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**PERFORMANCE AND VALUE: THE WORK OF THEATRE IN KARL MARX'S CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ECONOMY**

That theatre is a place of work seems beyond debate. But what kind of workplace is it? And under what conditions does theatre conform to a capitalist production process? At first glance these questions may seem obviously, even inextricably, linked; but investigating theatre as somewhere people go to work is a far different enterprise than specifying its economic connection to capital.

Over the past decade there has been a surge in attention to the labor that goes into performance, with most scholars, artists, and activists tackling how theatre functions as a workplace. Nicholas Ridout, for instance, describes theatre as a place where “one group of people spend leisure time sitting in the dark to watch others spend their working time under lights pretending to be other people.”<sup>1</sup> Others like Christin Essin redirect our gaze backstage to where designers and technicians perform the essential theatrical work that often goes unseen or unremarked.<sup>2</sup> And thanks to the workplace interventions of groups such as the Precarious Workers Brigade, it is hard to ignore how even ostensibly “progressive” theatres rely profoundly on the exploitation of unpaid interns and overworked custodians.<sup>3</sup> These and other varied efforts at shedding light into the hidden abode of theatrical production have done much to reveal the type of workplace theatres are, but even they do not explain the circumstances under which theatre corresponds to the capitalist production process. To examine theatre as a site of capitalist commodity production requires probing more than the “content” of theatrical labor; one must also concentrate on the “social form” this labor takes.

By “social form” I do not mean the aesthetics or even the formal qualities of a given job within the theatre (e.g., its requisite behaviors, costumes, and gestures).

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For their helpful suggestions on the material presented here, many thanks to Morgan Wadsworth and two anonymous readers who offered feedback.

Instead I have in mind how Karl Marx used the term when in the opening chapter of *Capital* he writes that as soon as people “start to work for each other in any way, their labour also assumes a social form.”<sup>4</sup> For Marx social form refers to the specific relations that emerge among parties involved in a given production process. The social form that labor takes can vary across different historical modes of production, and Marx’s focus of course was capitalism, in which the concrete activity a worker does is made into an abstraction. And within capitalist production it is only when the particular labor of a worker becomes a commodity that this labor becomes exchangeable socially with other instances of work. It is only when a commodity objectifies concrete labor that has been rendered abstract that the valorization of capital—the very aim of capitalist production—is possible.

Whereas political economy before Marx focused on how the content of labor (the actual work and time that goes into a product) determines the value of a commodity, Marx set out to investigate “why this content has assumed that particular form, that is to say why labour is expressed in value” (*Capital*, 1: 174). According to Marx, the value of a commodity could not be found in the commodity itself since value is not a commodity’s “natural property”—like, for instance, the hardness of a table is (1: 127). Value exists not in a “natural form” but only in a social form, that is, as a social relation between people that appears fetishistically in “the fantastic form of a relation between things” (1: 165). Marx was not satisfied with only studying the actual work people do, but sought instead to clarify what distinguished the capitalist mode of production as a specific historical system from all others. It is the abstracted form of labor, Marx believed, that “bear[s] the unmistakable stamp” of capitalism, “a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite” (1: 174–5). One can stitch a jacket or perform a monologue within various modes of production, but the social relations under which tailors or actors work vary enormously across these systems. To ask whether theatrical labor has been subsumed to capital requires examining the social relations that give form to value itself. Considering the level of abstraction such a Marxist enquiry entails, it may seem reasonable that both performance scholarship and activism tend to focus more on the seemingly practical matter of how people work in theatres than on the social form this labor assumes.

Even so, as this special issue of *Theatre Survey* evidences, there is growing interest in what Marxian theory can offer theatre and performance studies. But this (re)turn to Marx comes at a time when the place of performance within Marx’s value theory is being deeply scrutinized. The most influential of these critiques originates not from performance scholars, but from figures associated with the “autonomist” thought that has roots in postwar Italian *operaismo*. Paolo Virno, for instance, argues that Marx all but dismissed activities that have the quality of performance from his study of the capitalist production process, including everything that does not result in a physical product—from cognitive and emotional labor to service work and the performing arts. Such an assumption, Virno suggests, “places Marx in an embarrassing situation” now that we have entered a post-Fordist service economy “in which all wage labor has something in common with the ‘performing artist.’”<sup>5</sup> Virno is referring here to the epochal shift in the economic output of deindustrialized countries from the production of actual

things to less tangible phenomena like services and communication. Marx's refusal to consider the performing arts and other types of "immaterial labor" as a potential source of surplus value leads Virno to dispute the political and analytical relevance of Marx's entire value theory today. Virno's critique, which is frequently cited by theatre and performance scholars, participates in the broader move of key autonomist figures to shelve Marx's theory of value for being "out of date"—to use the words of Antonio Negri.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas many critics beyond theatre and performance studies have pointed out the categorical errors that underpin the autonomist dismissal of Marx's value theory, my purpose here is to consider the claim Virno and others make that Marx excluded performance from the capitalist production process.<sup>7</sup> By focusing on the value theory Marx developed in *Capital* and associated works from the late 1850s onward, I revisit the role in which he casts performance in his critique of classical political economy. As I show, Marx *does* posit performance as exceptional to capitalist commodity production, like Virno insists; *however*, this is only one part of Marx's argument. In addition to noting cases when performance should be kept out of consideration, Marx also emphasizes scenarios in which performance is organized in a capitalist fashion—namely, when it is organized as theatre. As a means for giving "social form" to the work of performance, theatre exemplifies for Marx the capitalist mode of production's capacity to bend human activity to the law of value. Marx's attention to theatre does not stem from any special concern for the economics of theatre; instead, he posits his analysis as a riposte to the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, who himself had insisted performance was exceptional to capitalist production.

My project to chart the role theatre plays in Marx's critique of political economy can be read partly as a response to what Shannon Jackson has called "the current rush to quote the post-Operaismo school" in theatre and performance studies.<sup>8</sup> Autonomism's appeal to performance scholars owes no doubt to the important place of performance in autonomist theories of labor. This means, however, that the recent workerist turn in performance scholarship—which also frequently quotes Marx—tends to pivot on a theoretical approach that all but dismisses the cornerstone of Marx's theory: value.<sup>9</sup> It may very well be that Marx is being read more today by performance scholars than in half a century, but what sort of reading is this exactly? And what aspects of Marx's thought that speak directly to theatre and performance does the autonomist interpretation of Marx obscure?

The reading of Marx I apply in this essay departs from autonomism and draws instead on a set of wide-ranging debates that unfurled internationally in the wake of 1968, which today often travels under the name of value theory. Of particular significance here is a strand of heterodox conversations in Anglophone economics and the so-called *neue Marx-Lektüre* (the New Reading of Marx) initiated by students of Theodor Adorno in West Germany.<sup>10</sup> Despite the many differences and disagreements within the bodies of work that get lumped beneath this blanket term, value theory typically prizes a rigorous and philologically nuanced reading of Marx's oeuvre. Those associated with value theory insist that Marx did not try to continue or even correct classical political economy, but instead leveled a categorical critique of its very foundations. As Michael Heinrich,

an important figure in *neue Marx-Lektüre*, notes, “This critique of categories begins with the most abstract category of political economy, that of value.”<sup>11</sup> As understood here, value is not something that exists within a commodity as determined by the content of the labor that went into it; rather, value is a social relation objectified in the commodity. In addition to breaking with classical political economy, value theory rejects the determinism of major orthodox Marxist traditions. But the economic focus of value theory also separates it from the dissident stream of Western Marxism (à la the Frankfurt School) that concentrates largely on matters of culture, ideology, and sociology. To date value theory has only rarely been applied to the cultural sphere, though recent efforts have been made to do so with respect to visual art and literature.<sup>12</sup> The present essay looks to add to this understanding of what value theory can say about artistic production by turning to the world of performance and outlining a Marxist economic analysis of theatre.

#### THE ABSENCE OF A MARXIST ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF THEATRE

Half a century ago, in their groundbreaking study *Performing Arts—The Economic Dilemma*, the economists William Baumol and William Bowen argued that performance is not “an intangible manifestation of the human spirit” exempt from economic analysis, but rather an exemplary “productive activity.”<sup>13</sup> Performing arts like theatre and orchestral music, they wrote, are emblematic of service work in which the activities of workers “are themselves the consumers’ good.”<sup>14</sup> In many ways Baumol and Bowen’s influential alignment of performance and service work anticipated the current torrent of scholarship that examines what the world of performance shares with a postindustrial society increasingly filled with service jobs and provisions.

For some working in theatre and performance studies today, performance has come to be more than just an example of a service industry; it is often rolled out as “the central scaffolding of a service economy.”<sup>15</sup> While a number of scholars deploy acting theory to explain the qualities required by many kinds of service work, others argue that modern managerial science is tapping into the creative and flexible capacities of performing artists themselves. Most often the tribulations of artists and performance ensembles are taken to be paradigmatic of the precarious experience of working in a neoliberal society.<sup>16</sup> As Theron Schmidt puts it in his gloss on this workerist turn in performance scholarship: “artists, performance-based or otherwise, can no longer claim some vantage point outside of advanced capitalism, but, it may be argued, are its most exemplary labourers.”<sup>17</sup>

Perspectives like these help us to grasp the myriad overlaps between the worlds of performance and capitalism today. But attempts to describe how capitalist society impinges on performance tend to look past or even overstate the specific economic relation performance has to capital. That performers are now “exemplary workers” does not necessarily mean that performance has become an exemplar of capitalist production. That entrepreneurial values and market pressures have snuck into theatres in unprecedented ways is not proof that theatrical performance is now indistinguishable from the capitalist commodity. In other words,

there is a crucial but frequently overlooked difference between the relationship performance has with capitalist society and the extent to which it conforms to capitalist production. Too often scholars and critics seem to assume that since a performance is produced in a capitalist society it must have been produced in a capitalist fashion. Not only does such an assumption risk selling performance short, but, more crucially, it compromises our understanding of capital.

In his recent book *Art and Value*, Dave Beech makes a similar point, but with regard to visual art:

The question of whether art conforms to the capitalist mode of production cannot be determined simply by observing certain capitalistic elements at work in the production or circulation of art but depends entirely on whether art embodies the social relations in which the capitalist subjugates production through the ownership of the means of production and the payment of wages to purchase labour power.<sup>18</sup>

Beech's argument challenges longstanding assumptions that visual art production has become identical to capitalist commodity production. He opens his study by noting an "extraordinary convergence" between mainstream economics and Marxist cultural analysis, both of which insist "art is, always has been, or has recently become nothing but a commodity" (*A&V*, 1). Even towering figures like Theodor Adorno go awry in Beech's book for failing to distinguish between art's relationship to capitalist society and its economic relationship to capital. Cultural Marxist thought from the Frankfurt School and Fredric Jameson up through the likes of Stewart Martin has tended to focus primarily on how capitalist society influences the themes and values of art, the market available to it, and how it gets consumed, rather than its specific mode of production. Despite Western Marxism's rigorous sociological and philosophical investigations of capitalist society, there remains, Beech avers, "the absence of a Marxist economic analysis of art" (217).<sup>19</sup> By this he means that even ostensibly Marxist cultural thought tends not to specify the economic relation of artistic labor to capital. We are familiar with arguments attesting to the "apparently cosy relationship between art and capitalism" but what often goes unexamined "is the difference between art's cultural, social and political incorporation by capitalism, on the one hand, and its economic incorporation, on the other" (1). To put it another way: much of what passes as Marxist cultural analysis does not separate the impact of capitalist society on art from art's potential production as a capitalist commodity. If, as Beech insists, the orthodox Marxism of Karl Kautsky "said a great deal about economics and very little about art," then "Western Marxism said a lot about art and aesthetics but virtually nothing about economics" (213). What is needed, therefore, is an economic analysis of how "art corresponds to the capitalist mode of production" (5). The same goes for theatre and performance.

*Art and Value* moves against the grain of much arts commentary to contend that, far from being subsumed to the social relations of capital, artistic production is "economically exceptional" to the capitalist mode (20). Although art certainly can metamorphose into a commodity and function like one within a market, it is

not a capitalist commodity like any other because ordinarily it is not produced in a capitalist fashion. The social relations under which artists work—when producing art, at least—tend to depart from those that determine the capitalist production process described by Marx. Artists do not earn a wage for the productive activity they perform, but typically they sell their products themselves or through someone working on their behalf. Moreover, artists when producing art do not *usually* exploit workers, at least for the purposes of generating surplus value. As such, artists occupy the position of neither labor nor capital. Their product is not a standard commodity, since the price set for it rarely accords to anything like an average socially necessary labor time. However, the prospect of art's economic exceptionalism is hardly cause for celebration, and Beech explains it does not amount to "an economic argument for art's autonomy" (27). As Western Marxist thought has proven, art and artists are hardly freed from the vagaries and vicissitudes of capitalist society when artistic labor is not subsumed to capitalist production.

Beech's method is instructive for theatre and performance insofar as it emphasizes the need to look to art's mode of production and the social relations therein, rather than at the content of any particular instance of artistic labor. The study's usefulness notwithstanding, the actual conclusions *Art and Value* reaches cannot be assumed to hold for theatre, for as Sarah Brouillette notes, Beech's insights "can be applied rigorously only to works of irreproducible fine art."<sup>20</sup> Beech himself admits as much, even claiming disciplinary specificity (he focuses almost exclusively on visual art and sculpture) to be an essential methodological premise:

There is not only one economics of art. Since the arts are not economically unified, the economic analysis of one sector cannot stand in for the economic analysis of another. Different disciplines within the arts, including theatre, literature and the visual arts, have different modes of production, distribution and consumption. (23)

There is good reason to doubt theatre's economic exceptionalism; as I have noted, theatre is widely recognized as a site of waged work, and it is hardly a stretch to identify the commodity character of theatrical labor despite its putative ephemerality. But taken on their own, categories like waged work and the commodity do not amount to a capitalist production process. What must be determined are the conditions under which the labor of performance crystallizes into the social form of a *capitalist* commodity.

In reviewing *Art and Value*, Jasper Bernes and Daniel Spaulding distinguish theatre as a "borderline case" in its correspondence to capitalist production. Theatre is less like visual art than the publishing industry, they suggest, "in which enterprises may be organized along either capitalist or non-capitalist lines."<sup>21</sup> Bernes and Spaulding make this point only in passing, but it seems generally correct by implying that "theatre" does not comprise a singular mode of production. There are many types of theatre, of course, but what remains to be shown is how and when performance is organized along capitalist lines. That such a situation for performance exists was already noted by Marx, something critics seem

to miss when claiming he excepted performance from the capitalist production process.

#### PERFORMANCE AND CAPITALIST PRODUCTION

What then is the capitalist production process? And what would it mean to say that a performance conforms to it or not? In *Capital* and related works, Marx offers a theoretical rather than a historical analysis of capital's mode of production. Instead of charting a history of capitalism or examining a particular historical phase of capitalism, he describes the fundamental categories that distinguish the capitalist mode of production as an identifiable historical system. His task, in the words of Michael Heinrich, is to outline "those elements which must remain the same regardless of all historical variations so that we may speak of 'capitalism' as such."<sup>22</sup> Daring to speak, as Marx does, of "the invisible essence of capital" might seem cause to accuse his project of being transhistorical—or even ahistorical—but this would ignore his sense of dialectics.<sup>23</sup> Marx conceded that capitalist society shifts and alters over the course of its own history, noting this most famously in *The Communist Manifesto* from 1848. But in addition to foregrounding that capitalist society requires constant innovations and drastic ruptures just to survive, Marx also focuses attention on the categories that are fundamental to capitalism as a historical mode of production. This is what Marx seeks to do in *Capital*: to "present the internal organization of the capitalist mode of production, its ideal average, as it were" (*Capital*, 3: 970).<sup>24</sup>

Just as Marx's overview of the capitalist mode of production cannot adequately describe every particular instance of it, the same holds true for his theoretical analysis of theatre: it does not account for every—or even any—actual theatre. Modifying Heinrich, we could say that Marx outlines the elements that "must remain the same regardless of all historical variations so that we may speak of" a capitalist theatre "as such." For this reason, the ideal average of a capitalist theatre Marx details in his writing beginning in the late 1850s is not unfit for studying theatre today unless one thinks we no longer live in a historical system dominated by capital as Marx understood it.

To explain capitalism as a historical mode of production, Marx distinguishes *capitalist* commodity production from a general type of commodity production found in other historical modes. He describes this latter *noncapitalist* commodity production as a circuit in which commodity producers sell their commodities (C) to earn money from buyers (M) that they then use to buy other commodities (C). Whereas this simple form of commodity circulation, C-M-C, has as its end "the satisfaction of needs," the goal of *capitalist* commodity production is to increase the sum of the value invested in the production process (*Capital*, 1: 250). Both money and commodities are still in play in capitalist production, but they now operate as capital. In the C-M-C circuit, commodities get privileged for their use value, whereas the "driving and motivating force" of capitalist production is "exchange-value" (1: 250). If the rationale behind C-M-C is to acquire a commodity that is qualitatively different than the one a person already has, then capitalist production looks to increase quantitatively what a capitalist starts with, which is

money (M). The circuit of capital begins with money (M) that gets invested to produce a commodity (C), which is then sold for a higher order of money than opened the process (M')—Marx represents this as M-C-M' (1: 247). The value invested as money at the start of the circuit must return to the capitalist in excess; otherwise there would be little point. Marx calls this process of increasing the total sum of one's value "valorization," and the excess accrued over the original value advanced is surplus value. In other words, M-C-M' describes the movement of capital. No matter the form it takes, be it money or a commodity, capital is "a sum of value that performs this movement." It is not a static thing, "not merely value, but rather *self-valorizing value*"—value that expands itself.<sup>25</sup> Any actual needs satisfied in the circuit of capital are auxiliary to the aim of capitalist production, which is to generate surplus value.

But what is the source of surplus value? The circuit of capital is not just a case of buying low to sell high. Nor is it (only) systemic thievery. Were either the case, capitalist production would be a zero-sum game. At stake in the capitalist production process is the creation of new value.

Surplus value emerges sometime between the two phases of capital circulation, M-C and C-M'. To find the source of surplus value Marx famously descends into the "hidden abode of production," which consists of the varied activities that unfold between these circulatory phrases (1: 279). To kick the process off a capitalist first needs to acquire the commodities necessary for production, which happens in the first phase, M-C. In addition to buying the requisite means of production (the raw materials and equipment) whose value is expended in production, the capitalist also purchases the "special commodity . . . whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value." This special commodity is "labour power," the capacity of a worker to work for a specific duration (1: 270). Marx describes the means of production as "constant capital" since their value remains fixed when transferred into the final product, distinguishing labor power as "variable capital" because the value a worker transfers to the final product varies according to the conditions of the production process itself (1: 307–19). Surplus value accrues when a capitalist pays a worker a sum of value in wages that is less than the total value a worker confers to the final product. Marx calls this extraction of surplus value from labor power exploitation. The social relation that undergirds the capitalist production process exists between capital and labor, and not as a contract freely and directly agreed upon by a capitalist and a worker.

From the standpoint of capital, the actual use value of a produced commodity (its usefulness for a purchaser) is irrelevant, since the motivation of M-C-M' is exchange value. Likewise the actual content of the labor performed in the course of production does not determine whether the process is capitalist or not. Just as Marx identifies value as consisting of both use value and exchange value, so too does labor have "a twofold nature" (1: 132). Labor generates use values as well as the exchange value that forms the substance all capitalist commodities have in common. Just as a commodity is use value *and* exchange value, it also contains concrete *and* abstract labor. Whereas concrete labor is "useful labour, i.e. productive activity of a definite kind" (1: 133) that yields use values, abstract labor is "the



expenditure of human labour in general” (1: 137). Abstraction explains how an act of concrete labor comes into relation with all other acts of concrete labor in society, forming the very “social substance” of a commodity that allows it to be exchanged with any other commodity (1: 138). Concrete and abstract labor are not opposites, nor are they “different *types*” of labor. They are, Diane Elson explains, “different *aspects* of labour.”<sup>26</sup> But the dominance of abstract labor is historically specific to capitalist commodity production insofar as it comprises what Marx calls “value-forming substance” (1: 129). The capitalist commodity, thus, is the objectified form that abstract labor takes, and its value indexes the social relation between capital and labor.

Marx’s value theory is hardly straightforward, but nor is his object of study. Value, writes Joshua Clover, “is without a doubt the most elusive of [Marx’s] categories,” but it grounds both his “critique of all existing political economy, and his own propositions about capital’s laws of motion.”<sup>27</sup> As Elson puts it, value is the “*foundation*” not just of Marx’s analysis of capitalism, but his very attempt to understand capital “in a way that is politically useful to socialists.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, value drives capitalist commodity production and also shapes the terrain on which efforts to undo capital must be fought. For the present argument, it should suffice to note that determining whether performance conforms to capitalist commodity production requires looking for the starring role of abstract labor instead of describing the concrete activity someone performs. This means examining the social relations within which performance might take the form of waged labor that has been hired with capital to be exploited as a source of surplus value. As we will see, theatre is the name Marx gives to the set of social relations that organizes performance into a capitalist commodity.

#### PERFORMANCE AS PRODUCTIVE LABOR

In a capitalist theater, the actors are therefore just as much “productive laborers” as steelworkers who work in a capitalist steel mill.

—Michael Heinrich<sup>29</sup>

To state the obvious, theatre was never Marx’s object of study. When Marx speaks of theatre—and other performing arts, like dance and music—it is almost always in response to what Adam Smith had to say about it.<sup>30</sup> In *The Wealth of Nations* from 1776, Smith mentions theatre to illustrate his theory of unproductive labor. For Smith the work of a performer—be it “the declamation of the actor, the harangue of the orator, or the tune of the musician”—coincides with that “of the menial servant” insofar as “the work of all of them perishes in the very instant of its production,” leaving behind no “vendible commodity.”<sup>31</sup> Workers who perform services instead of producing goods can never be productive laborers in Smith’s world, no matter how necessary or important their work may be. If workers do not produce actual commodities that can store the labor that went into them, they cannot generate material wealth for their employers.

Smith’s focus, like Marx’s, was less the use value of commodities than that for which they can be exchanged. Nonetheless Marx subjects Smith’s emphasis on

the materiality of the commodity in capital accumulation to extensive critique. He scrutinizes Smith's theory of productive and unproductive labor most thoroughly in *Theories of Surplus Value*, a work written in 1862–3 but published posthumously. Sometimes described as the fourth volume of *Capital*, *Theories of Surplus Value* departs from the other three by engaging even more overtly with classical political economy. It features lengthy commentary on figures like Smith and David Ricardo, and at times reads more as a critique of claims made by others than an attempt to lay out fundamental features of capitalism. It is here, while dissecting Smith's concept of productive labor, that Marx offers his broadest account of theatre.<sup>32</sup>

As we have already seen, neither the concrete labor performed nor the content of the commodity produced indicates for Marx whether a production process is capitalist. This is a clear break with Smith, but Marx does not entirely reject his claim that performers and service workers engage in “unproductive labour” of the sort that does *not* add “to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed.”<sup>33</sup> According to Marx, the work of an actor or a butler can be either productive or unproductive depending on the social relations at play. He explains that categories like productive and unproductive labor should index the social form labor takes, and not the content of labor or its product. In *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx parrots Smith's position on unproductive labor, but not without reframing it in a crucial way:

[A]n entrepreneur of theatres, concerts, brothels, etc., buys the temporary disposal over the labour-power of the actors, musicians, prostitutes, etc.—in fact in a roundabout way that is only of formal economic interest; in its result the process is the same—he buys this so-called “unproductive labour,” whose “services perish in the very instant of their performance” and do not fix or realise themselves “any permanent” (“particular” is also used) “subject or vendible commodity” (apart from themselves). The sale of these to the audience [*Publikum*] provides him with wages and profit. And these services which he has thus bought enable him to buy them again; that is to say, they themselves renew the fund from which they are paid for.<sup>34</sup>

Smith assumes that the social relations that define performance and service work are always direct social relations. He supposes that butlers and actors sell their services directly to those who consume it. Without necessarily excluding this possibility, Marx posits another by adding into the mix a third party, referred to as an entrepreneur, who mediates between the producer and the consumer. This entrepreneur does not buy the service performed to enjoy it himself. Instead he purchases “temporary disposal over the labour-power” of the performer. In doing so the entrepreneur becomes a capitalist and the performer a laborer, and they relate to each other socially as capital and labor. The capitalist does not consume the commodity as a use value, but transforms it into a vendible commodity to sell “to the audience.” When the return the capitalist receives on his initial investment exceeds the value of the labor power, the capital he advanced can be said to have been valorized. In such a case, however, the material situation Smith

originally describes still holds; the service perishes “in the very instant” of performance, but not before it has transformed socially into the form of a capitalist commodity. Marx moves the actor’s performance that Smith describes as unproductive into a new set of social relations through which the very same labor yields surplus value.

It might help to clarify that Marx implicitly distinguishes theatre from performance. Performance pertains to a work performed, and theatre to a set of social relations that can encompass this work. To put it another way, theatre describes the social form performance takes under capital. A theatre organized along capitalist lines need not be structured in an industrialized fashion as may have been found in Stanislavsky’s Moscow Art Theatre, but it must entail the social relations specific to the capitalist mode of production.<sup>35</sup> For theatrical labor to be “productive” it will be organized as wage labor for the purposes of creating commodities that yield surplus value. As Marx explains in *Capital*:

The only worker who is productive is one who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, or in other words contributes towards the self-valorization of capital. . . . The concept of a productive worker therefore implies not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of his work, but also a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital’s direct means of valorization. (1: 644)

Marx is not specifying a literal organization of the production process here. By his definition of capitalist production, even the most experimental and freewheeling venue can be organized in a capitalist fashion so long as labor is subsumed to capital.

The variety of locales in which Marx claims productive labor can be found is striking; they include not just theatres, but also concert halls, brothels, restaurants, hotels, and more. Since Marx’s chief interest is abstract labor, his attention to such places should not be misunderstood as a particular concern for activities like theatrical labor, cooking, or sex work. Moreover, references to the theatre are meant primarily as rhetorical ripostes to Smith’s argument that it is not just “some of the most frivolous professions” that should be classed as unproductive, but even “some of the gravest and most important” services, such as those offered by lawyers, priests, and doctors.<sup>36</sup> If something as “frivolous” as theatrical labor could be exploited for surplus value, Marx insists, then why should we expect other activities to be an exception.

#### THEATRE AS A SITE OF PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

Productive labor is not an essential category for Marx in the way value is. His writing on this topic is notoriously tricky, not the least because the very distinction between productive and unproductive labor is, as Ian Gough notes, “one of the most suspect legacies of classical political economy.”<sup>37</sup> Although Marx turns to productive labor in order to critique Smith’s contribution to classical political

economy, Marx's perspective on what counts as productive labor has been trenchantly criticized itself. Given that Marx provides his take on capitalist theatre in the course of defining productive labor, critiques of his distinction between productive and unproductive labor can help clarify the limits and usefulness of Marx's performance theory.

Arguably the most thoroughgoing charges against Marx's writing on productive labor have come from figures tied to the 1970s Wages for Housework Campaign. Marxist feminists like Silvia Federici, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, and Leopoldina Fortunati targeted how Marx's emphasis on the exploitation of labor power within the capitalist production process deprivileges other kinds of work that are essential to reproducing labor power.<sup>38</sup> Marx himself acknowledges that his definition of productive labor does not cover all activities that produce things or contribute to social reproduction. But Marx contends that his task is to define productive labor specifically "from the standpoint of capitalist production."<sup>39</sup> And yet, Marx's claim that he includes only labor that produces surplus value in no way resolves the critiques that he overlooked the various acts of unpaid reproductive labor that women perform to support working men and children. In addition to depoliticizing reproductive work, Marx's elision naturalizes the exploitation of women in the domestic sphere. But instead of dismissing his theory of value entirely, many Marxist feminist critics have sought to supplement it with a gender critique.<sup>40</sup>

More recently Marx has come under fire from critics who claim he excludes from his analysis of capitalist production innumerable forms of intellectual, creative, and emotional labor that do not result in an actual material product. As noted above, chief among these critics are autonomists like Paolo Virno, for whom the post-Fordist world of wage labor is full of "virtuosic" workers who "produce surplus value" by behaving like performing artists. By this Virno means that the immaterial labor of information and communication work essential to capitalist production today tends to depend on "the presence of others" and find "its own fulfillment" in the fact of its own unfolding.<sup>41</sup> The transition to a postindustrial society has compromised the usefulness of Marx's theory of value, Virno argues, since Marx did not believe that such forms of performance-like work could produce surplus value:

In principle, there is nothing to say that a dancer does not give rise to a surplus value. However, for Marx, the absence of a finished work that lives on beyond the activity of performance puts modern intellectual virtuosity on a par with actions undertaken in the provision of a personal service: services that are seen as being nonproductive, because in order to obtain them one spends income, not capital.<sup>42</sup>

In Virno's account, Marx excluded performing artists and other virtuosic workers as productive laborers because they do not produce a product that is independent from their performance. "In conclusion," Virno insists, "virtuosic labor, for Marx, is a form of wage labor which is not, at the same time, productive labor."<sup>43</sup>

It should be clear from the previous section that the perspective Virno attributes to Marx more resembles that of Adam Smith, whose theory of the productive labor of performance Marx rigorously critiques. The autonomists' interpretation of Marx's value theory itself has been heavily criticized. At times their misreading of Marx carries an air of willfulness, no less so than in Virno's work. According to Virno, Marx "for the most part," "virtually," and "almost always" dismissed performance as productive labor.<sup>44</sup> Hedges like these are striking; they nearly suggest Virno knows his gloss does *not* represent Marx's position on either performance or productive labor.<sup>45</sup> What Marx calls the "correct definition" of productive labor—which is also capital's—specifies neither the materiality of labor nor the materiality of the commodity, but only the social relation between wage labor and capital that "produces surplus-value for the capitalist."<sup>46</sup> As noted above, Marx offers no reason to assume that performance cannot generate surplus value so long as it is organized in accord with capital. This represents a categorical break with both Smith and the position Virno attributes to Marx. Virno's claim that Marx categorizes performance as unproductive labor neglects Marx's emphasis on social relations, and privileges instead—as Smith does—the (im)material content of performance. Marx does not ignore the immateriality of performance, but it is not materiality that determines whether a performance produces surplus value. The ephemerality of a theatre's commodity is irrelevant to whether theatrical labor can be exploited as productive labor. As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*: "Actors are productive workers, not in so far as they produce a play, but in so far as they increase their employer's wealth."<sup>47</sup> That theatrical labor can be a source of surplus value and theatre can be a site of capitalist production is no reason to rejoice however. As Sianne Ngai reminds us, the category of unproductive labor is not one of "moral disparagement."<sup>48</sup> So too Marx argues, "To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune."<sup>49</sup>

For Marx theatre is not so different from a factory insofar as it comprises a set of social relations that gives the labor performed within it a social form distinct to capitalism, that of the capitalist commodity. But theatre is not just a site of production; typically it doubles as a site of consumption. Performance scholars are familiar with the simultaneity of production and consumption in theatre, but it has caused confusion for readers of Marx. No less an eminent theorist than Ernst Mandel in his introduction to the second volume of *Capital* finds "striking contradictions" in *Theories of Surplus Value* on exactly this issue. The trouble for Mandel comes when Marx claims that an "actor's labour" in a theatre can be both productive and unproductive at the same time.<sup>50</sup> What Mandel deems contradictory, however, is essential to theatre and the multiple sets of social relations that undergird it. The first set of relations develops when a performance is consumed by an audience "while it is being performed."<sup>51</sup> This requires the audience to approach the performance as a means for satisfying a need or want, in which case the performance is "purchased to be consumed as a use-value."<sup>52</sup> Since the audience members directly consume the performance they cannot use it to augment the value they paid for it. In other words, the audience cannot resell a performance as a capitalist commodity that generates surplus value. The second set of

social relations arises when someone purchases an actor's labor power not to consume it as a personal service but to sell it on to an audience as a commodity.

Imagine I commission a performance for my upcoming birthday party. Since the content of the performance does not matter, this could be a collection of my favorite Shakespearean monologues or a piece of endurance art. But assume no one shows up to my party. In such a case, I am left having hired a performer to perform just for me, and I treat their service as a way to satisfy my wants—which in this instance is to be distracted from what must seem the sorry state of my friendships. I have not hired the performer to earn a profit, and their labor expires in the act of its unfolding. The money I have paid the performer does not take the form of capital since I have paid this wage to satisfy a want and not to create surplus value.

But suppose sometime later, having been so impressed by this performer at my birthday party, I hire them again, but this time to do the same performance for others who buy tickets from me to see it. Now I am commissioning the performer's services not for my own enjoyment but as a production from which I hope to make a profit. I am investing in the performer's labor power with capital, the aim being to recoup and augment through ticket sales the original sum of value I advanced. In both situations the actual labor performed is physiologically the same. The social relations between the performer and me, however, are qualitatively different. At my birthday party the performance is a personal service for which I pay directly out of my existing income—it is unproductive labor. In the second case, the performance becomes a capitalist commodity that I purchase with capital to sell on to others for a profit—it is productive labor.

The fact that performers' work can be productive and unproductive simultaneously has nothing to do with their labor as such, but with the social relations at play. This simultaneity hinges on the two types of consumer in a capitalist theatre: the audience and the theatrical entrepreneur. Marx explains this by distinguishing "productive consumption" from "unproductive consumption."<sup>53</sup> To consume a commodity productively requires transferring the value of one commodity into the value of a new commodity while supplementing it with the value added by productive labor. A theatrical entrepreneur who purchases an actor's labor power to valorize capital consumes productively. By contrast, audience members who buy a ticket to watch the actor's labor consume unproductively because they approach the performance directly as a use value, paying for it against revenue. Even if Donald Trump were part of the audience in question, he would not be there as a capitalist. In purchasing a ticket, he buys from the theatrical entrepreneur the right to experience the product of the theatrical production process. Class divisions between Trump and the performers undoubtedly still exist, but Trump does not approach them socially as capital to labor in his capacity as an audience member. Thus, a performance can function differently for two consumers at the same time without contradiction. As Marx explains:

The same labour can be productive when I buy it as a capitalist, as a producer, in order to valorise it, and unproductive when I buy it as a consumer, a spender of revenue, in order to consume its use value, no matter whether this use value

perishes with the activity of the labour capacity itself or materialises and fixes itself in an object.<sup>54</sup>

That a performer's labor can be both productive and unproductive and be consumed productively and unproductively is an essential quality of Marx's capitalist theatre.

#### THEATRE AS EXEMPLAR

Theatre is more than an example of the capitalist production process for Marx; it is an exemplar. This is not to say that theatre is exceptionally effective as a site of commodity production, but that it conforms to Marx's "ideal average" of capitalist production in ways that are rhetorically exceptional for his critique of political economy. One further passage from *Theories of Surplus Value* should suffice to demonstrate this:

An actor, for example, or even a clown is a productive laborer if he works in the service of a capitalist (an entrepreneur) to whom he returns more labour than he receives from him in the form of wages; while a jobbing tailor who comes to the capitalist's house and patches his trousers for him, producing a mere use value for him, is an unproductive labourer. The former's labour is exchanged with capital, the latter's with revenue. The former's labour produces a surplus value; in the latter's, revenue is consumed.<sup>55</sup>

Here Marx again rehearses his argument against Smith about the potential for an actor to be exploited within a capitalist production process. In addition to outlining key facets of his value theory, this excerpt is striking for the rhetorical weight carried by the actor. From the standpoint of capital, Marx suggests, it is just as possible for an actor to be productive as it is for a tailor to be unproductive. If the next time you need a new shirt you skipped going to H&M and instead directly hired an independent tailor to make one for you, that tailor's work would not be productive according to capitalist criteria no matter how little you paid them. They would be performing a personal service for you instead of producing surplus value, and you would be paying the tailor out of your own existing revenue rather than investing in their labor power with capital. A scenario like this confounds what classical political economy understood useful and productive activity to be. It remains compelling today by playing against a proclivity to prioritize concrete activity over social form: how can someone who spends the working day to produce something that can be worn be unproductive whereas an activity as "frivolous" as that of an actor ("or even a clown") may be productive? The contrast Marx draws between the actor and tailor evinces the unnaturalness and historical specificity of the capitalist mode of production by upending assumptions of what counts as productivity.

Theatre is exceptional to more than classical and commonsensical understandings of productive activity; it even breaks in important ways with Marx's broader theory of capitalism itself. While the exemplar of theatre bolsters

Marx's claims about capitalist production, it clashes with his argument about the reproduction of capitalist society. In Marx's account, there is a limit to which a capitalist system can tolerate productive labor geared to unproductive consumption. As explained above, unproductive consumption occurs when a commodity sold as such by a capitalist is consumed as a direct use value by its buyer. People consume use values (like food) everyday as a matter of mere survival, but Marx does not count means of subsistence into unproductive consumption because consuming them is necessary for reproducing one's capacity to work. Since no one can live off theatrical performance alone, we might say theatre more resembles the large number of commodities that "[i]n their reality, as articles, . . . have no *use-value* for the process of reproduction."<sup>56</sup> For such a reason, theatre audiences tend to be unproductive consumers.<sup>57</sup> This is not to say, however, that theatre is unnecessary from the standpoint of capital. Marx explains in the second volume of *Capital* that even luxury items are essential for keeping capitalist production afloat, not the least because they give the relatively wealthy reason to expend money that cannot be invested in production.<sup>58</sup> Whether theatre could ever be considered socially necessary for the reproduction and accumulation of capital is beyond both Marx and this essay. That theatre contributes minimally or not at all to the social reproduction of capital, however, does not change the fact that it can conform to the rules of capitalist production.

The uncertainty of theatre's place in capitalist *reproduction* may only heighten a sense that Marx's reference to theatre in his theory of capitalist *production* is merely rhetorical. If this were so, his description of capitalist theatre would function similarly to mentions of other performances he makes elsewhere, such as the allusions he offers to *Hamlet* in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, or the famous metaphor of the dancing table in *Capital* that illustrates commodity fetishism.<sup>59</sup> Like these examples, the specter of a capitalist theatre adds force and clarity to Marx's argument about capitalist production generally. But references to theatre in Marx's critique of political economy are also more than rhetoric. However scattered and incomplete his understanding of performance, Marx provides a starting point for evaluating the economic connection of theatre to capital. He outlines the ideal average of a capitalist theatre. Marx's approach is all the more useful to theatre and performance studies because he demonstrates practical meanings of essential categories like the commodity, labor, capital, and value to performance.

Understood from a Marxist perspective then, a theatrical production combines the value of the constant capital used in a performance—the sets, the building, the rigging, and so on—with the value added by the labor power of performers, designers, technicians, and others. What results is a commodity that has usefulness for audiences and a value for the capitalist; meanwhile the workers whose labor power is exploited receive a wage they spend on goods they need to live. Although Marx more or less equates theatrical performance with the work of other performing arts, theatre departs in a marked way from the concert halls, restaurants, and other surprising sites of production he identifies in his critique of political economy. Not only does theatre demonstrate that "content is completely irrelevant for determining whether labour is productive or not," it does so via its inimitable ability to subsume any activity into production.<sup>60</sup> In a theatre organized



along capitalist lines, any action—be it an amateur’s hobby or the manufacture of a widget—becomes a potential source of surplus value. It does not matter if an actor performs the actions of a military general or a prisoner, a miner or a mother, a teacher or a politician—from the perspective of capital each of these activities when performed in a theatre organized along capitalist lines is a potential source of surplus value. In this sense theatrical labor exemplifies the extent to which labor can be “*abstracted from its concrete manifestation*.”<sup>61</sup> Theatre can put to work on the stage almost any activity that can be found off of it.<sup>62</sup> For Marx, performing in a theatre is not a means of abolishing capitalist productivity but of ensuring it. To say this is not to dismiss all that can be accomplished in the course of performance; but in recognizing the political usefulness of theatre as an aesthetic activity we cannot lose sight of the fact that it remains a potentially exemplary place of economic activity.

Of course many, if not most, particular instances of theatre are actually exceptional to capitalist commodity production. This does not mean, however, that theatre possesses the same sort of economic exceptionalism Dave Beech attributes to visual art. For Beech fine art production tends not to conform to rules of productive capital, but it can exemplify the commodity features of merchant and finance capital. Theatrical production by contrast exemplifies the capitalist production process, even though the actual theatrical commodity behaves in rather exceptional ways. It is difficult but not impossible to envision a performance as something that can be traded or subjected to financial speculation. And I have left open important questions about the theatrical commodity’s reproducibility and the extent to which theatre can squeeze theatrical labor of what Marx calls “relative” surplus value by, for instance, intensifying or rationalizing the theatrical production process. But even as a site of production, theatre frequently breaks with the capitalist mode. Although theatre can be organized along capitalist lines, counterexamples like community theatres, nonprofit theatres, student theatres, amateur theatres, and even state-subsidized theatres are obviously more the norm than the exception. Even the most profit-oriented theatres could be expected to buck Marx’s ideal average of a capitalist theatre. None of these exceptions undermine Marx’s theory of the capitalist theatre, however; they are the exceptions that make his ideal average exactly that, “ideal.”

But just because a particular performance may break from the capitalist production process hardly means it is immune to capitalist society. This is particularly evident in the many theatres and performance ensembles today whose production processes might bear little resemblance to the capitalist mode, but whose work and livelihood suffer from so many of its ills.

## ENDNOTES

1. Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6.
2. Christin Essin, “Unseen Labor and Backstage Choreographies: A Materialist Production History of *A Chorus Line*,” *Theatre Journal* 67:2 (2015): 197–212.

3. See <http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com/>, accessed 17 October 2016.
4. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1990), 164. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text.
5. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti et al. (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 2004), 54; 68.
6. Antonio Negri, "The Specter's Smile," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's "Specters of Marx,"* ed. Michael Sprinkler (London: Verso, 2008), 5–16, at 10. See also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 2001, 27–30.
7. Two perspectives on the autonomist reading of Marx's value theory from within the humanities that inform my own include Joshua Clover, "Value | Theory | Crisis," *PMLA* 127:1 (2011): 107–14; and Annie McClanahan, "Investing in the Future: Late Capitalism's End of History," *Cultural Economy* 6:1 (2013): 78–93. For a critique of the autonomist argument about work, see Sarah Brouillette, "Creative Labor," *Mediations* 24.2 (2009), 140–9.
8. Shannon Jackson, "Just-in-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56:4 (2012): 10–31, at 25.
9. Recent articles and monographs in theatre and performance studies in which the autonomist reading of Marx figures prominently are too many to list here. A notable sample includes the following: Joe Kelleher, "A Golden Surface: On Virtuosity and Cosmopolitics," in *International Politics and Performance*, ed. Jenny Edkins and Adrian Kear (London: Routledge, 2013): 96–110; Dieter LeSage, "Permanent Performance," *Performance Research* 17:6 (2012): 14–21; Nicholas Ridout, "On the Work of Things: Musical Production, Theatrical Labor, and the 'General Intellect,'" *Theatre Journal* 64:3 (2012): 389–408; Rebecca Schneider, "It Seems As If ... I Am Dead: Zombie Capitalism and Theatrical Labor," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56:4 (2012): 150–62. Bojana Cvejić and Ana Vujanović offer a compelling critique of the autonomist notion of "immaterial labor" in relation to performance; see "Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable," *TDR: The Drama Review* 56:4 (2012): 163–77, at 175–6.
10. For an introduction to value theory, see Endnotes, "Communitisation and Value-Form Theory," *Endnotes* 2 (2010), <http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/4>, accessed 12 September 2016. And for an overview of *neue Marx-Lektüre* specifically, see Ingo Elbe, "Between Marx, Marxism, and Marxisms—Ways of Reading Marx's Theory," *Viewpoint Magazine*, 21 October 2013, <https://viewpointmag.com/2013/10/21/between-marx-marxism-and-marxisms-ways-of-reading-marxs-theory>, accessed 12 September 2016.
11. Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Karl Marx's "Capital,"* trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 33.
12. For examples, see Dave Beech, *Art and Value: Art's Economic Exceptionalism in Classical, Neoclassical and Marxist Economics* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 9; Sianne Ngai, "Visceral Abstractions," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21:1 (2015): 33–63; Daniel Spaulding, "A Clarification on Art and Value," *Mute*, 28 May 2015, [www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/art-value-and-freedom-fetish-0](http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/art-value-and-freedom-fetish-0), accessed 12 September 2016.
13. William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, *Performing Arts—The Economic Dilemma* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1966), 162.
14. *Ibid.*, 164.
15. Jackson, 12.
16. For excellent examples of this scholarship, see: Adam Alston, "Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value," *Performance Research* 18:2 (2013): 128–38; Broderick Chow, "An Actor Manages: On Acting and Immaterial Labour," *New Left Project*, 29 January 2013, [www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article\\_comments/an\\_actor\\_manages\\_on\\_acting\\_and\\_immaterial\\_labour](http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/an_actor_manages_on_acting_and_immaterial_labour), accessed 12 September 2016; Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Elyssa Livergant, "The Passion Players," *New Left Project*, 23 January 2013, [www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article\\_comments/the\\_passion\\_players](http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/the_passion_players), accessed 12 September 2016; Nicholas Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, and Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013). For influential perspectives like these from outside theatre

and performance studies, see: Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (London: Verso, 2005).

17. Theron Schmidt, "Troublesome Professionals: On the Speculative Reality of Theatrical Labour," *Performance Research* 18:2 (2013): 15–26, at 15.

18. Beech, 9. Subsequent citations of this source are given parenthetically in the text.

19. This is found in *ibid.*, "On the Absence of a Marxist Economics of Art," 211–40.

20. Sarah Brouillette, "On Art and 'Real Subsumption,'" *Mediations* 29.2 (2016): 169–76, at 170.

21. Jasper Bernes and Daniel Spaulding, "Truly Extraordinary," *Radical Philosophy* 195 (2016): 51–4, at 54.

22. Heinrich, 31.

23. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 3*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1993), 134.

24. For a more extended discussion of Marx's historical dialectic as it relates to performance, see Michael Shane Boyle, "Brecht's Gale: Innovation and Postdramatic Theatre," *Performance Research* 21:3 (2016): 16–26.

25. Heinrich, 86–7; italics in the original.

26. Diane Elson, "The Value Theory of Labour," in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism*, ed. Diane Elson (London: Verso, 2015), 115–80, at 144.

27. Joshua Clover, "Value in the Expanded Field," *Mediations* 29:2 (2016): 161–7, at 161.

28. Diane Elson, "Introduction," in *Value*, i–v, at i.

29. Heinrich, 122.

30. Marx discusses references to performance in the work of other classical economists like Jean-Baptiste Say and Germain Garnier. Like Marx, their mentions of theatre were responses to Smith, which is why I focus only on Marx's engagement with Smith.

31. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations: Books I–III*, ed. Andrew Skinner (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), 430–1.

32. For a helpful overview of Marx's perspectives on productive labor, see I. I. Rubin, "Productive Labor," in his *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* [1924], trans. Miloš Samardžija and Fredy Perlman (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2008), 259–75; Ian Gough, "Marx's Theory of Productive and Unproductive Labour," *New Left Review* 76 (1972): 47–72.

33. Smith, 429.

34. Karl Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels Collected Works*, vol. 31, *Marx 1861–1863*, trans. Emile Burns, Renate Simpson, and Jack Cohen (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2005), 21–2.

35. On Stanislavsky and the industrialization of theatre, see Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs*, 33–57.

36. Smith, 431.

37. Gough, 47.

38. See Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (London: PM Press, 2012); Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital* [Italian original, 1981], ed. Jim Fleming, trans. Hilary Creek (New York: Autonomedia, 1995); Selma James and Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, UK: Falling Wall Press Ltd, 1975).

39. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, 12.

40. For a review of these perspectives, see Kathi Weeks, "Life within and against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics." *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* 7:1 (2007): 233–49.

41. Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 55; 52.

42. Paolo Virno, "Virtuosity and Revolution," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, trans. Ed Emory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

1996), 189–209, at 191. Available online at [www.generation-online.org/c/fcmultitude2.html](http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcmultitude2.html), accessed 9 September 2016.

43. Virno, *Grammar of the Multitude*, 54. Here Virno indicates he is reading *Theories of Surplus Value* in making this point.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Elsewhere Marx describes services as “peripheral phenomena” that “can be ignored when considering capitalist production as a whole” because they only “are of microscopic significance when compared with the mass of capitalist production.” Today, when services account for such a large percentage of GDP, Marx’s dismissal of services here seems to play into the autonomist argument that the rise of the service economy renders Marx’s value theory unfit for purpose. But the grounds Marx gives for excluding services as productive labor are historically exceptional to his overall theory. The exclusion reflects more the shifting industrial composition of 1860s Europe than a fundamental premise of his theory. Marx tethers his point to a specific historical condition instead of anything historically specific to capitalist production. Since Marx admits that service work can be productive labor theoretically, it seems wholly in line with his value theory that such services would count as productive labor if they were to take on unprecedented consequence and no longer “are of microscopic significance.” See “Results of the Immediate Process of Production,” in *Capital*, 1: 943–1084, at 1048; 1044.

46. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, 8.

47. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin, 1993), 328–9.

48. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 306.

49. Marx, *Capital*, 1: 644.

50. Ernst Mandel, “Introduction,” in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 2*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 11–79, at 40 n. 43. The passage Mandel cites as evidence is the following from *Theories of Surplus Value* (28): “As for labours which are productive for their purchaser or employer himself—as for example the actor’s labour for the theatrical entrepreneur—the fact that their purchaser cannot sell them to the public in the form of commodities but only in the form of the action itself would show that they are unproductive labours.”

51. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, 28.

52. Marx, “Results,” 1041; italics in the original.

53. For a useful gendered critique of Marx’s theory of productive consumption, see Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 30–68.

54. Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value*, 20–1.

55. *Ibid.*, 13.

56. Marx, “Results,” 1045; italics in the original.

57. There are potentially many exceptions to this, such as journalists and academics who go to theatre as part of their job. See Ridout, *Passionate Amateurs*, 138–62.

58. Marx expands on points like these in *Volume 2*, where he distinguishes productive workers who generate surplus value when producing, on the one hand, the means of production and wage goods and, on the other, luxury goods. The former kinds of production are socially necessary for the reproduction and accumulation of capital, whereas luxury goods are not.

59. See Martin Harries, *Scare Quotes from Shakespeare: Marx, Keynes, and the Language of Reenactment* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); David Riff, “Was Marx a Dancer?” *e-flux* 67 (2015), [www.e-flux.com/journal/was-marx-a-dancer](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/was-marx-a-dancer), accessed 12 September 2016.

60. Author’s translation. The sentence in German is “Dieser Inhalt ist für die Bestimmung der produktiven Arbeit ganz gleichgültig.” Ben Fowkes (1: 1045) translates “gleichgültig” as “immaterial.” “Irrelevant” is closer to Marx’s meaning here and avoids confusions with the autonomist concept of “immaterial labor.” See Karl Marx, “Resultate des unmittelbaren Produktionsprozesses,” [www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/marx-engels/1863/resultate/1-mehrwert.htm](http://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/marx-engels/1863/resultate/1-mehrwert.htm), accessed 12 September 2016.

61. Heinrich, 48; italics in the original.

62. Theron Schmidt makes a similar point in his discussion of the performance of backstage labor in Quarantine's *Entitled*: "Theatre may be the name by which some actions may be abstracted into surplus value, such as the way that people sitting around and talking with one another about their fictional lives becomes 'a work.'" Schmidt's argument resonates with my own insofar as he recognizes theatre's ability to subsume under the value relation activities otherwise not validated as labor. "But," Schmidt continues, "theatre is also a set of social relations that renders this apparently 'real' labour unproductive." In the very act of showing "labour itself," the labor performed in a performance like Quarantine's "is rendered unproductive." For Schmidt there is something about theatrically showing labor as labor onstage that makes theatre uniquely equipped to short-circuit capitalist social relations. "In showing us labour itself, then, what theatre shows us is that it is not there," he argues. "The abstraction of capital is doubly abstracted by theatre." Schmidt leaves open the possibility for theatre both to collect together and to refuse the social relations that undergird capitalist commodity production. But he overlooks Marx's crucial point that even though a particular "unproductive" social relation may exist between spectators and performers, this does not exclude the possibility that a "productive" social relation mediated by a theatrical entrepreneur could remain. If the theatre under analysis is assumed to be a place where surplus value is extracted from labor (as Schmidt suggests), then the social relations between performers and audiences are already mediated by capital. That something useful might happen in the course of performance is theoretically irrelevant to the capitalist production process so long as it does not preclude the creation of surplus value. The fact that "theatre has the effect of flattening and equalizing whatever behaviour is undertaken within its frame" only speaks to the content of theatrical labor and does not change the capitalist social relations at play. See "Troublesome Professionals," 24–5.