Nealry fifty years after its first publication, the conceptual force of Mario Tronti’s *Operai e capitale* remains undiminished. Here Tronti reverses the usual line of causation assumed by structuralist accounts of capital to propose that Schumpeterian innovation lies entirely in the hands of labor. Writing in the very first hours of the Fordist crisis, Tronti suggested that it was workers’ struggles at their slackest and most undignified—expressed in defection, sabotage, absenteeism, and the wildcat strike—that would force capital to undertake the extended restructuring we now refer to as “post-Fordism.” Labor is at its most creative and destructive, he argued, when it withdraws from the scene of production, refusing the mediated politics of recognition and redistribution alike in favor of mass defection.

Yet the refusal of work that prompted the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism was much more expansive in scope than the Italian operaisti were able to imagine. The practice of mass defection was never the sole privilege of the white factory worker, the standard wage laborer of Fordist mass production, who more often than not followed the example of other, more marginal classes of paid and unpaid labor in their flight from the
conditions of Fordist production. In the United States, the most uncompromising attacks on Fordist mass production were launched by Detroit’s nonaligned union movement, the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, which staged a series of wildcat strikes starting in the late 1960s, protesting the hazardous conditions, accelerated work rhythms, and compulsory overtime that were imposed on nonwhite (African American and Arab) and female workers in particular.

The crisis of Fordism, moreover, extended well beyond the shop floor into the intimate space of the household. For what we call Fordism was never only about the consensus between (white) industrial labor unions and capital, but relied also on a particular configuration of familial politics, one that in the United States was marked by the gendered and racialized divisions of reproductive labor incorporated in the family wage. When white women exited the Fordist household en masse to join the paid labor force during the late 1960s, post-Fordism put the “private” to work, newly restructuring the labor market around “services” that were once performed as unpaid work in the private space of the home. During the same period, unprecedented numbers of African American women left their positions as paid household labor in white homes, progressively reducing the gap between their own and white women’s wages as they moved into better-paid clerical and white-collar jobs. Today paid domestic labor remains no less gendered and racialized, but its fault lines are defined by the external rather than the internal border of the state as undocumented migrants replace African American women as domestic workers employed by the middle-class household. Alongside these shifts in the distribution of household labor, we should also include a consideration of the welfare reform movement of the mid-1960s, decisive as it was for the subsequent restructuring of the post-Fordist labor market. As the animating force behind this movement, African American single mothers challenged the implicit racial bias of the Fordist family wage when they demanded to receive welfare benefits on an equal basis with white women. Although briefly successful in its efforts to expand and increase welfare benefits, the welfare reform movement subsequently gave way to a sustained conservative onslaught that has transformed welfare into an intensive site for renewed labor exploitation.

As the organizational form that emerged from crisis, post-Fordism presides over the breakdown of the politicoeconomic categories that structured the short-lived Fordist-Keynesian era, blurring the boundaries between production and reproduction, waged and unwaged labor, welfare and work. The new household economics developed by Chicago school economist Gary
Becker represents one of the first attempts to theorize this process within the limited framework of orthodox, neoclassical economics: not incidentally its exponents in the law and economics movement have been some of the keenest observers and champions of commercial markets in paid domestic, sexual, and other intimate services, including the commercial sale of blood, organs, and reproductive tissues. As both theorists of the new household economics and their critics have observed, post-Fordism internalizes the boundaries that Fordism placed on commodification, pushing back at the limits between production and social reproduction, production and consumption, and production and circulation to turn even the most intimate bodily functions into exchangeable commodities and services. Welfare reform has been pivotal to the configuration of new labor markets in personal and domestic services. When nonwhite women demanded to receive welfare benefits on a par with white women in the late 1960s, conservative forces responded by repositioning welfare recipients as a below-minimum-wage labor force, compelled to work in exchange for benefits that were previously underwritten by the state. If Fordism configured welfare as a counterpart to the white family wage, post-Fordism puts welfare back to work, making workfare one of the most instructive laboratories of contingent labor practice in the low-level service sector. In the United States, it also reconfigures the prison as a thriving labor market for the underemployed surplus of African American men, in what must be seen as the masculine counterpart to feminized workfare.

Post-Fordism, it might be said, responds to the multiple challenges launched by Fordism’s nonstandard subjects by destandardizing labor itself. The generic post-Fordist worker is no longer the employee, tied to the firm by a long-term “contract of service,” but the independent contractor, who moves from firm to firm and from client to client selling “contracts for service.” By divesting itself of the long-term contract of employment, the post-Fordist workplace frees itself of the burdens of social insurance and outsources risk to the contractor in “personal services,” who thereby becomes responsible for hedging against the whole spectrum of vital contingencies once insured by the state. As generic wage labor comes to coincide with the hitherto peripheral figure of the independent contractor, the burden of noninsured risk devolves entirely to labor. It is not only the case, then, that post-Fordism undermines the distinction between the “time of life” and the “time of work,” but it also dismantles the standard metric of the Fordist/Taylorist labor contract. As the standard working day and week are supplanted by intermittent call work, night work, overtime,
nine-day fortnights, weekend shifts, and annualized work times, a plethora of new contractual forms have emerged to constrain workers to the contingencies of a flexible labor market. These range from fixed-term contracts to on-call contracts, zero-hour contracts (which do not guarantee any work at all but require the employee to be on call at any time should service be required), and annualized hour contracts (which allow the employer to intensify work times according to fluctuations in demand). Under post-Fordist conditions, the wage itself has become something of a speculative proposition—contingent, in many cases, on unspecified hours of unpaid work readiness, conditional on the achievement of performance indicators, or fully integrated into the volatilities of the stock market (as in the case of stock options as supplements to traditional wages).

As the force of twentieth-century labor law weakens, standard wage labor no longer constitutes the centripetal point around which nonstandard forms of labor gravitate but is, rather, an exception to the general rule of contingent labor practices. If the socially averaged time of abstract labor served as the metric for Karl Marx’s labor theory of value, it would seem that the nonstandard time of the unpredictable event has come to define the abstract conditions of labor in the contemporary moment. Such a proposition demands that we rethink the question of the “law of value” as posited by Marx in the first volume of *Capital*. Under post-Fordist conditions, we might say, *contingent labor has become socially necessary labor*. What we might define, then, as the post-Fordist law of value no longer works through the statistical normalization of time (the law of large numbers) but rather by affirming the lawfulness of contingency itself. In its contemporary form, the law of value seeks to transform contingency into necessity—an imperative that finds its metaphysical counterpart in a certain kind of speculative materialism.

Nowhere is this imperative more forcefully enacted than in the contemporary experience of workfare, where the nominally “free contract” of contingent labor merges with the visibly “unfree contract” of mutual obligation.

**Workfare: Making Necessity out of Contingency**

Precisely because of its tenuous connection to the liberal ideal of “free wage labor,” welfare-to-work (*workfare* in the United States, *work for the dole* in Australia) has also been one of the most intensive sites for the proliferation of new forms of labor discipline, psychological interventionism, and income management. The mutual obligation contract exposes the paternalist and
authoritarian face of labor flexibilization, turning unemployment into a full-time job and employment into a state of voluntary servitude, both at below-minimum wages. Workfare reinvents the classical liberal contradiction between willfulness and coercion in a future-oriented mode—attuning its psychological interventions to the problem of flexible “work preparedness” and prospective “job readiness.” Its work “activation” strategies (a term coined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) demand immediate and relentless availability to the most volatile of labor markets especially on the part of those who have no long-term prospect of formal employment. Work is a contingent event in which one must have faith, even when states have long since abandoned their structural commitment to full employment.

In every instance, welfare reform represents a response (albeit a belated one) to the relative “democratization” of work and welfare that characterized the late years of Fordism and propelled the ensuing phase of capitalist restructuring we refer to as “post-Fordism.” When Bill Clinton promised to “end welfare as we know it,” he was responding to more than two decades of conservative attacks on the expansion of the welfare state to those it had historically excluded—African American women in particular. Welfare reform represented the triumph of an intellectual vision promoted by socially conservative and neoliberal think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Manhattan Institute and refined, most notably, by the father of neoliberal neopaternalism, Lawrence Mead. Following on more than a decade of state-based experiments in workfare, the 1996 Welfare Reform Act (otherwise known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act; PRWORA) enacted the most far-reaching changes to federal welfare (and labor) laws since the 1930s. PRWORA introduced an absolute time limit of five years on welfare eligibility, required that welfare recipients engage in compulsory work programs, and imposed unforgiving sanctions, including a total cut-off of benefits, on the noncompliant. When George W. Bush reauthorized PRWORA in 2002, states were no longer required to respect the minimum wage for workfare workers. In practice, as Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore have shown in some detail, workfare became structural to the lower ends of the service labor market, undercutting unionized and minimum-wage work in the fast-food and municipal cleaning industries by supplying them with a constant reserve of underpaid, forced labor.

In Britain, the Labour Party introduced a comprehensive welfare-to-work program in 1998 targeting the young and long-term unemployed
rather than single mothers. The new Welfare Reform Bill currently wending its way through Parliament threatens to go much farther than its Labour predecessors in emulating the punitive dimensions of US workfare. Drafted in consultation with Mead, the current Welfare Reform Bill—put forward by the conservative Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith—mandates compulsory workfare for welfare recipients (the empirical face of Big Society voluntarism) and extends work “preparedness” programs to the disabled and single parents. Together with the recent dramatic increases in student fees that seek to restrict “creative” and “cognitive” labor to the upper middle classes, the intensification of workfare stands at the cutting edge of postcrisis austerity politics.

Australia has been one of the most conscientious advocates of neopaternalist welfare reforms, ranging from mutual obligation contracts to the outsourcing of welfare services to private contractors and charities. Introduced by the conservative coalition government in 1997, workfare has been deployed to supply cheap casual labor to the low-wage service sector, to faith-based charities, to private agricultural properties declared “emergency zones” because of long-standing drought, and to public events such as the 2000 Olympic Games. However, the federal government’s most recent and extreme experiment in welfare and labor reform has been visited on indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, in what amounts to both an import of neopaternalist welfare politics from the United States (Mead has been an invited guest of conservative indigenous welfare advocate Noel Pearson, in Cape York) and a return to Australia’s long-standing history of indentured indigenous labour.

The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), launched by the conservative Howard government in 2007 and continued under Labour, combined the methods of militarized humanitarian intervention and the neopaternalist micromanagement of everyday life to roll out a set of welfare reforms that are without precedent in the international arena. One of the first measures undertaken by the NTER was to phase out a voluntary employment program managed by indigenous communities and to replace it with a compulsory form of workfare designed to broker labor to nonindigenous employers. By abolishing the existing community employment program, thousands of indigenous people were moved onto welfare rolls, where they became immediately subject to the punitive conditions of the NTER. Peculiar to the NTER and unparalleled in any other neoliberal welfare reform program is the imposition of compulsory income management, by which 50 percent of welfare benefits are
quarantined and selectively allocated to restricted budget items by the federal government. Again, this measure is strongly reminiscent of the history of quarantining indigenous wages under the Aboriginal Protection Act that endured up until the 1960s. The exceptional nature of the intervention was signaled by the government’s decision to temporarily suspend the Racial Discrimination Act in order to target indigenous communities in particular. Retrospectively, however, it is clear that the NTER was not so much exceptional as exemplary. In 2009, the Labour government announced its plans to extend income management to all classes of welfare recipients across the country, introducing a trial scheme in the Northern Territory in 2011.

In each of these cases, workfare’s neocontractualism confirms the enduring symbiosis between “free” and “unfree” wage labor to the capitalist mode of production. The permanent flexibility of contingent labor is not without risks even from the point of view of capital, in the sense that it may also translate as worker noncompliance and labor flightiness. It is precisely this threat of surplus flexibilization that workfare strives to preempt. By turning the most menial forms of contingent labor into compulsory labor, workfare creates a permanent and captive labor force even in the most insecure of labor markets. Workfare, it might be said, performs the quasi-theological task of transforming contingent labor into socially necessary labor, or *contingency into necessity*. As such it imposes “faith” in the contingent prospect of work as both a moral and an economic obligation for all classes of labor.

Here it should be recalled that some of the first urban experiments in workfare—those carried out in New York City during the 1970s—were the state’s response to a fiscal crisis induced by the city’s financial sector. Faced with the consequences of the oil crisis and the looming threat of default from developing nations, Wall Street responded by imposing a domestic austerity program on New York City itself, refusing to roll over the city’s short-term debt unless it undertook a comprehensive reform of its local welfare state and unionized municipal workforce. Today, as the liquidity crisis in the financial sector has assumed the form of sovereign debt crisis, the intensification of workfare represents the state’s most punitive (because most desperate) effort to restore the profitability of capital. The credibility of the US dollar (or some other form of global reserve currency) depends, in the final instance, on the state’s ability to restore faith in the value of labor—that is, to transform contingent labor into necessary labor.
Workfare = Familyfare

And yet we fail to grasp the full significance of neoliberal welfare/labor reform when we abstract from its interventions into the intimate space of the household. For architects of welfare reform such as Mead, such interventions are far from representing a peripheral aspect of workfare reform: inasmuch as poverty is thought to indicate a breakdown of the proper relationship between production and reproduction, the restoration of sexual order is pivotal to the neoliberal vision of social redemption. As Angela Mitropoulos has argued, the politics of the household are as foundational to the emerging neoliberal workfare consensus as they were to the Keynesian welfare state. Neoliberalism may have signaled the demise of the family wage and the Keynesian “sexual contract,” with its sharp divisions of labor between the formal productive sphere and the reproductive sphere of unpaid domestic work, but in its place it has established its own vision of the familial, with its own equally assertive divisions of sexual and reproductive obligation.

Although it is not without its emulators, US welfare reform represents, to date, the most egregious and unparalleled attempt to legislate the “sexual contract” of post-Fordism. In language inspired by the Thomist theology of new natural law theory, the opening preamble of PRWORA proclaims: “1) Marriage is the foundation of a successful society; 2) Marriage is an essential institution of a successful society, which promotes the interests of children; . . . 3) Promotion of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is integral to successful child-rearing and the well-being of children.” These formulations were more than rhetorical. As part of the package of reforms enacted under PRWORA, federal legislation required states to increase their efforts to police, track down, and enforce paternity obligations, stipulating that the biological father of a child on welfare must be forced to pay child support (to be deducted from state welfare payments) whether or not the mother wished to maintain a relationship with him. And in what must be understood as a blurring of the boundaries between the free and unfree sexual contract, subsequent legislation sought to compel biological fathers not only to fulfill the role of wage earners but also to marry the mothers of their biological children. The most punitive provisions were reserved for the unwed welfare mother—the culmination of several decades of new right-wing antiwelfare rhetoric directed at African American and Latina welfare recipients. Yet PRWORA also included measures to promote married, heterosexual procreation in the wider population, allocating millions of dollars in bonus funds for states that could demonstrate they had successfully reduced ille-
gitimate births and abortions, and setting aside budgets to finance public abstinence-only sex education, marriage promotion, and responsible fatherhood programs.

Taken together, these extraordinary provisions both redefined the figure of legitimate reproduction (replacing the Fordist model of male breadwinner and female housewife with the ideal of the working family) and reasserted already existing divisions of labor in the post-Fordist service sector. In spite of the fact that many welfare recipients were already engaged in informal labor or alternated between precarious work and welfare, PRWORA put subsidized reproductive labor back to work (that is, at below minimum wage) by forcing welfare mothers into menial service positions and placing a lifetime limit of five years on welfare eligibility. Workfare has turned the welfare benefit into the de facto minimum wage and transformed welfare recipients themselves into an underclass of unfree service laborers. Women of color have long occupied the lowest rungs of the post-Fordist service economy. PRWORA reconfirmed and solidified these divisions of labor, not only by demoting African American and Latina women to even lower levels of remuneration (and what is effectively a form of unfree labor) but also by intervening in the labor market in reproductive labor performed by migrants. In the same year as PRWORA, Congress passed an immigration reform law restricting access to welfare by migrant single mothers, the class of migrant most likely to work in paid care work for private households. Taking account of the intervening shifts in the US labor market, welfare reform both accentuated the racial division of labor in the feminized service economy of post-Fordism (maintaining African American, minority, and migrant women at the lowest rungs of the labor market) and reasserted the private family as the foundational and ultimate source of security for women in general. The African American poor were nominated as the exemplary (because blatantly coercive) figure of this new familialism.

Recent welfare reform in Australia and the UK has emulated the familialism of PRWORA. In the UK, Duncan Smith's proposed Welfare Reform Bill is shaped by the conviction that family breakdown is a “social justice issue” that lies at the heart of welfare dependency. The Centre for Social Justice, a think tank created by Duncan Smith, is engaged in ongoing interventions into British and European family law and, in a nativist register, vows to defend “national cultural traditions” of family life against what it perceives as the socially destructive forces of market exchange and political federalism. Under the conservative (Liberal-National Party) government of Prime Minister John Howard, Australia introduced an openly pro-natalist policy in
the form of a bonus to be paid to Australian citizens on the birth of each child. The legislation was enacted in 2004 after an election campaign that had pivoted around the twin themes of “border protection” and “stronger families.” Launched three years later on the pretext of widespread child sexual abuse, the NTER made explicit the racial premises of Howard’s neopaternalism by vowing to restore proper family relations (including the ownership of private homes) in indigenous communities.

What is at stake here is not a return to the Foucauldian problematic of “normalization,” with its implicit reference to the expansion of administrative regulations under the mid-twentieth-century welfare state. Rather what we have witnessed since the introduction of workfare reforms in the mid-1990s is an intensive *relegislation* of the sexual as the state reverses a four-decade-long trend toward the privatization of family law, and family law itself (in the United States at least) falls increasingly under the sphere of influence of political theology. Both the PRWORA and the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996 were implicitly informed by a Thomist philosophy of natural law.28 The critical Left has yet to contend with the growing influence of political theology in the conceptualization and administration of workfare.

**The Theology of Workfare**

Untimeliness of the most mundane kind (more out of touch than Nietzschean) seems to be the recurrent destiny of a certain kind of theoretical avant-garde. The most intensive years of neoliberal economic restructuring were also those in which the poststructuralist Left was declaring the terminal obsolescence of Marx and the consequent irrelevance of economic analysis to the cultural politics of race, gender, and sexuality. Today political philosophers from Jürgen Habermas to Alain Badiou and Mario Tronti are laboring under the illusion that faith in some absolute theological truth is what will save us from the purportedly desacralizing influence of late capitalism.29 In the meantime, the kingdom of God has long since arrived on earth in the much more pragmatic and, one suspects, more consequential form of faith-based workfare. In his most recent and explicitly “postsecular” publication with the American Enterprise Institute, *From Prophecy to Charity: How to Help the Poor*, Mead argues that only the absolute precepts of theology are capable of responding to the essentially moral problem of impoverishment.30 In this newly ascendant vision of welfare reform, which brings together long-standing theological advocates of moral economy with the fathers of neopaternalism, the structural indebtedness of the working poor
is a state of sinfulness that can be redeemed only through the theology of
divine obligation. The permanent contingency of labor finds its absolute
truth and necessity in the unbreachable covenant of faith-based workfare.

Once again, the United States has been at the forefront of the “theo-
logical turn” in labor and welfare regulation, although it has been closely
followed by the UK and Australia, to mention only the most proximate
cases. Former Republican senator John Ashcroft initiated the turn to faith-
based welfare-to-work when he introduced the charitable choice provision to
PRWORA. Charitable choice gave religious social service providers the right
to compete for government-funded contracts on an equal basis with secular
social services, without having to sacrifice their theological character. Since
1996, the scope of social services covered by charitable choice has been
extended to include the US Department of Labor’s welfare-to-work program
and other job “activation” services. When George W. Bush took office in
2001, he issued two executive orders to create the White House Office of
Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (renamed the White House Office
of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships under Barack Obama) and
satellite offices in the major government administrations including the
Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services.
Lew Daly has underscored the extravagance of such a move. No further exec-
utive orders were needed to establish faith-based welfare; yet Bush’s creation
of faith-based outreach offices internal to government departments ensured
that religious providers would not only be accepted into tenders for govern-
ment contracts but openly favored and courted. As noted by many advoca-
cates of faith-based welfare, the decision is a calculated one, since only the
absolutist pretensions of faith-based service providers can be expected to
provide the vigorous moral and psychological intervention—the complete
redemption of the self—required by neoliberal welfare reform.

Today, faith-based welfare-to-work programs are endemic to the lower
levels of the contingent labor market in the postindustrial US city. A less
visible, although no less significant, effect of the theological turn in wel-
fare reform has been the proliferation of faith-based work and reeducation
programs in US prisons, some of which offer only religious services. What
Loïc Wacquant refers to as “prisonfare” is fast becoming indistinguishable
from faith-based workfare.

In the UK, the think tank ResPublica has provided the theological
counterpart to Duncan Smith’s Centre for Social Justice, refiguring his calls
for moral reform via workfare in an explicitly theological register. Directed
by Phillip Blond, the philosopher of religion and former student of the Radi-
The red Tories have a radical critique of neoliberalism—what they denounce, however, is not the stratification of low-wage service labor along the lines of race, gender, and class, but its destructive effects on the natural hierarchies of familial and national life. In this respect, they declare themselves allies of the working class, whose members they imagine to be the first victims of neoliberalism’s demoralizing effects, against the “Left-libertarianism” of a countercultural elite. Invoking the Christian socialist imaginary of the medieval guild, the red Tories advocate a return to “parish-led” social services and bucolic alliances between the familial working class and landed elite—a vision that is not without parallels in the chthonic leftism of Karl Polanyi. The force—and the danger—of this analysis is that it finds ready allies on both the left and right. The red Tories have in fact found common cause with the Blue Labour movement of Maurice Glasman, which has attempted to attract some imaginary working-class base with a combination of familialism and xenophobic nationalism.

The influence of political theology on contemporary welfare and labor reform has been profound and unprecedented in recent US history. This influence crosses both denominational and political divides, uniting the most ascetic of Dutch Calvinists with the most extravagant of American Catholicisms and recruiting advocates from the Christian Right as well as the Christian Left. In the United States, two think tanks in particular, the Dutch Calvinist Center for Public Justice and the Catholic-Hayekian Acton Institute, have been at the forefront of efforts to fashion and promote the doctrinal bases of faith-based welfare-to-work. Together, they have drawn inspiration from the Protestant doctrine of “sphere sovereignty” and the Catholic social philosophy of subsidiarity to argue that theological law (of most immediate relevance to the legislation of sexuality) should constitute a jurisdiction beyond the law of the state, to be administered by the church but funded by public money. It is the absolutist moral vision of the faithful, they contend, that is best suited to the task of transforming the contractual flexibility of “free” labor into the divine covenant of workfare. In the UK, ResPublica’s workfare agenda is directly influenced by the Radical Orthodox theology of Milbank, a philosopher who has not only inspired a general turn toward the postsecular in political theory but also found somewhat surprising affinities with contemporary variants of Leninism. What unites these diverse doctrinal influences is a common understanding of work as both a moral and an economic obligation and welfare as an act of divine grace or charity.
Perhaps the most condensed, although no doubt unwitting, philosophical translation of the theology of workfare can be found in the Pauline messianism of Badiou, for whom labor itself is an act of faith in the face of radical contingency. Having acknowledged the historical obsolescence of a certain style of Leninism, Badiou’s new militantism no longer looks to the party or the state as the agent of revolution but rather to the armies of the faithful, “coworkers in the labor of truth,” whom he charges with the task of reinstating a certain kind of sexual order. For the later Badiou, it is not the party-state but “love” (Badiou’s translation of agape, or charity) that will perform the work of salvation. Truth is no longer to be found in the “law” of the state, but rather in the “law beyond the law” of sexual difference, which the armies of the faithful will uphold against the dedifferentiating logic of the general equivalent. It is through the labor of faith, Badiou insists, that the subjective contingency of experience becomes amenable to the necessity of universal truth. In this, Badiou’s philosophy perfectly encapsulates the law of value in its contemporary form.\textsuperscript{39}

Anti-Polanyi: Rethinking the Double Movement

Post-Fordism follows in the wake of the antiracist, feminist, and sexual liberation movements of the 1960s, restructuring the labor market around the multiple defections that prompted the crisis of the Fordist reproductive (that is, racial and sexual) consensus. As white women defected from their role as state-subsidized domestic labor and African American women refused the role of paid domestic labor to the Fordist middle classes, post-Fordism responded by redistributing feminized labor to the expanded household of the paid service economy. Post-Fordism, in other words, internalized the demise of the family wage but in the process did not abolish but merely redistributed the enduring fault lines of race, sex, and class.

But if post-Fordism adapted to the crisis of the Fordist household, it also sought to redraw the terms of obligation—both sexual and economic—on a new and no less punitive basis. Beginning in the early 1970s, the New Right and, later, the New Democrats singled out welfare as the locus of family breakdown and the demoralization of the low-wage labor force. Faith-based workfare—and the comprehensive overhaul of welfare that introduced it—must be understood as the long-premeditated outcome of these reforms.

The familialist tendencies of the last two decades of workfare reform should make us wary of the proposition that post-Fordism has destroyed the proper hierarchies of sexual labor and should therefore be countered with a return to moral orthodoxy. It is this restorative proposition that
unites the otherwise disparate anticapitalisms of the social democratic sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, the ultraorthodox Catholic Milbank, and the Maoist/Leninist revolutionaries Slavoj Žižek and Badiou. Reformist, ultratraditionalist, or messianic, what these theorists share in common is an essentially conservative critique of capitalism—a critique that should itself be considered as internal and structural to capitalism’s double movement. Perhaps the most influential rendition of this particular form of Left conservatism can be found in the work of Karl Polanyi, whose theory of the double movement (itself a revision of Marx’s thesis) suggests that the social and economic dislocations wrought by capital must be resisted by a countermovement aiming to reinvent (if not restore) the foundational values of land, labor, and kinship. For Polanyi, the scandal of capitalism went well beyond the exploitation implied in the “free labor contract”—the latter was only the economic face of a much more serious social dislocation that had wrested communities from their traditional modes of social reproduction and led to the outright “destruction of family life.” These forces of dissolution could be thwarted only by a countermovement intervening to restore the boundaries between the economic and the noneconomic, between exchange value and fundamental (use) value, between the limited contract of labor and the unbreachable covenant of the familial gift. What Polanyi seeks to establish, in other words, is an external law of value that would reanchor the fluctuating volatilities of currency in the enduring use value of kinship, making the family the fundamental value underlying all exchange.

For Marx, on the other hand, the drive to restore fundamentals in the form of a “law of value” is intrinsic to the double movement. The capitalist mode of production is both self-revolutionizing and restorative, transgressive and foundational. Even while capital strives to overcome all transcendental limits to its expansion, it is constantly compelled to reassert such limits as the internal condition of its continuing valorization. Capital, that is to say, constantly oscillates between the poles of euphoric speculation and austere refoundation, and it is maintained in tension between the two in a dynamic that is neither dialectical nor progressive. Marx’s thesis on the double movement of capital, outlined in the Grundrisse and the third volume of Capital, challenges all transcendental theories of value (including, it could be argued, his own labor theory of value) by interpreting the “law of value” as an imperative that is immanent to capital itself. It is only through the recurrent and retroactive assertion of some transcendent “law of value” that capital is able to transform incalculable speculation into redeemable debt and contingent labor into socially necessary labor. As even Polanyi recognized, free market
liberalism requires the authority of the state and the central bank to underwrite the credibility of fiat money. Faith in an incalculable future must be sustained, or retrospectively confirmed, by some instance of absolute law. The “free contract” of contingent labor demands to be grounded in the “unfree contract” of necessary labor and compulsory workfare.

Yet while Marx recognized that the restoration of fundamental value can be accomplished through any number of institutional and juridical means, from the generalization of the wage contract to citizenship laws and the creation of national debt, his analysis does not extend to the intimate, reproductive dimensions of fundamental value. Capital, he famously asserts, “drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life.” But is it not also periodically compelled to reinvent the “socially necessary” form of reproduction? Does it not also need to reassert the reproductive foundations of the race, family, and nation, as the condition of its own valorization? Inasmuch as the “law of value” strives to maintain the stable reproducibility of the means of exchange, its purview is sexual as well as economic. On this point, Marx’s thinking on fundamental value must be radicalized. The assertion of foundation is never merely “economic” in character since it must ultimately incorporate the “social and cultural” conditions under which value is to be reproduced—kinship, lineage, and inheritance. Today the always implicit theology of the “law of value” has been replaced by the explicit theology of faith-based workfare.

Notes

The research in this article was funded under Australian Research Council grant number FT100100543.

1 Mario Tronti, Operai e capitale (1966; Turin: Einaudi, 1977).
3 See Morgan Adamson in this issue. See also the classic text by Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution (New York: Saint Martin’s, 1975).
4 I am here taking my cue from Angela Mitropoulos’s ambitious rereading of the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism through the prism of household politics. See Angela Mitropoulos, Contract and Contagion: From Biopolitics to Oikonomia (New York: Minor Compositions, 2012).


10 I am grateful to Catherine Waldby for this insight into the difference between “contract of service” and “contract for service.” Waldby notes that “contracts for service” extend well beyond the traditional employment relationship to any kind of personal or intimate “service,” including, for example, surrogacy contracts. The expansion of “contracts for service” under post-Fordism signals a corresponding generalization of work relations into the space of the personal, the biological, and the intimate. Author’s conversation with Waldby, June 2011. For a discussion of the surrogacy contract in contemporary capitalism, see Kalindi Vora in this issue.

11 For an extended analysis of post-Fordist neocontractualism, see Mitropoulos, *Contract and Contagion*.

12 On Marx’s conception of abstract labor time as “socially average” time, see Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (London: Penguin, 1990), 129. Here Marx writes that “the labour that forms the substance of value is equal human labour, the expenditure of identical human labour-power. The total labour-power of society, which is manifested in the values of the world of commodities, counts here as one homogenous mass of human labour-power, although composed of innumerable individual units of labour-power. Each of these units is the same as any other, to the extent that it has the character of a socially average unit of labour-power and acts as such, i.e. only needs, in order to produce a commodity, the labour time which is necessary on average, or in other words is socially necessary” (ibid.).

13 Here I am assuming a certain familiarity with debates concerning the question of value in Marx. Isaak Illich Rubin and Moishe Postone both insist on the difference between a classical labor theory of value (which posits labor as the immediate source of all wealth) and a properly Marxian theory of value, which distinguishes between concrete labor as use value and abstract labor as a social measure and law of equivalence. They point out that the measurability of labor can be achieved only through the mediation of abstract labor time. The “law of value” is therefore to be understood as a historically contingent but nevertheless fully operative law of equivalence that imposes itself on the otherwise variegated substance of qualitative labor. See Isaak Illich Rubin, *Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1972); and Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). More recently and controversially, Antonio Negri has intervened in this debate to assert that under post-Fordist conditions, the “law of value” has become obsolete and labor has ceased to be “measurable.” See Antonio Negri, “Valeur-Travail: Crise et problèmes de reconstruction dans le post-moderne” (“Labor-Value: Crisis and Problems of Reconstruction in Postmodernity”), *Futur antérieur* 10, no. 2 (1992): 30–36. In my view, Negri’s proposition is compelling but needs to be qualified. Under post-Fordist condi-
tions, labor has indeed become immeasurable—if only by the standards of Marx’s labor theory of value and the imperatives of Fordist/Taylorist valorization (Marx’s labor theory of value represents a formidable anticipation of the Fordist standardization of labor time). This, however, does not mean that the “law of value” as such has ceased to be operative. Rather, it has changed form and expression. The “law of value” now resides in the notion that contingent labor must be transformed into necessary labor—in the affirmation, that is, of the necessity of contingency.


16 On the future orientation of work activation, see Lisa Adkins in this issue.


18 On the historical precedents to such reforms, see Desmond King, In the Name of Liberalism: Illiberal Social Policy in the USA and Britain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and on their import in the US context in particular, see Sanford F. Schram, Welfare Discipline: Discourse, Governance and Globalization (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).


22 Mitropoulos, Contract and Contagion.

23 See Lisa Adkins in this issue.


See Bamforth and Richards, *Patriarchal Religion*.


On the notion of a theological law beyond the law of the state, see Lew Daly’s reading of the doctrines of sphere sovereignty and subsidiarity, in Daly, *God and the Welfare State*; and Daly, *God’s Economy*.


See Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 77, 81, 88, 92.


