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Form-Giving Fire: Creative Industries as Marx's "Work of Combustion" and the Distinction Between Productive and Unproductive Labour

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Abstract

This chapter considers the role played in the production of value by the labour that takes place in the "sphere of circulation", with specific focus on creative industries such as design, advertising and branding. Valorization depends upon goods and services attaining commodity status by selling for money. Value is subject to this validation. I contend that the capitalist use of advertising, design and branding is among the most important means by which the possibility of this validation is guaranteed. I argue that these practices, traditionally seen as peripheral to the production of value, may actually be indispensable to it. This claim is based on a rereading of the discussion of productive and unproductive labour found in Marx's most direct treatment of the question of circulation work – what he at one point calls the "work of combustion" – in *Capital* Volume 2.

Introduction

In this chapter I consider the role played in the operation of the law of value by what Marx calls the "work of combustion". Marx uses this term to refer to the activities of circulation. I use the creative industries as an example, with a specific focus on graphic design, advertising and branding. I argue that such circulation activities bear a greater determination upon value than Marxian thought has thus far permitted.

In this discussion I utilize a specific interpretation of Marx's theory of value. This interpretation holds value to be subject to the social validation of abstract labour by means of exchange.¹ I apply this interpretation to the question of productive and unproductive labour. It is in Marx's considerations of this question that we find his most direct engagement with the labour of circulation and its role in value production. My interpretation moves away from an intrinsic picture of where productiveness lies. Instead, it gravitates towards one that describes a process of abstraction whereby labour is rendered productive. Although it has a gradually cohering identity at earlier stages, the category of productiveness is a standpoint achieved only at the culmination of this process.

I contend that the activity of circulation renders the labour that takes place in the realm of production productive. This it does by effecting successful exchange. It realizes value and thus brings it into existence. It establishes the basis upon which we ascertain productiveness. Past labour is rendered fully "productive" only through its abstraction.

This abstraction culminates in the exchange of products of labour as commodities. But for this to happen, there is a considerable effort to endow a commodity with a social dimension. I attribute this contribution to the labour that takes place in the realm of circulation. In this case, this includes graphic design, advertising, branding and cognate fields.

I look at these fields with reference to value-form interpretations of the law of value. I give a reconstruction of the theory of productive and unproductive labour that does away with some key assumptions. It situates the distinction between the two as internal to the law of value rather than as one of its foundations.²

My examination of Marx's "work of combustion" emphasizes the importance of poles of valorization aside from that of labour. I argue that they should have attributed to them greater credit in the question of where value-productiveness lies. Using the creative and cultural industries as a case study, I adopt the standpoint of a reconstructed theory of value. This necessitates a reconsideration of the theory of productive and unproductive labour. Applied to the economic activities composing circulation, this exposes the way in which the category of productiveness comes to light only at the end of the process. In this way, the ultimate criterion of productiveness rests in exchange rather than labour. In this respect, fields such as advertising and graphic design play a more integral part in the production of value than commonly conceived.

Marx's writings on productive and unproductive labour, and their role in circulation are inconsistent, fragmentary and open. The particular value-form interpretation and specific historical focus advanced here takes advantage of this inconsistent and fragmentary openness to suggest new and unexplored gaps. These gaps concern two specific issues that lie at the heart of this discussion. First, the specific dimensions of productive and unproductive labour when considered in light of the theory of the value-form. Second, the specificity of circulation labour in a contemporary capitalism where the creative industries play a leading role.

In light of these two areas in need of clarification and recalibration, two questions guide this discussion: (1) How can we theorize the distinction between productive and unproductive labour as an outgrowth rather than a foundation of the law of value? (2) How can we understand the labour of circulation with productive and unproductive labour secondary to the operation of the law of value?

Argument

The argument made here draws upon so-called "value-form" reinterpretations of Marx conducted in the wake of Rubin (1972). Applying this approach, I see the criterion of

productiveness as arising in the social validation of abstract labour as productive. This takes place with the successful exchange of products of labour as commodities (see Heinrich 2012). It is through this that value can be said to have been “produced” in any meaningful sense. This throws into question accounts of productive labour which associate it with any kind of concrete labour that takes place in the realm of production. Rather than the labour of the formal activity of production, it places the burden of productiveness upon the labour that helps bring this social validation about.

Rather than anything intrinsic to concrete labour itself, the productiveness of labour can only be seen fully as a factor of its end result. It depends upon the good or service it produces selling as a commodity. The good or service produced is initially only an ideal or potential commodity. When this product of labour sells as a commodity, the labour performed in its production enters into relation with all the other labours of society as part of an abstract whole. This validates the labour, conferring upon it the standard of productiveness.

In making this argument, I agree with Harvie’s (2005, 61) contention that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour rests within the law of value rather than prior to it. Thus, what is productive of value does not precede the process of valorization by lending it its subject. Rather, it comes as a result of that process of valorization. As such, it is an internal part of the theory of the value rather than something outside its purview. This is because productiveness is an outcome of the movement of the law of value, the abstraction of concrete, private labour as a part of the social whole in exchange.

This abstraction relies upon the successful exchange of a product of labour as a commodity. The labour that attaches to a simple product of labour the status of a commodity is that which makes the product of labour exchangeable, and a desirable object of sale. This labour of circulation is traditionally conceptualized as “unproductive” in the Marxist canon. It incorporates the occupations that I identify as the “work of combustion”. I emphasize the social validation of abstract labour as productive of value by means of the exchange abstraction. This challenges the familiar distinction between productive and unproductive labour.

The concrete labour behind the mere good or service is not productive at all when taken on its own basis. It has no productiveness of its own divorced from the continuum of value production. In this continuum, circulation labour plays the most important role at the point of culmination, with the exchange of the commodity. Abstract labour is the labour of value. Abstract labour, rather than possessing any concrete existence, comes into being as a conceptual residue of exchange. The labour that brings exchange about also helps bring about this abstract labour. It does so by making the sale and consumption of commodities both possible and desirable to some buyer or other. From this standpoint, it is such

activities that are accountable for the expression of abstract labour as money in its role as the mediating factor in value relations. Hence, by means of the price awarded the commodity, they are responsible for the appearance of value itself.

The prior contributions of concrete labour can be perceived as part of the production of value only from the standpoint of its completion. This standpoint cannot exist save for the labour of circulation. This is the “work of combustion” that brings buyers to sellers through the mediating social relation of the commodity. Previous Marxian analyses have underplayed the significance of this “work of combustion”. But I suggest the exertion of new attention upon labour in the “sphere of circulation”. This includes that of marketers, advertisers, graphic designers and so on. This attention recognizes the true significance they hold vis-à-vis the production of value.

Discussion

The work of combustion and the form-giving fire

In the second volume of *Capital* (1992), Marx at one point refers to the labour that takes place in the sphere of circulation as that of the “work of combustion”. This work of combustion, Marx asserts, produces no value. But the work of combustion is essential for value to come about. He uses a scientific analogy to illustrate this. “This work of combustion does not generate any heat,” Marx writes, “although it is a necessary element in the process” by which combustion takes place. It uses up energy but is necessary for heat’s generation. (Marx 1992, 132–133)

So, although combustion uses up energy in a supposedly “unproductive” way, it would be hard to deny that it is a prerequisite for the production of heat. Departing from Marx, I suggest that it does this by realizing the potential heat-productiveness of the different elements involved. We might situate advertising and its counterparts in graphic design, marketing and so on, in an analogous relationship to the production of value. They bring about value through their facilitation of opportunities for the exchange of products of labour as commodities. In so doing, they help make possible the production of value.

I will go on to delineate the theoretical basis of this assertion further. But for now it is worth considering the practical dimensions of this “work of combustion” as it exists in the cultural and creative industries. One might draw a parallel between Marx’s utterances on the “work of combustion” and those he makes on the subject of labour’s “form-giving fire”. He writes in the *Grundrisse* that “[l]abour is the living, form-giving fire; it is the transitoriness of things”. In turn, “the transitoriness of the forms of things is used to posit their usefulness” (1993, 360–361).

The work of combustion may be seen as precisely this “form-giving fire”. It posits transitory usefulness in the way described above. It gives exchangeable “forms” to the various heterogeneous “contents” passed on from the realm of production proper. It makes these forms desirable on the basis of their difference or specific quality. In so doing, the combusive work of advertising, branding and graphic design helps organize the monetary exchange of products of labour as commodities. This exchange grants them value and attaches to them a price. Without this, no value would come about.

In his critical treatment of Marxist political economy (see 2002), Asger Jorn develops this notion of “form-giving fire”. He suggests that creative workers perform an essential function in capitalism. They create the specific forms which commodities take on the market. The basis for Jorn’s contention is that creative workers do not make value in and of themselves, but rather value persists in the difference that they create. This difference manifests in the plenitude of styles, fashions and trends one finds for consumption on the capitalist commodity market. It is brought into being by Jorn’s creative elite (Wark 2011, 89). It is this creative elite that “give[s] form to value”, by “renew[ing] the form of things” and creating the difference in which value consists (ibid., 84–85). The creative elite are the producers of the form rather than the content of commodities (ibid., n. 33, 89). Indeed, the commodity as it sells in its fetishized existence is pure form, pure symbol, incredulous to content. It need only be desired to be successfully exchanged in the marketplace, regardless of underlying characteristics. It is owing to this that value can attach itself to something in the first place.

Jorn touches upon something important and significant in the role that creative workers and creative industries play in capitalism. He reasserts that which Marx only implied in his discussions of “form-giving fire” and the “work of combustion”. Valorization proceeds not through the manufacture of specific goods or services. Rather, it proceeds through the manufacture of desirable forms, incredulous to content.

Jorn’s thesis of the creative elite and their production of forms harkens back to a distinction which Marx himself makes. This is that between form and content in productive and unproductive labour. Marx suggests that productive labour is pure form without content. He writes in his *Theories of Surplus Value* that “the designation of labour as productive labour has absolutely nothing to do with the determinate content of that labour, its special utility, or the particular use-value in which it manifests itself. The same kind of labour may be productive or unproductive” (1861–1863, part 1, online). Thus, it does not matter whether labour is productive or not. Labour itself may in fact be entirely peripheral. Its content must be given form to be said to be productive of value. Advertising and other such industries oriented towards exchange in the sphere of circulation create this sellable form. This pure symbolic form is indifferent to its particular content. This is an aspect which

becomes apparent in the periodic scandals about consumer goods purporting to be something that they are not. This may be horsemeat masquerading as beefsteak or quack medicine masquerading as miracle cures.

Marx implies the irrelevance of labour's content. We might infer that the latter depends on the particular form the labour takes, in its guise as abstract labour. It is by being abstracted from, after the fact, that labour attains full "productiveness". This abstraction is possible only through the exchange of products of labour as commodities. But for this requires a considerable effort to create a commodity in its full social dimension, as pure form without content. It is to the labour that takes place in the realm of circulation, such as advertising, that we can attribute this contribution.

Productive and unproductive labour

The implicit tendency of orthodox approaches is to relegate the labour of circulation to a secondary position vis-à-vis the realm of production. Thinking about practices as advertising and graphic design, I challenge this relegation. In an important contribution to existing debates, Harvie (2005) makes the claim that all labour is productive of value. He suggests that the labour involved in circulation such as advertising and other professional services is as productive as any other labour.

I wish to go further than this. The parity Harvie draws between the labour that takes place in production and that which takes place in circulation is a welcome beginning. But it remains too much within the traditional way of conceptualizing value-productiveness. It pushes against existing Marxist understandings of productiveness by extending the idea elsewhere. But this retains what is problematic. Harvie's approach comes up against an important contradiction. This is that labour can only be said to be fully productive in its abstract form. Productiveness coheres on a continuum, of course. Concrete labour is one part of this continuum. But one can only really speak of productive labour once value is apparent. And value can only be perceived once it has been generated from exchange.

The labour that makes itself shown in exchange is abstract labour. Abstract labour is not so much a kind of labour, per se, but rather a conceptual expression of the social relationship of equivalence between labours. Thus, the only "labour" that we can say exists, and to which we can attach the category of either productive or unproductive, is concrete labour. And this labour withdraws from such associations with productiveness. This is owing to the simple fact that there is no way of saying whether it is productive or not. Abstract labour is social, equivalent and commensurable "labour". It is the "labour" that is associated with the full status of a product as a commodity among all others. It is not labour in any

practical or physical sense, of course. And it is only this “labour” that can be said to be “productive labour”. But only concrete labour exists or takes place.³ Thus, “productive labour” does not “exist” in any concrete, tangible form that can be witnessed objectively in the moment of its occurrence. In its abstract dimension, it has real effects. But the “labour” that it describes is not labour than anything other than an imaginary sense.

By extension, nobody performs productive labour in the sphere of production. In the sphere of production, what is “performed” is not “productive labour”. It is not necessarily unproductive labour. It might be more usefully termed “non-productive” labour, or at least potentially pre-productive labour. The criterion of productiveness does not so much apply to labour in the sphere of production itself, but to what happens afterwards in the sphere of circulation. The productiveness of labour arises from elsewhere than labour, and to see it one must exert a different focus. I contend that it is the so-called “work of combustion” that renders the labour that takes place in the realm of production productive. It does so by effecting successful exchange. It brings value into existence. In essence, it establishes the basis upon which productiveness is ascertained.

The labour that exists in the realm of production produces the goods that are later sold as commodities. But it is non-productive in the sense that it does not really matter whether or how much of it takes place. All that matters is that something attracts a price at the end of it all. It is helpful, of course, that labour is expended to create a specific use-value that can hold a distinct appeal to consumers. Yet it is not necessary to generate a specific use-value for it to retail as one on the market. A clever and well-targeted advertising campaign can achieve this, for instance. Furthermore, it is helpful that labour is expended in order to subject it to measure. Measurement is part of the process of abstraction which brings all things into social relation with all other things. But even here, the abstraction and commensuration of labours as parts of the total social whole can be effected in retrospect. This can occur with or without a corresponding expenditure of labour at its basis. Thus, it may be a precondition of the production of value that the thing sold should have had some kind of labour input into its production. But it is neither necessary nor sufficient that such labour should take place. As long as something sells, value appears.

One might just as easily say, then, that due to the quintessence of its role, the labour of circulation is the only labour productive of value. But this would be to adopt an understanding of productiveness entangled in the conceptual framework of orthodox approaches. Value is “produced”, if we wish to use the traditional understanding, on a continuum that includes the labour that takes place in the realm of production.⁴ But this continuum has its culmination only in exchange. This culmination comes via those who service the ends of exchange, i.e. those involved in the labour that takes place in circulation, Marx’s “work of combustion”.

Without this culmination, value would not be present to have the understanding of its having been produced applied to it. The labour that goes into the production of a value-generating commodity does not produce this value. As I have suggested, it may or may not take place at all and still result in the production of value. Rather, the value appears at the moment that it is “realized” in exchange. Thus, “production” as a category does not truly exist until this point. It is hard to see what standpoint one could have from which to say that this or that labour is productive at all, except from the standpoint of exchange. I do not claim that the work of combustion in circulation is the only productive labour. Rather I say that if it were not for the former, “production” could not be said to exist.

Creating commodities from the products of labour

Thus, rather than anything intrinsic to concrete labour itself, the productiveness of labour is a factor of its end result. Its ultimate arbiter is whether the good or service it produces sells as a commodity. It is this that brings the labour performed into relation with all the other labours of society as part of an abstract whole. This validates the labour as part of the “socially necessary” labour of society. It confers upon it the standard of productiveness. This is as a result of the good or service it produces gaining its own confirmation of its status as a full commodity, an object of exchange or sale. This is a principally retrospective activity. The “validation” of past labour as productive conjures a new purely symbolic and abstract quantity of labour. This is nothing but a conceptual, imaginary device by which the social totality of productive activity is pictured. It helps bring its goods and services into a relationship of commensuration and equivalence with one another.

I therefore agree with Harvie, who contends that “[l]abour which is ‘unproductive’ is [...] categorised as such because commensuration through market exchange does not take place” (2005, 150). That labour is productive by commensuration through commodity exchange is not restricted to the moment that a product hits the market. The commensuration is that by which different concrete labours enter into a relationship of equivalence with one another. They thus attain abstractness, sociality and productiveness. This is a process that unfolds gradually within production and without, culminating fully only in exchange. As Harvie writes, “a thing- commodity – is produced, and then it just is, until it is sold – its value realized”. Helping this come together are those recruited by the capitalist, such as “marketers and advertisers, credit-providers and retailers” (see Harvie 2005, 152). Without these functionaries, the commodity moment would not come, and nothing would be “productive” in any real sense at all.

Harvie uses advertising as an example of this. The particular use-value that the service commodity of advertising offers to the capitalist is that it facilitates exchange, validating abstract labour as productive, and thus bringing value into full reality. This it does by means of the sale of a product of labour as a commodity on the market. Thus, advertising

insulates the capitalist against the uncertainties of circulation. Not least among these is that of whether a commodity will sell. Advertising also produces use-values for consumers. It conjures “imagined, non-corporeal qualities of products”, such as the brands with which one identifies when buying a material good. The two, Harvie suggests, cannot be “disentangled”. The brand is completely tied up with, part of and implicated in the specific product purchased. We “buy not only the tangible good, but the identity too” (Harvie 2005, 153). Traditionalist accounts of circulation labour overlook this kind of production.

Moving goods and moving people

It is not simply that advertising and its counterparts adds a “cultural content” (Lazzarato 1996) to the commodity, on top of an objective sphere of use-value. Rather, it actively intervenes in the latter. The production of a use-value may be the original impetus out of which a good or service arises. It furthermore grants the basis for a good or service exchanging as a commodity with a specific purpose or desirability attached to it. But more must be done to create this desirability than simply to produce something useful. Use is the basis of this desirability. But it may not be quite enough to foster the conditions by which a product of labour can be sold and thus attain the fully-fledged status of a commodity. Something more must happen to grant the good full commodity status and render the labour expended abstract and, thus, productive.

The facilitation of use is a precondition of something being desirable and specific enough in its attributes to constitute a worthwhile purchase. Creative industries help create the correct environment in which use-value means something. This establishes the basis and around which exchange-value can cohere.

Value depends upon the creation of an exchange relation between commodities (and thus the labours attached to them) through the mediation of money. This is, as we have stated, based upon someone wanting something. Use-value is one part of this, but the category of use is a potentiality unlocked only with the conditions in place for use to actually happen. Things will not be used unless they sell. Things will not sell unless they are desirable in some way. Indeed, Marx suggests as much. He writes that the production of a commodity succeeds by “creating in consumers a want for its products as objects of consumption” (Marx, quoted in Gough 1972). Desire, and the want that Marx contends it “implies”, are not extraneous to the production and consumption of use-values, but rather essential to it.

In *Capital* Volume 2 (1992), Marx spends some time discussing the role of the transport sector in capitalist valorization. Marx’s treatment of transportation parallels that I have offered of the role the creative industries assume in the production of value. Marx situates transportation in production rather than circulation. This is because it does not present itself as a loss or deduction to the capitalist, unlike other ancillary functions. Noting that

“the transport industry sells [...] the actual change of place”, Marx focuses on the movement of people to commodities and commodities to people. This constitutes both a production process and an act of consumption. Movement is a very specific and particular commodity in itself (1992, 135).

Marx writes that “the use-value of things is only realized in their consumption, and their consumption may make a change of location necessary, and thus, in addition, the additional production process of the transport industry. The productive capital invested in this industry thus adds value to the products transported” (ibid., 226–227 my italics). Transportation, then, helps in the production and realization of value by bringing goods to people and people to goods. It both produces a commodity – the movement of goods and people – and helps in the production and realization of value – by bringing goods to people and people to goods. It does not present itself to capital as a loss in the same way as the activities of circulation.

The service performed by transportation would not appear to be something limited exclusively to trains, planes and automobiles. We can associate Marx’s remarks with the development of a much different infrastructure of activities and industries. Advertising, graphic design and branding are similarly committed to bringing products to people and people to products.

Fields such as marketing, advertising, graphic design and sales bring products to people and people to products. In so doing they turn simple products of labour into commodities. They create the bond and the conditions by which it is possible that something exchanges or sells as a commodity in the first place.

From this reconstruction of Marx’s thought one can see that the category of what produces value in capitalist society is potentially much wider. It exceeds activities such as transportation that Marx singles out for special treatment. To drive this home, we might play upon the dual meaning of the verb to move. One can move goods in a spatial sense, as in transportation, but one can move people in an emotional one. I speak of a specific sense of movement – to move people, to stimulate emotion, identification, loyalty, desire and want towards some product or brand. This marks the truly valorizing force not just in the sphere of circulation but within the entire stretch of the circuit of capital as a whole. This applies just as much to the acquisition of means of production and raw materials by businesses as it does to the acquisition of consumer goods by individuals.

It is not enough for a product to be made and used. It is then only a use-value, a product of labour. It must sell and to sell must warrant desire. It is the latter that gives it value, that validates it as something worth exchanging. Orthodox presentations see intrinsic value given osmosis-like to the object. But what is important here is the generation of meaning,

desirability, significance around it. It is this that “creates” the commodity, if we consider the commodity to be that which is sold, and the mere product of labour only a potential commodity. The labour of circulation, in creative industries and elsewhere, stimulates meaning, desire and attachment. This provokes the validation of something as worthy of exchange and grants the attendant status of a commodity.

Thus productiveness is situated in the trajectory of the commodity rather than in the activity of labour. There is some justification for this in Marx. In *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861–1863, Part 1, online) Marx states that “it is not th[e] concrete character of labour” that “stamps it as productive labour in the system of capitalist production”. Rather “only labour which manifests itself in commodities” is properly productive capitalist labour. The emphasis here is upon the production of a commodity as the arbiter of productiveness. Concrete labour, therefore, has little to do with productiveness. In fact, it is the stamping of this labour as productive that counts. And the necessary condition of this is the production of a commodity that someone has some use for. This in turn is the necessary condition of whatever this product of labour is – a good or service – becoming an object of exchange- a formal commodity- in the first place. The condition is that it sells, garners value, bringing its labour into a social relationship of abstraction with other such labours. It thus “stamps” that labour as part of the productive labour of society.

Conclusion

I began by noting two shortcomings of Marx’s treatment of the work of combustion, circulation and productiveness. I suggested that they exhibit a need for recalibration in two ways, theoretical and empirical. First, “value-form” reinterpretations invite a reconstruction of the concept of productiveness. Second, the rising importance of creative industries merits a rethinking of the role of circulation labour in capitalism. I sought to explore these issues through posing two questions: (1) How can we theorize the distinction between productive and unproductive labour as an outgrowth rather than a foundation of the law of value? (2) How can we understand the labour of circulation with productive and unproductive labour secondary to the operation of the law of value? In response to these questions, I offer the following conclusions.

As concerns the first, I have applied a value-form perspective to the question of productiveness. This approach stresses an explanation of the origins of value in the social validation of abstract labour in exchange. It entails a crucial shift of emphasis which conceives of the criterion of productiveness as one determined by the law of value rather than determining of it. Through this, I have suggested that the productiveness of a given labour process is an unknown quantity until capital attains the vantage point of the sale of a commodity. We can strip away the practices and procedures that mark the gradual unfolding of the exchange abstraction both within the realm of production and without.

Aside from these, value boils down to an encounter forged within the moment of exchange. Thus, the productiveness that gives rise to this value is grasped in retrospect. Indeed, the possibility of the labour that went into the production of this value even being “productive” comes with the arrival of this value in its fullest form. This form is the outcome of a transaction of two commodities by buyer and seller by means of the mediation of money.

No labour is productive or unproductive in its very doing. The ultimate judgement of this comes with the success or failure to sell or exchange the particular commodity that it renders. Previously an ideal category, the production of value is conjured. It has no practical or concrete basis other than in the abstraction of exchange. From this standpoint, it functions as a conceptual framework through which to assess past concrete activity. Within production itself, tools of abstraction attain early glimpses of this standpoint. But, in the final instance, production is a category not of the realm of production but of the sphere of circulation.

How then to situate the labour of circulation – Marx’s “work of combustion – within this systematization? How to think of this labour in the context of the arbitration of productiveness within the operation of the law of value? In response to the second question delineated above, I say that the work of combustion that occurs in circulation is not, as Marx suggested, unproductive of value. But the possibility of my making such a claim relies upon having done away with the very metric by which Marx evaluated the productiveness of one type of labour or another. Creative industries are productive not on the basis set forth by the traditional Marxist understanding of productiveness. They are “productive” on a more profound level. In creating the conditions whereby value can be “realized”, they create the conditions upon which it can be said to be “produced” at all. This does not constitute an argument for the application of the classical definition of productiveness to the creative industries. Rather I suggest that creative industries intervene directly in the possibility of the category of productiveness itself. They assist in its attachment to the labour that has generated a given good or service.

The role of circulation labour such as graphic design and advertising within this is to create saleable commodities out of the simple products of labour. They attach to pre-existing use-values another layer of significance which styles them in such a way to attract the desire and wants of consumers. They create new use-values by creating new needs where neither were present before. Without this, there is a lessened likelihood of exchange, and without exchange, the impossibility of value. In this respect, creative industries are as crucial rather than peripheral to capitalist valorization.

Value is a social relation rather than something intrinsic to labour and its product. The latter is not by some miracle endowed with a valuable quality by the former. Some other explanation of from where it derives must be sought. Circulation provides a more plausible

alibi. It establishes the frontier and criteria of what is productive and what is not, by bringing about the conditions whereby value is established. Without value, of what can we claim any kind of labour to have been productive? The labour of circulation is not the only “productive” labour. It plays a more significant role than this. It makes possible the productiveness of all other labour not through producing itself, but by realizing something that was once only ideal. It thereby makes possible the abstraction we call production.

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Endnotes

1 The most concise presentation is Heinrich (2012).

2 Mohun (1996) is a good example of where the distinction between productive and unproductive labour is depicted as pre-existing the law of value. As I will go on to discuss, Harvie (2005) enunciates the implications of overturning this assumption.

3 For more on the assertion that abstract labour has no concrete existence, see Bonfeld (2010, 260).

4 Bellofiore and Finelli (1998) give a good sense of this position.