resistance born of separation is imagined more along lines of flight than lines of opposition. Its task is to organize struggles that neither take the form nor mirror the logic of what they contest. Separation is the path of difference—not an antithesis to be subsumed in a synthesis, but a singularity that might invent something new. Negri describes this as a rejection of a relationship between capital and its antagonists on the model of the dialectical opposition of that which is the same and that which is different, an opposition that he describes as lacking a conception of singularity (Casarino and Negri 2008, 46). Finally, antagonism must be added as a key term: an antagonistic logic of separation stands in contrast to a dialectical logic of contradiction. Whereas dialectical contradiction is an objective category, the product of a system of structures, antagonisms arise from the expressed needs and desires of historical subjects. Antagonism can in this sense be grasped as the subjectivization of contradiction. For examples of subjectivized contradictions, think of the difference between, on the one hand, the contradiction between the forces and relations of production and, on the other hand, conflicts between what we have and what we might want, between what we are and what we could become, between what we do and what we can do. Self-valorization, separation, and antagonism are thus crucial to the project of autonomy, and the means of conceiving a Marxist method—whose ideal form, at least—could be "completely subjectivized, totally open toward the future, and creative," one that "cannot be enclosed within any dialectical totality or logical unity" (Negri 1991, 12).

THE REFUSAL OF WORK

The refusal of work as theory and practice emerges out of these methodological commitments and areas of conceptual focus. As an important slogan in the Italian social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the refusal of work is a fundamental ground of autonomist Marxism's critical analysis and political strategy, a critical element of the project of autonomy characterized above. At one level a clear expression of the immediate desire experienced by working people around the world, the refusal of work has been developed by autonomists into a more variegated concept, one that encompasses several distinct critical approaches and strategic agendas.

The concept's force, it should be acknowledged, comes from a prior understanding of the place of work in the critical analysis of capitalist

social formations. That is, fundamental to the refusal of work as analysis and strategy is a definition of capitalism that highlights not the institution of private property, but rather the imposition and organization of work. After all, from a worker's perspective, earning wages—not accumulating capital—is the primary concern. The wage system remains the dominant mechanism by which individuals are integrated, either directly or indirectly, into the capitalist mode of economic cooperation. Cleaver therefore defines capital as "*a social system based on the imposition of work through the commodity-form*"; it is a system built upon the subordination of life to work (2000, 82). Diane Elson's reading of Marx is helpful in fleshing this out. As she explains Marx's theory of value, it is best understood not as a labor theory of value but as a value theory of labor. In other words, the purpose of the analysis is not to prove the existence of exploitation or to explain prices; the point is not to grasp the process by which value is constituted by labor, but rather to fathom how laboring practices are organized, shaped, and directed by the capitalist pursuit of value. "My argument," Elson writes, "is that the *object* of Marx's theory of value was labour" (1979, 123). Whereas socialist modernization and socialist humanism each imagine the possibility of a postcapitalist society in terms of the realization of the constitutive power of labor, as a matter of grasping the centrality of labor to social life or to individual existence, in this alternative reading of Marx, "labor's constitutive centrality to social life characterizes capitalism and forms the ultimate ground of its abstract mode of domination" (Postone 1996, 361). The crucial point and the essential link to the refusal of work is that work—not private property, the market, the factory, or the alienation of our creative capacities—is understood to be the primary basis of capitalist relations, the glue that holds the system together. Hence, any meaningful transformation of capitalism requires substantial change in the organization and social value of work.

Thus, unlike the modernization model, the autonomist tradition focuses on the critique of work under capitalism, which includes but cannot be reduced to the critique of its exploitation. In contrast to the humanists, who also critique work, autonomous Marxists call not for a liberation of work but for a liberation from work (Virno and Hardt 1996, 263). In their insistence on replacing one slogan of worker militancy, "the right to work," with a new one, "the refusal of work," the autonomists certainly follow in the footsteps of Marx—the Marx who, for example,

insisted that freedom depended on the shortening of the working day. But perhaps a more appropriate precursor is Marx's son-in-law, Paul Lafargue. Leszek Kolakowski's description of Lafargue as the proponent of "a hedonist Marxism" only makes this genealogy all the more appropriate (1978, 141–48). Of course, Kolakowski intended his label as an insult, meant to signal Lafargue's naiveté and lack of seriousness, but it is also a fitting classification for a Marxist tradition committed to the refusal of work and open to the possibilities of a postwork future. In *The Right to Be Lazy*, Lafargue takes on the capitalist morality that "curses the flesh of the worker" and seeks to reduce the worker's needs, pleasures, and passions (1898, 3–4). But the immediate target is the 1848 right-to-work rhetoric of the French proletariat, which, he complains, echoes and reinforces this ethic of work—evidence to Lafargue that the proletariat has "allowed itself to be seduced by the dogma of work" (8). In a ploy reminiscent of Marx's insistence that alienated labor is the cause of private property, that the proletarians themselves recreate the system through their continued participation, Lafargue admonishes the French workers rather than the bourgeoisie for the shortcomings of capitalist production. "All individual and society [*sic*] misery," he insists, "takes its origin in the passion of the proletariat for work" (8). So, for example, when the manufacturers consume luxuries in excess or when they attempt to build obsolescence into their products, they should not be blamed; they are only trying to satisfy "the crazy desire for work on the part of the employees" (31). Because of this strange and furious mania for work, the workers do not demand enough: "The proletarians have got it into their heads to hold the capitalists to ten hours of factory work." That, he insists, is the great mistake: "Work must be forbidden, not imposed" (37). One of the most striking elements of the text is Lafargue's rather extravagant refusal to rehabilitate nonwork by recourse to productivist values. He disdains the "capitalist creed of usefulness" and claims that once the working day is reduced to three hours, workers can begin "to practice the virtues of laziness" (41, 32). Certainly his passionate tribute to "O, Laziness, mother of the arts and the noble virtues" (41) offers a pointed contrast to seemingly more serious interpreters of Marx like Kolakowski, who supports a very different reading. Although it is true, Kolakowski concedes, that Marx did support shorter working hours, this was not to give the worker more time for "carefree consumption" as Lafargue suggests, but rather, as Kolakowski reassures us in a

language resonant of more traditional and respectable virtues, "more time for free creative activity" (1978, 148).

Despite Lafargue's provocative tribute to the merits of laziness, the refusal of work is not in fact a rejection of activity and creativity in general or of production in particular. It is not a renunciation of labor *tout court*, but rather a refusal of the ideology of work as highest calling and moral duty, a refusal of work as the necessary center of social life and means of access to the rights and claims of citizenship, and a refusal of the necessity of capitalist control of production. It is a refusal, finally, of the asceticism of those—even those on the Left—who privilege work over all other pursuits, including "carefree consumption." Its immediate goals are presented as a reduction of work, in terms of both hours and social importance, and a replacement of capitalist forms of organization by new forms of cooperation. It is not only a matter of refusing exploited and alienated labor, but of refusing "work itself as the principle of reality and rationality" (Baudrillard 1975, 141). In this sense, "work which is liberated is liberation from work" (Negri 1991, 165). Rather than conceive the refusal of work narrowly, in terms of a specific set of actions—including strikes or slowdowns, demands for shorter hours or expanded opportunities for participation, and movements for improved support for or altered conditions of reproductive work—the phrase is, I suggest, best understood in very broad terms as designating a general political and cultural movement—or, better yet, as a potential mode of life that challenges the mode of life now defined by and subordinated to work.

The refusal of work can be broken down, analytically if not practically, into two processes, one that is essentially critical in its aims and another that is more fundamentally reconstructive in its objectives. The first of these, the negative process, is what is most readily conveyed by the word "refusal" and includes the critique of and rebellion against the present system of work and its values. If the system of waged labor is a crucial cultural and institutional mechanism by which we are linked to the mode of production, then the refusal of work poses a potentially substantial challenge to this larger apparatus. But the refusal of work, as both activism and analysis, does not simply pose itself against the present organization of work; it should also be understood as a creative practice, one that seeks to reappropriate and reconfigure existing forms of production and reproduction (see Vercellone 1996, 84). This is the special twofold nature of the refusal of work upon which Negri insists (2005,

269–74). The word "refusal" may be unfortunate in the sense that it does not immediately convey the constructive element that is so central to autonomist thought. Negri describes the refusal of work as both a struggle against the capitalist organization of work and a process of self-valorization, a form of "invention-power" (274). Rather than a goal in itself, "the refusal of work and authority, or really the refusal of voluntary servitude, is the *beginning* of liberatory politics" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 204; emphasis added).

The refusal of work thus comprises at once a movement of exit and a process of invention. The refusal can make time and open spaces—both physical and conceptual—within which to construct alternatives. Rather than a simple act of disengagement that one completes, the refusal is, in this sense, a process, a theoretical and practical movement that aims to effect a separation through which we can pursue alternative practices and relationships. "Beyond the simple refusal, or as part of that refusal," Hardt and Negri argue, "we need also to construct a new mode of life and above all a new community" (204). Paolo Virno develops this same idea through the concepts of exodus and exit: "The 'exit' modifies the conditions within which the conflict takes place, rather than presupposes it as an irremovable horizon; it changes the context within which a problem arises, rather than deals with the problem by choosing one or another of the alternative solutions already on offer" (1996, 199). In this sense, refusal, like exodus or exit, is an "*engaged withdrawal* (or founding leave-taking)" (197), a creative practice as opposed to a merely defensive stance. The passage from the negative moment of refusal to its constructive moment of exit and invention marks the shift from a reactive gesture of retreat to an active affirmation of social innovation. According to this reading, the refusal of work serves not as a goal, but as a path—a path of separation that creates the conditions for the construction of subjects whose needs and desires are no longer as consistent with the social mechanisms within which they are supposed to be mediated and contained. This is why, in contrast to both modernization and humanist Marxisms, Negri locates in the refusal of work not just the symptoms of exploitation and alienation, but a measure of freedom (2005, 273). The defection enacted through the refusal of work is not predicated upon what we lack or cannot do, it is not the path of those with nothing to lose but their chains; it is predicated instead on our "latent wealth, on an abundance of possibilities" (Virno 1996, 199).

By this account, the negative and positive moments of refusal can be distinguished analytically, but not isolated practically. Rather than the traditional two-stage model that posits a radical break between the transition, conceived as a negative process of dismantling, and communism, imagined as the positive construction of an alternative, the logic of this analysis suggests the value of a more substantial break between the present logic of capital and the transition—seen in this case as a process by which a different future can be constructed. That is, this formulation of the relationship between means and ends indicates the importance of pursuing more radical strategies that attempt a more significant break with the present. In this way we might also better understand the militancy of the strategy—the call to refuse and transform the present system of work, rather than simply to reconsider or renegotiate a few of its terms and conditions. Although the immoderate character of the phrase "refusal of work" may strike us today as naive or impractical, if we consider such strategies as laboratories—both conceptual and practical—in which different subjectivities can be constituted and paths to alternative futures opened, the utopian aspect of the refusal of work, its insistence that we struggle toward and imagine the possibilities of substantial social change, is essential.

THE ABOLITION OF WORK (AS WE KNOW IT)

The vision of an alternative that marks the transition from antiwork to postwork in autonomist thought is offered as a contrast to socialism, which is defined as a system that would redeem work through public ownership. In this sense, the refusal of work disavows the two visions we reviewed earlier: socialism imagined either as state-planned economy to alleviate exploitation or as small-scale production to remedy alienation—one version "means primarily disciplining the working class," the other is "romantic" (Zerowork 1975, 6). "The problem is not," Jean-Marie Vincent argues, "simply to liberate production, but also for humanity to liberate itself *from* production by ceasing to treat it as the centre of gravity of all social activities and individual action" (1991, 20). Whatever else it may be, the vision of postcapitalism privileged in the autonomist tradition is not a vision of the work society perfected, with its labors rationally organized, equally required, and justly distributed. Rather, it is a vision of the work society overcome—that is, of a society in which work is certainly not eliminated but comes to play a different role