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## Dilemmas of Value in Post-Industrial Economies: Retrieving Clock Time through the Four-Day Work Week Essay

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## Essay

### Dilemmas of Value in Post-Industrial Economies: Retrieving Clock Time Through the Four-Day Work Week?

EMILY GRABHAM

*This Essay approaches the four-day work week from a feminist labor law perspective. Ostensibly, progressive measures such as this provide the potential for working women to better balance their “home” and “work” lives. The reality, however, for a great number of low-income and marginally employed women in post-industrial economies in the United States and United Kingdom is far bleaker than such an analysis suggests. For the underclass of women workers, measures adjusting the working day or working week have little relevance because these workers have irregular hours and little employment protection. This Essay advances the provocative suggestion that feminists accept the irregular work that low-paid women do for what it is. It suggests that we think and organize on the basis of shifting our concepts of value to prioritize hitherto low-paid work in service industries, for example, instead of changing working hours to allow middle-class women to continue performing dual roles in the market and in unpaid care.*

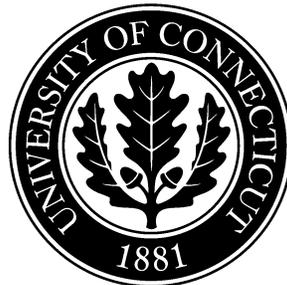
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# Dilemmas of Value in Post-Industrial Economies: Retrieving Clock Time Through the Four-Day Work Week?

EMILY GRABHAM\*

*[R]ather than understanding labour-time as dead, past labour-time as sealed into and frozen within the commodity, and indeed workers as zombies, that is as the living dead (dead because the process of abstraction strips human labour of subjectivity), we should think of labour and the commodity, and hence of value, as far more open, as vital and alive.<sup>1</sup>*

## I. INTRODUCTION

This Essay approaches the four-day work week from a feminist perspective. While attempts to limit the work day or the work week through compressed working hours or work/life balance laws and policies appear extremely compelling, they may prevent the establishment of more trenchant critiques of working conditions in the post-industrial economies of the United Kingdom and United States. Is it really possible to improve the working lives of precarious workers, and others, in the new economy by seeking to limit or standardize working time? What other possibilities exist for feminist agitation and activism, even for policy, *outside* time-based labor demands?

The four-day work week undoubtedly has great potential to benefit workers in standard employment. Those in permanent positions, with a more or less standard work week, can use the extra day off to complete chores, undertake a variety of forms of caregiving, or pursue hobbies. On the other hand, for employees under temporary contracts and/or working intermittent hours—perhaps in order to perform care work or service work to facilitate the standard working hours of others (e.g., nannies, cleaners, wait staff)—the four-day work week has less of a bite. This Essay focuses on why work time remains such a central concern for labor activists, and the implications this has for feminist labor lawyers, especially when trying

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Adkins, *From Retroactivation to Futurity: The End of the Sexual Contract?*, 16 *NORDIC J. FEMINIST & GENDER RES.* 182, 195 (2008).

to address the needs of low-income female workers in precarious employment. In the context of post-industrial or service-led economies—such as in the United States and the United Kingdom, which are less and less defined with reference to a standard work day and with reference to traditional ideas of economic value—why is it that a Fordist conception of clock time is still so important for labor activists? If we are shifting to an economic landscape in which value is conceived in terms of future plans, intangibles, intellectual property, affective labor, website hits, and excellence, what can we achieve through invoking clock time in our labor demands, and what do we leave out or ignore? In other words, if the type of economic creature we are looking at is shifting its own concept of value out of all recognition, why are we still framing our labor demands through conflicts over hourly pay and work/life balance?

These introductory comments may appear critical of the four-day work week initiative. By contrast, the initiative is bold, it is far-reaching, it comes at the right time, and, as Vicki Schultz and Allison Hoffman have so clearly established, it has enormous potential to benefit women because it is a universal labor standard.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the “24/7” information economy, it is refreshing to see the clock and the work week being wielded with such ferocity by labor activists. On the other hand, I argue that we should reflect on when and why clock time becomes significant in progressive social demands.

This Essay is structured as follows. Part II raises preliminary questions about how we think about labor time and what we gain and lose by prioritizing working time as the organizing focus of Left labor activism. Part II also discusses the characteristics and dimensions of what has been termed the “new economy.” Part III focuses on the shifting nature of value in the new economy. This Essay argues that labor activists, and specifically feminist labor lawyers, need to think about the concept of value in more depth and reconfigure our labor demands to address how value is operating right now in the “information economy.” This might entail matching, or even exceeding, our emphasis on work time and work/life balance initiatives with more creative thinking about feminists’ options for agitation in the new economy, specifically around value.

## II. LABOR TIME AS A COMMODITY

One assumption underlying a great deal of working time scholarship and policy is that labor time is a commodity, and a commodity of a particular type. It is a commodity that we still in many ways analyze as if

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<sup>2</sup> See Vicki Schultz & Allison Hoffman, *The Need for a Reduced Workweek in the United States*, in *PRECARIOUS WORK, WOMEN, AND THE NEW ECONOMY: THE CHALLENGE TO LEGAL NORMS* 131, 139–41 (Judy Fudge & Rosemary Owens eds., 2006).

it can be bought and sold, divided up into smaller or larger chunks—the work day, the work week—based on the measuring device of the clock. This remains true even if we do not believe that labor time, as a commodity, is alienable from the body. That is to say (and this is not at all a novel point—it has been pointed out by social theorists from Marx to E.P. Thompson onwards), labor is constructed, managed, bought, and sold through clock time, and the fundamental expression of the power relation between owners of capital and workers is a struggle over this type of time.<sup>3</sup>

This concept of labor as a commodity measured through clock time is extremely widespread, and so it is understandable that it influences feminist voices in the debate. Time-as-commodity leads us to quantify and try to limit working time in relation to pay, thereby maximizing the return we get for the effort we put in. It influences us to the extent that we ground our equal pay demands on measuring our yearly salaries.

In the United Kingdom, Kent Law School recently organized an “Equal Pay Day Event” because the current pay gap between men and women renders women’s work valueless to the extent that this period is effectively “unpaid” in relation to men’s pay for the same period. Women working full-time in the United Kingdom currently earn, on average, seventeen percent less than men working full-time, and this increases to thirty-six percent less per hour for women working part-time.<sup>4</sup> Here, the political demand is being made on a number of fronts: the hourly rate of pay and, more significantly, the time of the salary, expressed yearly.

Time-as-commodity also leads us to develop an extremely full, interesting, and lively conception of what exists outside of working time. Leisure activities as varied as organized nudism, gambling, and sports have been constructed and developed in the context of what lies outside the industrial work day.<sup>5</sup> Even our daily rhythms and how we value them have changed; the concept of adequate sleep time stems from labor demands around adequate time off from work.<sup>6</sup> And, in this context, the demands of domestic life have taken on huge significance, becoming, in feminist scholarship and activism, the central, most important, and—we argue—most under-measured type of “outside-work” time. Time-as-commodity therefore helps feminists identify and talk about social reproduction—who

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<sup>3</sup> See Joanne Conaghan, *Time To Dream? Flexibility, Families, and the Regulation of Working Time*, in *PRECARIOUS WORK*, *supra* note 2, at 101, 107.

<sup>4</sup> Fawcett Society, <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=321> (last visited Apr. 11, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> See RUTH BARCAN, *NUDITY: A CULTURAL ANATOMY* 168–69 (2004) (noting that “workers have only two options for escaping from their misery: bloody revolution or naturism”); Josie McLellan, *State Socialist Bodies: East German Nudism from Ban to Boom*, 79 *J. MOD. HIST.* 48, 70 (2007) (explaining that “nudism offered an escape from the uniforms, work clothing, and status symbols of everyday life”).

<sup>6</sup> See Elizabeth Freeman, *Introduction to Queer Temporalities*, 13 *GLQ: J. LESBIAN & GAY STUD.* 159, 160 (2007).

does it, when, how, and what the material/economic consequences are of those gendered divisions.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, time-as-commodity has some clear limitations. First, it does not easily fit a range of jobs and employment structures associated with the new economy. Jobs in the creative industries, information technology, and the service industry, for example, require a high degree of employee initiative, increasing the level of personal investment far beyond the idea that selling one's labor constitutes the beginning and end of any wage-work bargain. The increasing significance of rationales of professionalism, at least in the United Kingdom, results in many lower-paid and manual jobs being characterized by a culture of excellence, which requires a greater degree of identification on the part of employees with the employing business, and a corresponding shift in what is perceived to be at the heart of the employment relationship. In other words, if commodification is happening within the contemporary employment relationship, it is no longer predominantly happening through control of time. Commodification is shifting, along with concepts of value, in the new economy. Given these shifts in commodification, it is no longer obvious that labor demands should find their most forceful expression in time-related arguments. Part III will return to this point.

The second limitation of the time-as-commodity model is that it tends to make a distinction between what resides "inside" and "outside" of working time, running the risk of flattening the "inside" of working time and valorizing and reifying the "outside" of working time along the way. If working time is seen to be the crux of the relationship between capital and labor, then on this basis, labor activism will always be defined largely with reference to increasing what is seen to be the "outside" of that relationship. Often, this "outside" of working time is equated with freedom from capital and the development of the individualized, ethical, spiritual, and/or successful self. Therefore, while critical labor lawyers nimbly analyze the neo-liberal dimensions of work in post-industrial economies—for example, a rise in zero-hours contracts, contracting out, and flexibilization—nevertheless, the time/commodity nexus can hinder an analysis of how the "outside" of labor time is constructed and whether we actually want it to be constructed in this way. Two examples bear mentioning. First, the neo-liberal construction of leisure time obscures the

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<sup>7</sup> Joanne Conaghan & Kerry Rittich, *Introduction: Interrogating the Work/Family Divide*, in *LABOUR LAW, WORK AND FAMILY: CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES* 1, 1–2 (Joanne Conaghan & Kerry Rittich eds., 2005); Joanne Conaghan, *Work, Family, and the Discipline of Labour Law*, in *LABOUR LAW, WORK AND FAMILY*, *supra*, at 19, 27; Shahra Razavi & Silke Staab, U.N. Research Inst. for Soc. Dev., Div. for the Advancement of Women, *The Social and Political Economy of Care: Contesting Gender and Class Inequalities*, at 3, 5 (Sept. 19, 2008), available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/equalsharing/EGM-ESOR-2008-BP-3%20UNRISD%20Paper.pdf>.

ways in which workers are fashioned as capitalist consumers<sup>8</sup> or as successful “selves.”<sup>9</sup> Second, moralistic constructions of unemployment and/or worklessness downplay the racialized discourses through which welfare recipients are produced as a potential (and otherwise wasted) labor source; as putative, low-paid, flexible workers in the new economy.<sup>10</sup> Another way of putting this is to say that the time/commodity nexus tends to put the glow of freedom onto leisure time. Any freedom-related arguments should always be interrogated for the governmental and disciplinary projects that they enable,<sup>11</sup> and this is no different in relation to labor demands.

Third, in the context of what many have called the “new” or “post-industrial” economy, many theorists, feminists included, conceive the “outside” of labor time as being a time specifically of care and of the family.<sup>12</sup> This is the case even if those feminists identifying the “outside” of labor time are critical of unpaid gendered social reproduction labor. That is to say, even if what feminists are doing is uncovering gendered notions of labor time and challenging them, we tend to reify ideas about the outside of work time even as we critique them. Lisa Adkins points out that much recent work on social capital re-entrenches this concept of women existing outside of labor time.<sup>13</sup> This happens despite the fact that feminized concepts of labor, defined through ideas of communication, connectivity, and flexibility, operate as key mobilizing concepts in the post-industrial economy—in the service sector and in the information technology sector, for example.<sup>14</sup>

Attempting to keep up with vast reconfigurations of labor in post-industrial economies, writers such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri emphasize the importance of what they term “affective labor” and its role in producing social networks, biopower, and labor relations. They argue—and this is, as Adkins points out, on the back of a considerable history of feminist work in this area—that human feelings are being commodified in

<sup>8</sup> See MAX HORKHEIMER & THEODOR W. ADORNO, *DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT* 131 (John Cumming trans., Continuum Publishing Co. 1999) (1944) (discussing how modern mass culture encourages the consumerist tendencies of human beings).

<sup>9</sup> See NIKOLAS ROSE, *INVENTING OUR SELVES: PSYCHOLOGY, POWER, AND PERSONHOOD* 1–2 (1996) (discussing the value of one’s identity as an autonomous self).

<sup>10</sup> See ANNA MARIE SMITH, *WELFARE REFORM AND SEXUAL REGULATION* 262–63 (2007).

<sup>11</sup> See NIKOLAS ROSE, *POWERS OF FREEDOM: REFRAMING POLITICAL THOUGHT* 67–69 (1999) (discussing how freedom can be an objective of government or an instrument of government).

<sup>12</sup> This has found legislative expression in the United Kingdom, at least through parental leave policies that encompass queers, albeit on a heteronormative basis. Joanne Conaghan & Emily Grabham, *Sexuality and the Citizen Carer: The “Good Gay” and the Third Way*, 58 N. IR. LEGAL Q. 325, 334–35 (2007). That is to say, family time is a restrictive conception of outside work time, but it is not exclusively oriented to opposite-sex parenting arrangements.

<sup>13</sup> Lisa Adkins, *Social Capital, The Anatomy of a Troubled Concept*, 6 FEMINIST THEORY 195, 199 (2005); Lisa Adkins, *The New Economy, Property and Personhood*, 22 THEORY, CULTURE & SOC’Y 111, 117 (2005).

<sup>14</sup> See Adkins, *The New Economy*, *supra* note 13, at 112–13.

new ways.<sup>15</sup> Hardt, in particular, still operates with the idea that women's caregiving, outside the formal economy, could provide a route for producing *alternative* social formations as new possibilities for affective labor itself.<sup>16</sup> Adkins's problem with this analysis is that it reproduces romanticized notions of women's collectivity and solidarity and locates them *outside* current developments in the new economy.<sup>17</sup>

This conceptual move has two main consequences. First, it defines questions of unpaid labor and care as "pre-modern" and locates them outside of work time, ignoring the ways in which care itself is changing in the new economy and the ways in which it intersects with work time in many cases. And second, it ignores, as Adkins has pointed out in a more recent paper, the ways in which gender is entangled with the restructuring of time itself in post-industrial economies.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the question, as far as I can see it, is this: If the relationship between work, gender, and time is changing in the new economy, what is a feminist labor lawyer to do? While time and space restrictions prohibit a full answer to this question, Part III provides a little more background as to why I think this question should be a priority in the current political (and economic) moment.

### III. LABOR, GENDER, AND VALUE IN POST-INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIES

In the post-industrial economies of the global North, characterized by the "service economy model," with shifts toward "immaterial labor" founded on information and communication,<sup>19</sup> attempts to limit working time through adherence to a four-day work week look like an attempt by labor activists to retrieve a Fordist model of clock time in situations where clock time is otherwise becoming less and less the measure of labor value. Raising this as an issue is not the same as criticizing these moves on the part of progressive labor lawyers and labor activists. Thus, in this last section, I am categorically not arguing that the four-day work week is a redundant exercise in relation to workers in the new economy. On the other hand, given that forms of post-industrial labor are less attached to what Adkins would term the concept of past-oriented labor as a congealed commodity and more attached to a concept of forward-looking, future-oriented value,<sup>20</sup> labor demands based on limiting or rearranging (i.e.,

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<sup>15</sup> Adkins, *Social Capital*, *supra* note 13, at 202–04 (citing Michael Hardt, 'Affective Labour,' *BOUNDARY*, Summer 1999, at 89, 99).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 204.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 204–05.

<sup>18</sup> Lisa Adkins, *Feminism After Measure*, 10 *FEMINIST THEORY* 323, 323–24, 331–32 (2009).

<sup>19</sup> MICHAEL HARDT & ANTONIO NEGRI, *EMPIRE* 286, 289 (2000).

<sup>20</sup> Adkins, *From Retroactivation to Futurity*, *supra* note 1, at 194–95.

congealed) labor time begin to look all the more interesting and potentially open to examination.

The current phase of capitalism is one of postmodernization or informatization, in which jobs are service-based, highly mobile, and involve what are termed “flexible skills.”<sup>21</sup> While manufacturing and production do not disappear within this type of economy, the difference resides in what is being produced and why. As Hardt and Negri explain, “Just as through the process of modernization all production tended to become industrialized, so too through the process of postmodernization all production tends toward the production of services, toward becoming informationalized.”<sup>22</sup> In Hardt and Negri’s terms, “immaterial labor” drives the service sector, and there are three types of immaterial labor in particular that do this work.<sup>23</sup> First is the incorporation of information and communication technologies into the production processes, thereby shifting the temporal relations between supply and demand.<sup>24</sup> Second is the immaterial labor of information production or manipulation, involving both creative and routine work in relation to computer technologies.<sup>25</sup> But, it is the third type that is most important for the purposes of this Essay: the production and manipulation of affect through bodily labor and human contact, often, but not exclusively, in caring professions or client contact roles.<sup>26</sup> The production of affect is the form of gendered labor—“gendered” meaning “female”—which is most apparent in service-driven economies. That is to say, while it is easy to point out that women workers populate caring or client-contact roles in the new economy, it is also the case that the skills and dispositions more highly valued are the ones associated with femininity—flexibility, communication skills, cooperative working—in contemporary working practices.<sup>27</sup>

What is more important, however, is how we value this immaterial labor. Just as concepts of work and labor are changing, so are concepts of value itself. New practices in capitalist commodification, such as the activation of what Nigel Thrift terms “forethought,” are reworking value as a form of “efficacy.”<sup>28</sup> A new form of “vitalist” capitalism is emerging

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<sup>21</sup> HARDT & NEGRI, *supra* note 19, at 285.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 286.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* at 29–30.

<sup>24</sup> *See id.* at 289–90, 293.

<sup>25</sup> *See id.* at 290–93.

<sup>26</sup> *See id.* at 292–94.

<sup>27</sup> *See* Adkins, *The New Economy*, *supra* note 13, at 112–26 (discussing flexibility and openness as characteristics of the new economy and the implications this has for gender as more alienable and based on work product); *see also generally* KATE BEDFORD & JANET JAKOBSEN, NEW FEMINIST SOLUTIONS, BARNARD CTR. FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN, TOWARD A VISION OF SEXUAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE (2008), available at [http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions/reports/NFS4-Sexual\\_Economic\\_Justice.pdf](http://www.barnard.edu/bcrw/newfeministsolutions/reports/NFS4-Sexual_Economic_Justice.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Nigel Thrift, *Re-Inventing Invention: New Tendencies in Capitalist Commodification*, 35 *ECON. & SOC'Y* 279, 282 (2006).

that aims to make knowledge and life inextricable in an attempt to increase the “*the rate of innovation and invention through the acceleration of connective mutation.*”<sup>29</sup> Examples of this development can be found in business models that: (1) try to optimize on “forethought” or on the “rightness” of a commodity or service to a consumer; (2) prioritize models of “co-creation,” thereby drawing consumers more closely into production processes; or (3) engineer communities of knowledge through novel architectural designs in universities and science parks, for example.<sup>30</sup> Value takes on a different meaning in this new landscape because consumers are drawn closer into processes of production and because production is characterized by a process of co-creation with no final user in sight.<sup>31</sup> Specifically, value is not restricted to labor at work;<sup>32</sup> instead, as Thrift puts it, value spreads out, encompassing and utilizing consumers’ own capacities for invention.<sup>33</sup>

Considerable uncertainty exists about what these new practices mean for the way that value is produced and circulated.<sup>34</sup> Thrift, however, argues that this kind of value can be described through the concept of “efficacy.”<sup>35</sup> Efficacy itself is a way of talking about the beliefs that culture holds about what does and does not work, and the creative force of what does and does not work.<sup>36</sup> Second, in post-industrial economies, the type of efficacy or form of creative force discussed is a sense of “rightness,” or what Thrift would describe as “an attempt to capture and work into successful moments, often described as an attunement or a sense of being at ease in a situation.”<sup>37</sup>

In this way, value is shifting as a result of the intensification of capitalist processes of accumulation, and it is shifting into a sense of rightness that is characterized *temporally* by being able to work into successful moments. This, at the very least, describes value in relation to a sense of forward-looking or even hyper-stimulated simultaneous action and not the traditional sense of accumulated labor time or labor as a congealed commodity. In other words, exchange is not so much happening at the level of commodities (e.g., labor) that are characterized by effort in the past as much as it is responding, in a highly reflexive economy, to an orientation to simultaneous and/or future events.

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<sup>29</sup> *Id.* at 280–81.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 280–85.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 295.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 296.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *See id.*

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 296–97.

Other theorists such as Lisa Adkins are operating on a similar model—shifting value’s temporal orientation from past to future<sup>38</sup>—but, importantly, Adkins’s approach retains a central role for gender. Briefly put, Adkins argues that Pateman’s sexual contract position of labor, whereby workers accumulate skills and experience over time that can then be exchanged for a wage, operates within a temporal framework of “retroactivation.”<sup>39</sup> That is to say, it operates with an idea that labor, skills, and capacities are stored up in the body over time, similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus.<sup>40</sup> Labor, in these terms, is accumulated and embodied history.<sup>41</sup> Adkins argues that this retroactivation model influences a range of scholarship from materialist feminism to recent attempts to account for the role of women’s labor in the informational economies.<sup>42</sup> It also, importantly, influences the concept of the work/life balance.<sup>43</sup> Here, Adkins’s claim is that removing barriers to women being able to store up expertise and skills in the workplace should alleviate the pressures of combining care duties with paid work.<sup>44</sup> Following Pateman, arguments about the work/life balance make sense because participation in the formal economy is enabled by the dispossession of women and caring work from the social contract.<sup>45</sup>

Yet this is where time is again an issue. As already noted, the idea of “leisure time” only makes sense if work is seen to be alienating in the Marxist sense.<sup>46</sup> Marx believed not only that workers did not feel at home when they were working, but also that commodities contained “abstracted,” “congealed labor,” detached from the sensual human experience.<sup>47</sup> Adkins argues that proponents of work/life balance operate (1) with an idea of an “alienated subjectivity” at work that can only be mitigated by a healthy “home” life, and (2) with the idea that the commodity form subsists in congealed, quantifiable labor time.<sup>48</sup> Adkins notes:

In short, proponents of work-life balance are not only assuming a particular model of political economy, one where what is at issue is the alienation (and exploitation) of labour, but also of labour, whereby labour is understood as a substance which can be accumulated over time (both

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<sup>38</sup> See Adkins, *From Retroactivation to Futurity*, *supra* note 1, at 182.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* at 185.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.*

<sup>41</sup> *Id.*

<sup>42</sup> *Id.*

<sup>43</sup> *Id.* at 189.

<sup>44</sup> *See id.*

<sup>45</sup> *See id.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* at 189.

<sup>47</sup> *Id.* at 190.

<sup>48</sup> *Id.* at 191.

concrete and abstract) and to have retroactive powers, powers which call living labour into action and give commodities their vitality and force.<sup>49</sup>

Specifically, forms of work in the new economy, such as web design or management consulting are forward-looking and oriented to “an open and vital future,” although these arguments can also be applied to a wider range of paid occupations.<sup>50</sup> Web design, for example, focuses on generating hits in the future, and dominant ideas in business center on future planning and not past performance. And while it could be argued that these developments do not affect many workers in post-industrial economies, they indicate a shift in how business views itself, a shift in how value is conceived at the level of management, which determines workers’ responsibilities and their own value to business through rationales of efficiency and innovation. These future-oriented concepts of value operate with reference not to commodities comprising spent human labor, but instead with reference to intangibles such as intellectual property and know-how.<sup>51</sup> As a result, Adkins asks, “What currency does embodied labour power have when value lies outside of the labouring body and outside of the commodity form in the yet-to-come?”<sup>52</sup>

This is the question that feminists must try to answer. How do we ensure that women workers are at the forefront of being valued for their role in the “yet-to-come”? What equivalence, if any, exists between women’s paid work in the formal economy and intellectual property, for example? An emphasis on value could get feminist labor lawyers to some interesting places in relation to the future-oriented commodity forms that characterize the new economy. For a start, it is by no means only web-designers and management consultants who occupy the “yet-to-come.” In the post-industrial economy, it is also service workers, nurses, secondary school teachers, and so on, many of whom are female.<sup>53</sup> If we trace affective and caring labor as forms of immaterial labor, we can see that relationship-building and collaborative work are forms of labor aimed at the future, and specifically aimed at fostering chains of future affect and future return.<sup>54</sup> On these terms, immaterial labor is not even pursued with reference to the immediate future, defined in relation to an individual act of paid client-care or nursing, for example. And it is definitely not pursued with reference to caring labor as congealed, stored up labor.<sup>55</sup> The value,

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<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.* at 194–95.

<sup>51</sup> *Id.* at 195.

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* at 198.

<sup>53</sup> See Adkins, *Feminism After Measure*, *supra* note 18, at 329.

<sup>54</sup> See Adkins, *From Retroactivation to Futurity*, *supra* note 1, at 195–96 (suggesting that the dynamic of contemporary capitalism is in fact in the future).

<sup>55</sup> *Id.* at 194.

or efficacy, that women in *paid* work (much of it low-paid and precarious) are helping to incite or bring about in the mutating economy is forward-looking, both in the sense of the long view and also in the sense of helping to create the conditions for the sense of “rightness” that Thrift talks about.<sup>56</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Clearly, this Essay fits into a long debate in feminist circles about how to value women’s care work in the formal economy when that work itself is structured by gender segregation in the labor market. In other words, if we recognize that work in policy terms, do we reinforce the gendered allocation and valuation of labor? The point I am making at this preliminary stage is a little different: I want to stick with this work on its own terms. I am posing the question of whether trying to “balance” work and “life” through time-based labor demands is appropriate for the dilemmas being posed by the conditions of work in the new economy. Working on the admittedly provocative basis that it might be politically necessary to work with the constraints and possibilities of the new economy as it is, I propose that we should put precarious forms of “immaterial labor” at the center of our demands. We need to imagine and pursue new political strategies that value women’s “immaterial” labor in the mutating economy for its own sake instead of pursuing policies that ignore precarious work on the one hand (like many time-related work/life balance policies effectively do) or which, on the other hand, attempt to standardize such work on the basis of traditional concepts of full-time, permanent employment.

If we ask what currency labor power has when it resides in the “yet-to-come,” we are asking a fundamental question about the valuing of gender and about the contemporary reconfiguration of work, gender, and time.<sup>57</sup> While feminist labor lawyers have much to gain from time-related labor demands, we have to push our thinking into as-yet unimagined horizons in order to make a space for ourselves in the shifting terrain of the new economy. This might not mean the end of the four-day work week or the work/life balance as sites for social organizing, but it does require a critical approach to clock time, as well as radical new visions of the employment relationship that can adapt to the realities of low-wage and precarious work.

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<sup>56</sup> Thrift, *supra* note 28, at 283.

<sup>57</sup> Adkins, *Feminism After Measure*, *supra* note 18, at 330–34.