labor, and reproduction (Mies 1986, 47–52). Second, they argue that Marx and Engels, despite the potential

for a less deterministic and static view, end up conceptualizing the division of labor in naturalistic terms such that women and children appear as naturally inclined to do domestic and/or reproductive labor. The sexual division of labor thus transforms into a natural bifurcation instead of a historical, material product (Vogel [1983] 2013, 64–66). Third, they critique not only Marx but Western Marxism in general for reducing all oppression to economic relations as the single source of domination, rendering the ‘woman question’ a secondary concern (Eisenstein 1979, 11; Hartmann 1979; Mies 1986, 1–13; Vogel 2013). Finally, they question early Marxist tradition in general and Engels specifically for assuming that women’s entry into wage labor from the private, patriarchal family was the key to liberation (Hartmann 1979, 2–3).

For these and other reasons, there has been nothing particularly specific to gender in my brief account of affect and social reproduction thus far. As Hartmann argues (1979, 7–8), most Marxist categories on their own have no necessary gender content; concepts like class or wage labor require feminist intervention to be mobilized for any gendered analysis. For my part, I seek to add particularly affective and gendered content to the category of reproduction. Thus, I want to sketch out a possible outline – one especially informed by Lise Vogel’s work (2013 [1983]) – for understanding the reproduction of affect in Marx’s theory in gendered terms informed by Marxist feminism, with the subsequent section exploring this framework’s relation to an affective reading of three major Marxist feminist concepts.

To outline this framework in a somewhat schematic way, there is an affective component of Marxian reproduction, whether that reproduction is of life, humans, social relations, or labor power. At the most basic level, because Marxian bodies in general or labor capacity more specifically can be read in terms of affective capacity and essential powers, the category of reproduction in Marx implicates the replication of power and capacity. Affect must be

regenerated, as the organization of affective capacity in a particular mode of production must itself be reproduced as a basic requirement of the perpetuation of society as such. To gender this account of reproduction, we can posit that the burden for the activities, processes, and products that do the work of regenerating affect has historically and materially been governed in most societies by a gendered, patriarchal division of labor whereby those determined to fall in the category of woman and/or female must do this labor. Women are thus functionally assigned – usually through violence and coercion (Mies 1986, 65–71) – the duty for the (re)production of life, a category that includes the reproduction of affect. Reproduction is an expansive category covering all those activities, processes, and relations involved in the (re)production of the capacity for labor power (Hennessy 2000, 64–65), and the relations of reproduction are always social in the Marxist sense of the term (Petchesky 1990, 8–10).⁵ This gendered, affective reproduction takes the forms of many activities: procreation, housework, child rearing, cooking, cleaning, care work, sex, sex work, socialization, and more. Ultimately, this framework posits that reproductive labor always includes the reproduction of affective capacity and essential power, and that this affective reproduction is subordinated to a gendered division of labor. One material basis of the domination of women is thus the differential distribution, direction, and shaping of affective capacity.

The point of sketching out the framework in this way is to suggest that affect usefully explicates and extends the Marxian and Marxist feminist category of reproduction. Marxist feminist attention to gendered affective reproduction centers gender division in the material organization of affect and its reproduction. The next section explores this framework in relation to an affective reading of three different major concepts in Marxist feminism

Affect and Marxist Feminism

With this reading of Marx on reproduction and tentative framework for a feminist analysis of affective reproduction, I now turn to more directly think through the implications of affective capacity for Marxist feminist theorizing itself. By engaging in an affective reading of three Marxist feminists and through analyzing the extent to affect can be mobilized with central Marxist feminist concepts, this section of the paper explores several questions: to what extent does Marxist feminism anticipate affective concerns with reproduction and labor? In what ways does affect interact, connect, and diverge from Marxist feminist theorizing? When affect does conflict with Marxist feminist work, is this rupture inevitable? Most vitally, can affect theory productively extend and rearticulate the critical project of Marxist feminism? I think through these questions in relation to three major categories from Marxist feminist thought that seek to analyze the intertwining of economic and gendered forces and to deploy materialist feminist analysis to address the aporias in Marx's own thought: the sex/gender system (Gayle Rubin); social reproduction (Lise Vogel); and above all the human need for sensation and affect (Rosemary Hennessy).

Gayle Rubin: Sex/gender systems

In "The Traffic in Women" (1975), Gayle Rubin articulates the need for analysis into what she terms "sex/gender systems", the "set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied" (159). Considering the history of gender oppression, this most often takes the form of a "systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products" (158). In a complex reading of Marx and Engels, Lévi-Strauss, Freud, and Lacan, Rubin seeks to develop a theory where "sex and gender" are not just reduced

to or subsumed under the “mode of production” such that the oppression of women becomes “a reflex of economic forces” (203). In doing this, she insists on the need to see production and reproduction, as well as “sexual systems” (209) and “economic and political arrangements,” as intricately and multiply intertwined. In her discussion of Marx and Engels, she conceptualizes sex/gender systems as in part an organizing of bodies and social relations to meet biological needs, one structured by what Marx calls the ‘historical and moral element’ that partially shapes the content of the requirements for the reproduction of the worker. This element determines, for example, that a wife is necessary for the a worker, that women do housework instead of men, and that women do not inherit property or assume positions of religious and political authority (163-64). It is within this sex/gender system that Rubin claims the oppression of women can be located and analyzed.

Rubin’s conceptualization of the sex/gender system interacts productively with the concept of affective capacity and its reproduction. The schema that social and economic forces take “raw material” (in Rubin’s case, biology, or “females”) and transform them into products of these forces (socially constituted means for satisfying needs, or domesticated women) can also model the affective flows and reproduction that I have laid out. Affective capacity is to some extent a “raw material,”⁶ and Rubin’s “biological needs” might include the replenishment of affective capacity, and affect can be channeled, shaped, and appropriated by social forces, for example the affective relations of capitalism. Crucially, this can include the direction of bodies into socially shaped roles delimited through the differential structuring of those bodies’ essential powers. Rubin’s framework may enable an examination of the way that the social routing of affective capacities helps constitute the categories man and woman, and the oppression of one by the other. In this sense, sex/gender systems include an affective component. There is, presumably,

a more or less similar affective capacity in different kinds of bodies for providing care and nurturance, or to perform the kinds of labor necessary for the reproduction of labor capacity. However, these potentials can be channeled repeatedly over time so that assigning such activities to a limited group appears natural or inevitable in a way that obscures how social forces – i.e., an *affective sex/gender system* – work on those capacities for reproducing life. I thus claim that an investigation grounded in Marxism and affect becomes one potential project answering Rubin’s call for modes of “Marxian analysis of sex/gender systems” that interrogate these systems not as “ahistorical emanations” but as “products of historical human activity” (204). Affective Marxist feminism could productively take up one variety of this task by historicizing the general theoretical account of affect, the body, and reproduction I have developed thus far to examine particular forces, relations, objects, and historical moments constituting sex/gender systems that oppressively assign the work of reproducing societies, bodies, and life itself to women.

Lise Vogel: social reproduction

Lise Vogel examines Marx, Engels, and the Marxist tradition from the perspective of social reproduction in her *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (2013 [1983]). Arguing that one occasionally finds in the “mature” Marx the “rudiments of a theoretical foundation for analysing the situation of women from the point of view” of social reproduction and reproduction of labor power (60), Vogel locates oppression in social reproduction (8-9) and asserts that socialist or Marxist feminism must proceed from and expand upon Marx’s account of reproduction.⁷ This feminist standpoint on social reproduction starts from the Marxist observation that labor power has to be reproduced: the “reproduction of labour-power is a condition of production, for it reposit[s] or replaces the labour-power necessary for production” (144).⁸ In Vogel’s account, most societies organize social reproduction through a division of

labor assigning women the role of performing the labor that maintains and reproduces labor capacity, especially work that nurtures and socializes children (152). While the “exact form” dominating relations of social reproduction take varies, the “arrangement is ordinarily legitimated by [men’s] domination of women and reinforced by institutionalised structures of” oppression (153). Domestic labor, for example, thus has “a material character” analyzable “in terms of social reproduction as a whole” when considered in relation to the “maintenance and reproduction of labour-power” (32-33).

Affect clearly complements Vogel’s account of social reproduction. Vogel understands labor power as “a latent capacity borne by a human being,” and “its potentiality is realised when labour-power is put to use - consumed - in a labour-process”; social reproduction therefore involves the replacement of labor power (143-44). The language of the labor power being reproduced as a capacity that human laborers bear and actualize is similar to my own reading of Marx and Marxist feminism, although Vogel does not herself take this theorization in anything like an affective direction; as I discussed above, reproduction is always affective reproduction. Vogel claims that Marx’s discussion of ‘productive consumption’ “implies” a concept of reproduction “operat[ing] at the level of class-relations and social reproduction as a whole” that “would cover the maintenance not only of present wage-workers but of future· and past wage-workers (such as children, aged and disabled persons, the unemployed),” a category that contains “those who are not currently wage-workers but take part in the process of individual consumption (such as housewives)” (67). I argue that the maintenance of all of these kinds of people involves a regeneration of their capacities for affecting and being affected. Indeed, Vogel indicates that this productive consumption linked to social reproduction is an expansive category, comprising the consumption of “means of subsistence – food, housing, clothing, and the like”

that lead to the result the workers “maintain themselves” (66-67). I suggest we add affective capacity and the essential powers of the body into the “and the like” from Vogel. In a later work reevaluating her earlier account, Vogel notes that the meaning of the reproduction of labor power is continually shifting (2000, 153), and that throughout the 1990s it tended to lose its Marxist and theoretical character in favor of functionalist and/or empirical study (154). Despite these changes, she argues that gendered economic processes and trends in the 1990s demand a renewal in theorizing “capitalist social reproduction” and especially domestic labor’s role in that reproduction (168-69). I suggest that a Marxist-Spinozan and feminist focus on affective capacity in its reproduction is one fruitful critical pursuit along these lines. If we are to locate oppression in the processes and relations of social reproduction as Vogel suggests, then this implicates an exploration of the affective forces that help constitute those processes and relations, especially as they relate to the division of labor.

Rosemary Hennessy: The human need for sensation and a critique of affect

Rosemary Hennessy, in her *Profit and Pleasure* (2000), presents perhaps the ‘hardest case’ for the viability of my account of affect and reproduction in the context of Marxist feminist theorizing, and for an affective reading of Marxist feminism. She offers a sustained critique of Deleuzean theories of affect from a Marxist feminist perspective, and I consequently want to spend the most time engaging her work. Hennessy provides a challenging opportunity to reevaluate the entire framework I have developed; it is hence important to explore her broader critique in addition to focusing on a single concept, as I have done with my more selective theoretical encounters with Rubin and Vogel.

One concept important in Hennessy’s text is that of the human need for sensation and affect, which she understands as one of the “many basic human needs”, the meeting of which

“capitalism has outlawed” (22). More specifically, she is interested in the way that “under capitalism sensation and affect have been historically organized so that some ways of meeting these needs have been considered legitimate while others have been” proscribed (22). This framework situates this need for sensation and affect, which she calls a “species need” having the same status as needs for “education, leisure time, health care, food, and shelter” (22). More precisely:

Human needs also include the ability to exercise certain human potentials. As a species, humans have many capacities — for intellect, invention, communication; the capacity for sensation and affect and for affective social relations is another. [...] Moreover, many human affective capacities are integrated in the satisfaction of vital human needs in that they mediate the social relations through which these needs are provided. Affective needs are inseparable from the social component of most need satisfaction, then, but they also constitute human needs in themselves... (210-11)

In her history of the shaping of sexual identity and subjectivity by capitalism, she focuses in part on the way that capitalism organizes and disciplines this need for sensation and affect. This inquiry into the organization of pleasure, sensation, and affect interrogates the “structures of desire” and “formations of subjectivities” thereby produced (35). Her Marxist critique of the capitalist structuring of sexuality, sensation, and need opens onto an alternative political vision. Ultimately, Hennessy argues that if “we no longer ignore affect in the calculus of human needs, we create the possibility of “forging a collective standpoint for oppositional – even revolutionary – forms of consciousness” that “acknowledge how political agency, practice, and commitment are motivated, complicated, and undermined by our human capacity for affect” (208). This relation of affect and need – one foreclosed by capitalism – holds radical potential for her.

Hennessy criticizes Deleuze and Guattari’s account of desire from *Anti-Oedipus* and Massumi’s elaboration of affect, both on their own terms and as they relate to one another (70-72; 212-15). She also explicitly opposes her account of the “human capacity for sensation and

affect” to accounts of “sensation-affect” as “the motor of production” – presumably a reference to Deleuze and Guattari – or “prediscursive matter or energy” – apparently referring to Massumi (72). Not only do I want to examine the potential of a Marxian account of affective capacity in light of her theorizing, I want to explore these particular critiques. Hennessy situates Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* as in some ways the exemplar of what she discusses as the “postmodern left’s” “turn to pleasure and desire as categories of experience outside culture-ideology and prior to all social production” (71-72): “desire in the form of energy flows between organ-machines” – Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘desiring-production’ – is “the starting point of social life” and the “basis of social production,” and in her reading, Deleuze and Guattari “locate desire”, the “very matter of life,” “outside of history” (70).

Her critique of this notion is threefold. First, she maintains that Deleuze and Guattari make it “impossible” to analyze the ways the “content and the forms the desiring subject has taken change from one historical formation to another and in different phases of capitalism” (70). Second, she claims that in *Anti-Oedipus*, “the separation of sexuality from historical and material production has become complete” and “the structures of exploitation on which capitalist production depends have completely disappeared” even though Deleuze and Guattari claim some interest to theorize desire in relation to capitalism (71). Third, and more generally, she situates Deleuze and Guattari as part of broader academic trajectories – alongside Butler, Rubin, “avant-garde queer theory,” much of cultural studies – that at best have an “ideological affiliation” with late capitalism and at worst are allied with forces of late capitalism in “helping to consolidate a hegemonic postmodern culture” (68-69).⁹ While approving of Massumi’s efforts to work against “postmodern theories” that “ignore emotion and affect” and to develop an interface between affect, consciousness, and “social elements,” she argues that his “reduction of the material to

matter” – which she sees as “similar” to Deleuze and Guattari – “undercuts his insights” (212-14). Looking at Deleuze and Guattari and Massumi collectively, Hennessey contends that this sort of affect ends up as “a corporeal energy autonomous from the division of labor” (215).

I disagree with this particular reading of Deleuze and Guattari and of Massumi, and of desire and affect in that sort of theoretical tradition. I would contend that my own project performs precisely the kind of inquiry into the organization of affect under capitalism that Hennessey calls for, and that such a project is at the very least latent in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. The lengthy third chapter of *Anti-Oedipus* presents a quasi-history of varying modes of desiring-production in relation to different “social machines,” including two sections – “The Civilized Capitalist Machine” and “Capitalist Representation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 222–62) – specifically taking up flows of desire as they interact with capitalism. While neither historicist nor strictly Marxist although they continually turn to Marx, Deleuze and Guattari are quite interested in changes in modes of desiring- and social-production. Capitalism itself evinces some level of specificity, with its “singular nature of” a “conjunction” of “deterritorialized flows,” which they read into Marx as “the deterritorialized worker” with their labor capacity to sell and the “decoded money that has become capital and is capable of buying” this labor capacity” (224-25). That is, capitalism assembles and channels desire in particular ways, generating singular and contingent modes of production, representation, signification, family, material psychiatry, and so on. Rather than separating desire from social and material production, as Hennessey claims Deleuze and Guattari end up doing, they insist that desire always invests a social field and – even if desire is indeed a kind of “primordial matter of energy flows” (Hennessey 2000, 70) – it always conjoins with particular social machines. As Deleuze and Guattari write, the “truth of the matter is that *social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate*

conditions” (1983, 29; their emphasis). It is not the case that desiring-production functions in total isolation, but that it constantly interacts with these determinate conditions of particular social formations and their social machines. Nor is it the case that desire itself is exclusive of social organization.¹⁰

Moreover, affect or corporeal energy need not be severed from concerns of the division of labor, as Hennessy contends they are. Instead, I would contend that *affective capacity is channeled and in many ways appropriated through the division of labor*: it is in part the hierarchal division of labor that bifurcates workers – whose affective capacities are intensified but appropriated in the labor process of actualizing that capacity – from the bourgeoisie who benefit from the affective capture in capitalist production. Rather than dividing affect and the division of labor, there is a particular affective component to the division of labor. One of the effects of the gendered divisions of labor is to disproportionately yoke a certain subset of people to reproductive labor. In other words, I would contend that one of the divisions of a division of labor is a differential distribution of affective relations, capacities, and so forth.

Even if one were to concede Hennessy’s claim that Deleuze and Guattari and Massumi present theories of affect that are on their own too ahistorical, or lack specific enough accounts of “structures of exploitation on which capitalist production depends” (2000, 71), it does not follow that affect theories of this kind always necessarily have these potential faults. If anything, Hennessy’s critiques, as well as her broader account of sensation and affect, point to the need to assemble and think through the possible interactions between a Marxist and/or Marxist feminist critique of capital and Deleuzean affect theory. Ultimately, my argument is that Hennessy’s Marxist feminist project on the one hand, and affect theory proceeding from Deleuze, Guattari, and Massumi on the other, can and should be articulated together, not constructed as exclusive

theoretical or political endeavors. Hennessy contends that theories of desire proceeding from Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Deleuze and Guattari are effects of or complicit with late capitalism. For her, “knowing desire as freely mobile, indiscriminate micro-energies is itself an effect of late capitalism”, and the notion of desire as energy flows is particularly well suited to a capitalist regime of hyperconsumption and accumulation” (196-97). I would instead argue that affect, understood in similar ways, has the potential to be a fundamental critical tool for illuminating one particular mode of capitalist reproduction and capitalist domination: the way that it captures affective capacity for its own reproduction. To fully critique the capitalist organization of need, sensation, desire, and affect, as Hennessy wishes to do, we need an encounter between Marx, Marxist feminism, and this sort of theory of affect as mobile bodily energy.

Indeed, Hennessy regularly discusses affect and sensation in the language of capacity. “As a species, humans have many capacities,” Hennessy writes, including “the capacity for sensation and affect and for affective social relations”; ultimately “all people deserve to have the conditions available that will allow them to exercise and develop their affective capacities” (210-11). Reading this specifically in terms of material affective capacity accesses the full range of affectivity and corporeality of Hennessy’s account, as well to conceptual resources for rearticulating a Marxist critique of capitalism attentive to the affective features of bodily existence. This sort of reading is embryonic in Hennessy’s own work: she suggests at one point that “we might even say affective potential is included in what Marx means by labor,” and that even if Marx does not “explicitly name them as such, affective needs are part of the human potential for ‘self-realization’ that Marx often refers to when he contends that the development of needs is historically contingent on the development of human potential” (215). My own reading

suggests that the most generative way of carrying out the kind project that Hennessy intends is through a deep engagement between Marx, Marxist feminism, and affect theory as such.

This becomes clearer when turning to Hennessy's particular theorization of the capacity and need for sensation and affect. She incisively demonstrates throughout the text the ways that capitalism works to organize sensation and affect such that "some ways of meeting these needs have been considered legitimate while others have been" suppressed (22). More specifically when it comes to sexuality – one mode "through which the human capacity for sensation and affect and the human need for social intercourse" are organized – capitalism constitutes patriarchal heterosexuality as the "hegemonic form" of social relation (22). A framework of affective capacity helps to clarify and expand a critical account of some of the mechanisms of this organization and reification of heterosexuality and heteronormativity. In this framework, one of the most important potentialities of the body is to enter into relations and compositions with other bodies so that both can reciprocally reach a higher level of power, a greater capacity for affecting and being affected as a result of that composition. These compositions take multiple forms, and one can speculate these include a wide variety of compositions of bodies (and objects) organized around pleasure, desire, sex, and sensation as various ways to meet what Hennessy calls the need for sensation and affect. If, as Hennessy argues, capitalism organizes capacities for meeting that need to proscribe homosexuality, bisexuality, or other modes of fulfilling these sets of bodily needs and capacities, her work can be extended through a reading of this as the attempted channeling of all affective capacities in the realms of sex and sensation into a highly constricted set of socially sanctioned and organized relations and compositions. Capitalist social formations thus dampen and delimit the vast array of affect as capacity and

power in regards to sexuality. This sort of affective analysis deepens the critical reach of Hennessy's project by rearticulating into an additional register of affect.

More broadly, my own reading resonates with Hennessy's overarching critique of capitalism as such. Within capitalism, she argues, "sensation and affect often get separated from the meeting of human needs" (216). Commodity exchange produces not only commodity fetishism but also "a fracturing of our objective human capacities as sensuous, social beings": "alienation from sensation and affect underpins the organization of commodity production and consumption and the logic of exchange value" (217). Furthermore, exploitation as the appropriation of surplus labor "requires that workers alienate themselves from their human potentials, including their sex-affective potentials," because it "is only by severing her human potential to labor from her needs that the worker can present herself as 'owner' of her labor power" (217). This is consistent with my account of capitalist affective relations: the basic capacity of the worker under capitalism is in many ways amplified through the organization of productive forces under capitalism, but capitalist relations ultimately sever this intensified potential from the actual, long-term needs, bodily integrity, survivability, and power of those laboring bodies through which the capacity is actualized. Moreover, Hennessy specifies some of the mechanisms by which bodily affective capacity is captured in capitalist social formations. Not only can my reading of Marx and Marxist feminism add a crucial affective valence to Hennessy's project as I have demonstrated over the past several pages, but her account of capitalism and the capacity for sensation and affect – even if affect means something different for her – provides added clarity to my own analysis.

Ultimately, our projects share a comparable political-economic-ethical commitment, even as I value the framework of affect to a much greater degree. As "human needs in themselves,"

affective needs demonstrate that “all people deserve to have the conditions available that will allow them to exercise and develop their affective capacities” (210-11). In my terminology building on Spinoza, Deleuze, and Marx, the ethical project is to construct prevailing social conditions and relations that conduct and compose reciprocal and joyful encounters between bodies such that the capacities for affecting and being affected intensify. Within this general framework, Hennessy points to the vital need for particular attention on sexuality and gender in such a social-affective vision. She insists that in the processes of making legible and socially sanctioned certain modes of sensation, affect, and desire, “whole areas of human affective potential are effectively outlawed” (217). Just because they are outlawed, however, does not mean they dissolve away: there always are “unspeakable sensations and affects that do not fall easily into any prescribed categories,” for instance in the way that “the interface between the available modes of intelligibility [i.e., socially legible sexual identity] and human affective and erotic capacity is never complete” (218). The “human potential for sensation and affect” always manifests as “much richer than sanctioned identity categories capture” (218). These spaces – affective compositions, relations, and social organizations of bodies – might be a (the?) crucial site of articulating, practicing, and fighting for alternative, more open futurities. Hennessy suggests reorienting oppositional politics to focus on “addressing and connecting the ways capitalism has outlawed the meeting of so many basic needs,” including the “species need” for sensation and affect (22). Hennessy’s work to situate capitalism, sexuality, and affect on the same plane is vital. In this spirit, there is a profound need to theorize together Marx, Marxist feminism, and affect. Rather than setting affect as a bodily capacity and essential power as opposed to a Marxist feminist account of capitalism, sexuality, and need, an interaction between

the two is fundamental in order to fully interrogate the capitalist organization and limitation of the human need for sensation and affect.

Conclusion: Affective Marxist Feminism, Freedom, and Whiteness

This paper also underscores one of the limits to certain modes of a Spinozan-Deleuzian framework. If the concept of the “the body” becomes too universalized, too singular, too abstract, then it is easy to conceal the ways in which bodies are always already multiply gendered, racialized, sexualized, and so forth. There is no guarantee that certain modes of theorizing affect can or necessarily will engage gender – or race, sex, sexuality, ability, class, and so forth. Such a conceptual framework, however, does *not* inevitably carry out this occlusion. In engaging in an affective reading of Marxist feminism in this paper, I have sought to read affect together with Marxist-materialist feminists to carry out a gendering of the concept of affective capacity vis-à-vis Marx.¹¹ Many concepts coming from Marx that, as Hartmann contends (Hartmann 1979, 7–8), are potentially useful in thinking about gender even as they have no necessary gendered content. Likewise, affective capacity as a concept in general, or in the way it mobilizes Marx- and Marxist feminism-influenced accounts of reproduction requires an active theoretical intervention if it is to be useful for feminism.

I have suggested that Marxist feminism in many ways anticipates some of the central concerns of the affect theory to come after it. It thus supports Weeks’s claim that contemporary discussions of affective and immaterial labor have important lineages in earlier Marxist feminist theorizing, even if these genealogies are obscured or ignored (2007, 233). This point is most clear in the work of Hennessy, who engages affect in a way that is different than the later, more theoretically specific valence the term will gain. Her insights can be elaborated upon by affect at the same time that their work should inform discussions of affect today.

This broader point, though, is applicable to the entire constellation of Marxist feminist thinkers I have assembled. Concepts of reproduction, social reproduction, the sexual division of labor, as well as attention to the body as it is implicated in social forces and to polyvalent modes of power all prefigure central concerns of affect theory. The critique of Marx, focusing Marxist inquiry not just on production but also on reproduction and its connection to production, performs similar theoretical work. I have argued that even when Marxist feminist theorizing conflicts with the mode of affect theory I am articulating, the theoretical task becomes to work through the generativity and the conceptual work done by these tensions. Pursuing these lines of discord can, I think, extend both theoretical projects. An affect-Marx-Marxist feminism assemblage, held together with the Deleuzean-Spinozan concept of affective capacity, amplifies these theories both individually and in relation to one another. Indeed, through the tensions transmitted by and challenging to affect, one might generate new, productive, conceptual resources such as a focus on the affective force of the intertwined material bases of capitalism and patriarchy or a gendered, affective account of social reproduction. This necessitates thinking of affect as a crucial political concern that supplements and in some ways rearticulates other Marxist feminist political discourses, appeals, and resistances, just as it can and should be supplemented and re-elaborated by these others concerns. Affect and Marxist feminism are best understood as constantly and inevitably implicated in and acting upon one another.

To conclude, I would like to very briefly sketch the implications of my reading for the conceptual category of freedom, understood collectively rather than individually. Perhaps most direct among these is a renewed insistence that one cannot assume that something like the liberation of the working class, or a revolution in the mode of production, is ever sufficient for gender liberation, nor is liberation just about including women in productive labor. This, one of

the major lessons of Marxist feminism (e.g. Eisenstein 1979; Mitchell 1966, 18–19; Hartmann 1979, 3), extends to the affective realm. The affective flows and circulations of capitalism *qua* economic system help constitute patriarchy and gender oppression, but the affective structure of the latter is not reducible to the appropriation of proletarian affective capacity. Affect is itself not reducible to economic terms alone, and its oppressive channelings similarly extend beyond the economic realm. From the standpoint of an affective reading of Marxist feminism, a breakdown facilitated by the category of affect of sharp production/reproduction divides, freer relations of the reproduction of affect, an overthrow of the gendered affective division of labor, more open flows and production of sex/affective energy, the meeting of needs for affect outlawed by interacting capitalist, patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist social organization, and so on all constitute affective preconditions for a more open and liberatory sociality of gender.

Affect, then, can offer an additional valence to Eisenstein's understanding of social contradictions that lead to domination but also open possibilities for transformation and liberation. She locates revolutionary potential in the tension between "real conditions" and "possibilities" in capitalist patriarchal society. For her, Marx's "revolutionary ontology," when "extended to women [...] suggests that the possibility of freedom exists alongside exploitation and oppression, since woman is potentially more than what she is" because "what she is today does not determine the outer limits of her capacities" (1979, 9). In the context of this paper, we might say a standpoint such as this can theorize the way in which the *affective* capacities of women exceed the structuring and relations of these capacities – and thus constitute an affective source of transformation. Indeed, Ferguson's "socialist-feminist vision" posits a "society maximising egalitarian and democratic values" that "would, by that fact, tend to maximise reciprocal sex/affective energy and in so doing would increase the amount of sex/affective

energy available to all” (1989, 230).¹² Bodily, affective potential exceeds – or at the very least is able to exceed – its oppressive organization; as a result, one condition of possibility for freedom is the liberated, relational, amplifying flows and interactions of these capacities. As this essay demonstrates, any such account of freedom must pay attention to the gendered organization of affective capacity, in addition to and in its intertwining with capitalist forces and configurations.

This project, though, is ultimately limited due to the whiteness of Marxist feminism, which reproduces many of the exclusions and aporias of Marx himself. While critiquing Marx’s defects in accounting for gender, they exhibit analogous lapses in accounting for race. Gloria Joseph contends that Marxist feminism is usually “race-blind”, in a way that “do[es] a gross injustice to Black women” (1981, 93). When “the reality of the oppression of race relations within the woman question is denied,” they “commit a similar, parallel error” to the one they accuse Marxism of when it “focuses on the class question and shortchanges the woman question” (95). Taking on racism – including racism operating within Marxist feminism itself – becomes a necessary precondition in order to effectuate the “happy divorce of patriarchy, capitalism, and racism” (103; 106).

This occlusion of racial difference and racism operates in several linked ways. First, much feminist work ignores the historical reality and persistent effects of slavery, including the particular ways it violently disciplines black women’s bodies and structures their labor and reproduction (Davis 1983, chap. 1; Spillers 2003a [1984]; Spillers 2003b [1987]). Second, black women in the United States have a different relation to the family, motherhood, and reproduction than white women (Spillers 2003b). Domestic life was the one sphere of quasi-autonomy for Black women during slavery (Davis 1983, 14–18; Joseph 1981, 95) in a way distinct from more “hierarchal sexual roles” in most white families (Davis 1983, 12), yet feminist work on

mothering has often “lacked an adequate [...] race analysis” (Collins 2009, 188). As a result, family, the domestic realm, and motherhood may be more polyvalent for women of color than much white feminist theorizing of it allows. Third, ideologies of gender roles operate very differently for black women; the bourgeois notion of the housewife – either as object of critique or of celebration – is meaningful for black women in the US only as an impossibility (Beale 1970, 110–11; Caraway 1991, 100–105). Fourth, the specificity of the presence of black women as domestic workers for white families has gone regularly unacknowledged in feminist literatures (Beale 1970, 111–14; Davis 1983, 90–97; Collins 2009, 13–15). This directly challenges the Marxist feminist wages for housework campaign (Davis 1983, 230–42). Finally, categories central to white feminism, including some categories articulated in Marxist feminism, have different meanings, implications, and relations to concrete experience for black women. These include domestic labor – which in white feminist theory often ignores black women’s domestic work – and reproduction, which can occlude the specific struggles fought by black women around fertility and reproduction (Carby 1982). Supposedly universal categories in feminist theory, including that of “women”, are often based in particularistic, white experiences; when difference is brought in, it is often rendered pre-theoretical instead of having broader conceptual import (Baca Zinn et al. 1986, 296–97). While not all these exclusions operate in all Marxist feminist work, taken collectively, the Marxist feminist account of “the woman question [...] has never truly embraced Black women” (Joseph 1981, 93).

While I emphatically believe that the sketch of affective freedom I construct above is a crucial theoretical vision, its scope and generativity are theoretically and materially limited if the affective bodies of the vision are implicitly white. There are prospective connections between Marxist feminist perspectives and black feminist work, but they require attention to racial

difference in affect and Marxist feminist theory. Future work ought to explore these possible connections, for instance by engaging bell hooks on the redefinition of work (1984, chap. 7), Angela Davis on the future of work vis-à-vis gender (1983, chap. 13), or Hortense Spillers on the category of “flesh” (Spillers 2003b; on flesh and racialization, also see Weheliye 2014). If Marxist feminism is included in this category, and if it is to realize its articulated liberatory potential – most especially in my project, its affective potentials – its own problematization and revision is essential.

¹ While some authors distinguish sharply between socialist feminism and Marxist feminism and materialist feminism, I follow Weeks (2011, 236n15) in preferring the term “Marxist feminism” as a general signifier even when drawing on sources labeled as socialist feminism. As she notes, the “distinction between Marxist feminism and socialist feminism is not always clear” (236n15).

² Weeks cites two narrations of feminism that do this in regards to Marxist feminism (2011, 115-18). One posits Marxist feminism as thesis, radical feminism as antithesis, and socialist feminism as synthesis that transcends earlier versions. A second narrates ‘essentialist feminisms’ of the 1970s – liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist feminisms – as challenged and surpassed by anti-racist, third world, and poststructural feminisms. Weeks contends that both of these accounts of feminist pasts posit, to some extent, these earlier feminist projects as irretrievably failed, mistaken, and frozen as mere historical artifacts.

³ On the many varieties of affect theory, see Gregg and Seigworth (2010, 6–10). For example of a different strand, there are several thinkers who share many of the same commitments as Clough or Massumi, but retain some notion of subjectivity and do not separate ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ so distinctly – or at least turn to ‘feeling’ as a category pointing to some overlap (Ahmed 2004; Ahmed 2010; Cvetkovich 2012; Terada 2001). In general, I hold that one ought to be flexible in their use of “emotion” and “affect”, using them in a way that is responsive to the demands of and fit with the problem and texts at hand. Thus, in this project, I mostly turn to affect via Spinoza and Deleuze; for other projects, different kinds of theory on emotion and affect will be more apt.

⁴ Elsewhere: “...define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, [and] many things change. You will define an animal, or a human being, not by its form, its organs, and its functions, and not as a subject either; you will define it by the affects of which it is capable. Affective capacity, with a maximum threshold and a minimum threshold, is a constant notion in Spinoza. Take any animal and make a list of affects. [...] [D]efine bodies, animals, or humans by the affects they are capable of” (Deleuze 1988, 124–125).

⁵ In Berg’s recent formulation, reproductive labor is that which produces affects, bodies, desires, social systems, etc., not things (2014, 164). I would add to this account that affect infuses all of these realms instead of being localizable as a separate object of (re)production.

⁶ For instance, we might think of affect as raw material in terms of Clough’s theorization of affect as “pre-individual bodily forces augmenting or diminishing a body’s capacity to act” pointing to a “dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally” (2010, 207), or to Massumi’s conception of affect as

“autonomous” (2002, chap. 1). It is interesting to note here that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reads Rubin alongside Deleuze and Guattari – in addition to Foucault – as engaged in projects akin to one another in the way they talk up the problematic of “value” and “coding” arising out of Marx (1999, 103–109).

⁷ Vogel is not the only Marxist feminist to focus on social reproduction. See for example: the wages for housework movement (Dalla Costa 1972; Malos 1978); the domestic labor debate (Fee 1976; Mackintosh 1979); or Petchesky 1990, introduction;. I focus on Vogel for her effort to provide a book-length account of Marx and Marxist feminism from the standpoint of social reproduction and to synthesize many of these debates within the movement.

⁸ Labor power must be available to set the labor process in motion (144), and the energies of productive laborers must continually be restored (Vogel 2000, 157).

⁹ In the concluding chapter to *Profit and Pleasure*, she summarizes this broader argument thusly: “I have suggested throughout the previous chapters that the disappearance of capitalism in cultural and social theory is not an oversight but is itself the mark of certain affiliations between a new bourgeois ruling bloc and the emergence of new forms of consciousness for late capitalism” (209).

¹⁰ They make this point near the end of the long third chapter, after tracing and then retracing the various quasi-historical modes of social-production: “So we come back to the question: in each case what is the relationship between social production and desiring-production, once it is said that they have identical natures and differing regimes? [...] In short, the general theory of society is a generalized theory of flows; it is in terms of the latter that one must consider the relationship of social production to desiring-production, the variations of this relationship in each case, and the limits of this relationship in the capitalist system” (262).

¹¹ Feminist new materialisms, of course, theorize a related, but different, sort of feminist-oriented materialism. On feminist new materialism, cf. van der Tuin 2009; Coole and Frost 2010; Grosz 2010; Frost 2011; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, a recent special issue of *Women: A Cultural Review* on “Feminist Matters: The Politics of New Materialism” edited by Hinton and van der Tuin (2014), and Washick et al. 2015.

¹² Ferguson continues: “This would occur by minimizing the repressive aspect of social hierarchies – husband/wife, parent/child, teacher/student, boss/worker – which reduce the quantity and quality of sex/affective energy by one-way channeling and control” (230). Ultimately, these Marxist feminist visions are vital extensions – able to articulated in the register of affect – of the affectivity of Marx’s “revolutionary ontology,” to use Eisenstein’s words. These notions also extend my above reading of Hennessy, and would implicate affect in Mies’s vision in which the “aim of all work and human endeavour is not a never-ending expansion of wealth and commodities, but *human happiness* (as the early socialists had seen it), or the *production of life*” (1986, 211–12).

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