Work: Past, Present, Future – Some Specters of Marx

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Abstract: According to three influential French theorists, the ‘‘greatness’’ of Marx (Deleuze) consists in his status as an ‘‘initiator of discursive practices’’ (Foucault) and in his spectral living-on (Derrida). As respectively Foucault and Derrida argue, the discursive effect of Marx’s theorizing gives reason to characterize Marx as a ‘‘transdiscursive’’ author who remains relevant, influential, and determinate for our contemporary discourse. In this paper, I put this hypothesis to the test by turning to some of Marx’s ideas on labour, alienation, and emancipation as they appear in the work of Hannah Arendt and the contemporary political theorist Isabell Lorey. In doing so, this paper addresses the question: is Marx indeed still relevant for our contemporary economic and political discourse?
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Introduction

Shortly before he died, Gilles Deleuze expressed his intention to write one last book, bearing the title: ‘‘Greatness of Marx’’. Unfortunately, he never did. By then, Michel Foucault, in his influential essay ‘‘What is an author?’’, had already identified Marx as one of the most important ‘‘initiators of discursive practices’’, whose ‘‘distinctive contribution’’, he writes, lies in ‘‘that they produced not only their own work, but the possibility and the rules of formation of other texts.’’[1] And indeed, to this very day, the specters of Marx are haunting us, Jacques Derrida argued in 1993: the Marxist inheritance remains relevant, influential and

[1] Michel Foucault, ‘‘What is an author?’’ in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 131.

determinate for our contemporary discourse.[2]

In this paper, I put to the test that which these three influential French theorists, each in their own way, have tried to express: the ''greatness'' of Marx (Deleuze), which consists in his ''transdiscursive'' position (Foucault)[3] and his spectral living-on (Derrida). To this end, the paper traces some ideas of Marx originating from his theorizing on labour, alienation, and emancipation. My hypothesis is that *the discursive effect of some of Marx's theorizing about labour gives reason to characterize Marx as a transdiscursive author who remains relevant for our contemporary discourse.* Indeed, Foucault insinuates that the work of Marx gave rise to an ''*endless* possibility of discourse.''[4]

Hannah Arendt holds an ambivalent position towards Marx. After having written *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1951, Arendt started working on a project bearing the title ''Totalitarian Elements in Marxism'', in which she attempted to uncover the conditions of possibility for (mis)use of Marx's thought for totalitarianism, which Arendt considered to be ''the central event of our times''.[5] In a spin-off of this project, a lecture series called ''Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought'', Arendt makes the following remark:

> That Marx still looms so large in our present world is indeed the measure of his greatness. That he could prove of use to totalitarianism (though certainly he can never be said to have been its 'cause') is a sign of the actual relevance of his thought, even though at the same time it is also the measure of his ultimate failure.[6]

Although Arendt never finished her Marx-project, many of its themes found their way into her later writings, most notably *The Human Condition* (1958), where she prefigures not only Deleuze, but also Foucault and Derrida, by pointing to ''the great wealth of Marxian ideas and insights'', as well as ''the generations of authors whom

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[2] See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

[3] Foucault, ''What is an author?'' 131.

[4] Foucault, ''What is an author?'' 131, my emphasis.

[5] Hannah Arendt, ''Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,'' *Social Research* 69, no.2 (Summer 2002), 282.

[6] Arendt, ''Karl Marx,'' 282.

[Marx] has ''supported.''''[7]

On the other hand, Arendt was very critical of Marx. ''In the following chapter, Karl Marx will be criticized'', she announced just before making the remarks above. This antagonism can also be found in the short excerpt of her lecture series I just quoted. This critique, however, does not affect the status of Marx as a founder of discursivity; it rather invigorates it. What defines the ''initiators of discursive practices'', according to Foucault, is precisely that they ''not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but they also made possible a certain number of *differences*.''[8] As we will see, it appears that Marx lives on especially by means of differences or alterations; by authors who reinterpret, criticize, or even declare obsolete his ideas. The latter holds particularly true for the third and last author in the sequence of this paper: the German political theorist Isabell Lorey who, in her book *State of Insecurity* (2015), aims to uncover what defines the economy and the politics of the present moment.[9]

The fourfold ''space of spectrality'' below – to use a Derridean term – is traversed by the central theme of work (past, present, future). The first section is concerned with blurring distinctions: it first treats Marx's conceptualization of labour and its relation to the man/animal limit, and then turns to Arendt's critique that Marx fails to differentiate labour from what she calls ''work.'' After having outlined Arendt's distinction between labour, work and action elaborated in *The Human Condition*, I draw on the Italian Marxist philosopher Paolo Virno and Lorey to argue that the fading boundaries between these three activities is precisely what characterizes work in the 21st century. The second section departs from the distinction between productive and unproductive labor, theorized by Marx and celebrated by Arendt but discarded by Loray, because it seems that, with the rise of self-employment, even ''unproductive'' workers have become productive and thus ''capitalized.'' The third section discusses the succession of ''alienation'', as developed by Marx, to ''precarization'', as described by Loray, as being the central concept for understanding the worker's position within the

[7] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 79.

[8] Foucault, ''What is an author?'' 132, my emphasis.

[9] Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, trans. Aileen Derieg (London/New York: Verso, 2015), 1.

capitalist system. The fourth and final section demonstrates how Marx's ideas on revolution, emancipation, and freedom, via the critique of Arendt, become toned to ''civil disobedience'' and ''immanent exodus'' by Loray. The paper ends by addressing the question: is Marx indeed still relevant for our contemporary economic and political discourse?

Blurring distinctions: from labour to work and back

In a distant past, Aristotle defined man as a *zoön logon echon*: an animal with language, or reason. The first axiom of Marx by which one might illuminate his transdiscursive position is that *labour* rather than *logos* must be regarded as the anthropological difference. ''[Men] begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to *produce* their means of subsistence'', Marx claims in *The German Ideology*.[10] ''Admittedly animals also produce'', he had written just a few years earlier, ''[but the animal] produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.''[11] It is thus in the act of free production that the essence of man is to be found. In fact, it is only because of this axiom that man can be said to be estranged from himself, when he is estranged from his labour: a point to which I will return later. In *Capital*, then, Marx argues that labour should furthermore be regarded as ''an eternal nature-imposed necessity, without which'', he states, ''there can be no material exchanges between man and Nature, and therefore no life.''[12] It is by labour that we transform the materials provided to us by nature, and as such, shape our lifeworld.

Given the contempt for labour which characterized the ancient Greeks, Arendt considered this positive evaluation of labour to be a revolutionary element of Marx's thought. However, what she finds problematic, is Marx's *concept* of labour. ''In the following chapter, Karl Marx will be criticized'' – the sentence I quoted above opens Ar-

[10] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ''The German Ideology,'' in *Marx & Engels Collected Works,* vol. 5, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 31.

[11] Karl Marx, ''Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844'', in *Marx & Engels Collected Works,* vol. 3, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 276.

[12] Karl Marx, ''Capital Volume 1'', in *Marx Engels Collected Works*, vol. 35, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 53. Cf. Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 275-6.

endt's discussion of labour in *The Human Condition*. One of these criticisms concerns what we might call an ''unthought'' of Marx. That is to say, Arendt accuses Marx of not making a distinction between labour, on the one hand, and work, on the other.

Labour, according to Arendt, is indeed ''man's metabolism with nature'': it is the biological process of satisfying our bodily needs, which is needed to sustain human life. Because these bodily needs, like food and water, are of a recurring nature, the labouring-activity is endlessly repetitive, lacking a clear beginning and end.[13] Therefore, labour actually has more to do with consumption and necessity than with production and freedom, Arendt argues.[14] Because this necessity-driven existence is what we *share* with other living organisms, labour falls short in constituting a, let alone *the*, anthropological difference.

Work, on the other hand, designates for Arendt the process of producing durable objects. In contrast to the activity of labour, work does have a definite beginning and end, and leaves a durable product behind. So whereas the *animal laborans "*is subject to the necessity of its own life'', Arendt argues, *homo faber* presents itself as ''the master of all nature'', by transforming it into a livable world.[15] Yet in Marx's writing, this distinction between labour and work, necessity and freedom, transience and durability, has blurred, according to Arendt, leading to ''fundamental and flagrant contradictions'' in his works.[16]

Although work is a key aspect of the human condition for Arendt, it is in political *action* – which is conditioned by speech – that she believes human distinctiveness and freedom is to be found. It is only in acting that man appeals to his unique capacity to start something new and unexpected. Speech and action, in turn, are conditioned by a public space. ''Action and speech'', Arendt remarks, ''need the surrounding *presence of others* no less than fabrication needs the surrounding pres-

[13] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 96-101.
[14] Arendt, ''Karl Marx,'' 285, 290.
[15] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 136-144.
[16] Arendt, ''Karl Marx,'' 283; Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 101ff. However, Arendt does not take these contradictions to be a shortcoming of Marx's thinking: ''Such fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work.'' Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 105. See also Arendt, ''Karl Marx,'' 292, for a similar phrase.

ence of nature for its material, and […] a world in which to place the finished product.''[17] As is well-known, these three activities (i.e. labour, work, and action) make up what Arendt calls the *vita activa*, our active life, which she distinguishes from the *vita contemplativa*, or ''the life of the mind''. Arendt rounds up her investigation of the *vita activa* by acknowledging the still undiscussed human capacity of thought that would later form the starting point of her last and unfinished book called *The Life of the Mind.*

Now more than fifty years after the publication of *The Human Condition*, Isabell Lorey, following the Italian neo-Marxist philosopher Paolo Virno, picks up on Arendt's distinctions to illustrate what defines present-day work. In a seminar called ''Labour, Action, Intellect'', Virno argues that it is the fading of the boundaries between these three activities that characterizes work in the 21st century.[18] First of all, work in our contemporary society is often an activity *without work*, in Arendt's sense of the term.[19] That is, many professions today do not consist in producing a durable end product. Rather, the product they deliver is identical to the activity of production itself, which is to say that they deliver a service. What defines such labouring activities, from the work of a pianist to that of a teacher or waiter, is that they depend on what Arendt called ''the presence of others'', and that she distinctively attributed to action.[20] Secondly, today's forms of work arguably revolve around communication and cooperation, which by their very nature require Arendt's concept of a public space.[21] Thirdly, it seems that in the context of work in the 21st century, creativity and innovation, that is, starting something new, has increasing importance and is expected of every employee. In fact, this leads some employers to deliberately create room for contingency, for the ''informal'', ''unexpected'' and unprogrammed, both within the workplace and the work itself.[22] As such, the boundaries between labour and action – a distinction that is itself al-

[17] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188, my emphasis.
[18] Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude. For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertoletti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson (Los Angeles/New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 47-71.
[19] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 75.
[20] Cf. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 52.
[21] Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 55-6, 60.
[22] Cf. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 59.

ready a reappearance of Aristotle's distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* – have dissolved.

Fourthly and lastly, work has become increasingly dependent on intellectual or cognitive abilities; has become ''knowledge work'' (as theorized by Hardt and Negri[23]) causing labour and ''the life of the mind'' to overlap as well.[24] Contemporary ''modes of production'', Lorey argues for example, ''challenge the whole personality, its intellect, its thinking, its capacity for speaking, its affects.''[25] Hence, both Virno and Lorey conclude that Arendt's distinctions are inadequate for analyzing the labour market of the present. Their relevance, we might say, paradoxically consists in their irrelevance, by which these authors have been able to render visible what present-day work distinctively consists in. Indeed, what defines work in the 21st century, we may conclude, is that every distinctive feature of the human being, whether this is considered to be language/reason (Aristotle), labour (Marx), or action (Arendt), has become fused and, as Virno adds, ''subsumed within capitalistic production.''[26] To fully understand this latter claim, we must turn towards another distinction, another specter of Marx.

Singing like a bird: (un)productive labour

Another key element of Marx's writings that produced a great deal of discursivity or spectrality, is his theorizing on the distinction between productive and unproductive labour. Whether labour is to be considered as productive or unproductive, according to Marx, depends not on the *content* of the labour, but on ''whether the labour is exchanged for money as money or for money as capital''.[27] Although there is much to say about this, I propose to turn to one of Marx's examples right away:

A singer who sings like a bird is an unproductive worker. If she

[23] See e.g. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 108ff on ''immaterial labour''.

[24] Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 63-66; Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 83.

[25] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 74.

[26] Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 63.

[27] Karl Marx, ''A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,'' in *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 34, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 141.

> sells her singing for money, she is to that extent a wage labourer or a commodity dealer. But the same singer, when engaged by an entrepreneur who has her sing in order to make money, is a productive worker, for she directly produces capital.[28]

Productive labour is thus defined by its relation with capital: a worker becomes productive when she produces more than is needed for her own subsistence, that is, when she produces surplus value by means of a product, or, in this case, surplus labour for the ''entrepreneur''.[29] ''A singer who sings like a bird'' is unproductive, for she does neither of these things. The same holds, according to Marx, for other services, where ''the product is not separable from the act of producing, as with all executant artists, orators, actors, teachers, doctors, clerics, etc.'', where labour is exchanged just for money as money.[30]

The distinction between productive and unproductive labour also found its way into *The Human Condition*. Arendt is actually quite positive about it, since this distinction comes closest to articulating the difference between labour and work, which, as we have seen, she considered to be absent in the works of Marx (and other labour-theorists, like Adam Smith). ''[T]he distinction between productive and unproductive labour contains'', thus Arendt remarks, ''albeit in a prejudicial manner, the more fundamental distinction between work and labour.'' Prejudicial, because labour is glorified by Marx and Smith because of its productivity, thus condemning unproductive labour, which leaves nothing behind, as ''parasitical," as ''a kind of perversion of labour''.[31] Albeit anachronistic, this terminology appears to foreshadow a deconstruction or assimilation of this hierarchy, which is indeed provided by Arendt. That is to say, the same Marx – or at least one of his specters, Derrida might say – ''discovered and articulated'' that labour, in Arendt's sense, has its own productivity, ''no matter how futile and non-durable its products may be.'' That is, once again, *surplus labour*: the labour power which is left after man's effort to produce his own means of subsistence

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[28] Karl Marx, ''Capital. Book I. The Process of Production of Capital,'' in *Marx & Engels Collected Works*, vol. 34, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 448.
[29] Marx, ''Production of Capital,'' 442ff.
[30] Marx, ''Contribution,'' 144.
[31] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 86-7.

– the discovery of which, Arendt agrees with Friedrich Engels here, is to be regarded as ''the most original and revolutionary element'' of Marx's theorizing.[32] In the well-known line of thought, then, this surplus value constitutes the profit of the capitalist.

This exists in our contemporary labour market perhaps only to a decreasing degree, Lorey argues. In Marx's example, the singer is ''engaged by an entrepreneur'', but ''what if the singer becomes a *self-entrepreneur*?'' What would that imply for her productivity?

> Is she to be designated as 'unproductive' in Marx's sense if she not only takes her voice to market, but also, in her artistic independence and with projects subject to time limits, constantly sells her whole personality, when 'singing like a bird' serves to get her the next job?[33]

This is not a farfetched scenario, because in many countries self-employed workers, who are ''service-providers, producers and self-entrepreneurs'' at the same time, form a significant part of the working population.[34] In this sense, Marx's distinction seems to be inadequate for describing the labour market of the 21st century, in which ''unproductive'' workers have become productive and thus ''capitalized''.[35] Against this background, we can fully understand the claim of Virno that all of our distinctively human capacities are ''subsumed within capitalistic production'', and Lorey's similar conclusion that ''the entire person, with their knowledge and their affects, becomes part of the capitalist production process''.[36] But what we have yet to discover is why this is so problematic.

Capitalism: from estrangement to precarization

''In a predicative proposition that refers to time, and more precisely to the present-form of time'', Derrida writes, ''the grammatical present of the verb to be […] seems to offer a predestined hospitality to the return

[32] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 88.
[33] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 81-2.
[34] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 82; ''Self-employment rate,'' OECD Data, assessed January 23, 2021, https://data.oecd.org/emp/self-employment-rate.htm.
[35] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 82.
[36] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 83.

of any and all spirits''.[37] If we would ask Karl Marx, Hannah Arendt and Isabell Lorey what the greatest threat to the present-day worker is, we are likely to get three very different answers. In the context of this paper, I accommodate the two answers that have a link with capitalism as their common denominator: those of Marx and Lorey.

Marx's critique of capitalism is manifold. I focus here on the *Paris Manuscripts*, where Marx explains that within a capitalist system, the worker is dependent on his labour, that he has to sell to the factory-owner. This means that the worker finds himself in a position of insecurity and vulnerability, in which his existence is continuously threatened.[38] Most well-known are these manuscripts, though, for the theory of estranged labour. Capitalism, Marx argued, threatens not only the life of the worker, but also his freedom and humanity, by alienating him from his product(ion), his self, and his existence as a species.

Firstly, the worker is estranged from the *product* of his labour (which now belongs to the capitalist), and in which he can no longer recognize himself: ''The *alienation* [*entäusserung*] of the worker in his product'', Marx writes, ''means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him''.[39] Secondly, the worker is estranged from the *act of production* itself, that is, from his labour, which he has sold to the capitalist. As we have seen, the essence of man, according to Marx, is to be located in free production. Under capitalism, however, production has become unfree; ''*forced*''; the labour of the worker now ''belongs to another'', which therefore means ''the loss of his self.''[40] Because what distinguished man from animals has been lost, man is reduced to animality. Finally, the worker is estranged from his *Gattungswesen*, that is, his existence as a species, whose very identity is constituted by the act of ''creating an *objective world* by [its] practical activity'' – by ''work'' in Arendt's sense. Estranged labour alienates the worker from the ''*life of the species*'', Marx claims, by transforming labour from an end in itself to nothing more than a ''*means*'' for the continuation of the *individual*

[37] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 61.
[38] Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' e.g. 237ff.
[39] Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 272.
[40] Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 274.

existence of the worker.[41] So much for Marx for now.

Or perhaps not, since in some sense, even more than a century and a half later, nothing has changed. The individual, Loray observes, still has to sell their body and labour power in order to continue their existence as physical subject.[42] Moreover, the worker still suffers from a precarious position: ''If we fail to understand precarization'', Lorey opens in *State of Insecurity*, ''then we understand neither the politics nor the economy of the present.'' What characterizes our neo-liberal capitalist society, according to Lorey, is the erosion of government protection, which leads to a return of wide-spread insecurity and vulnerability. Such ''precarization'', she remarks, ''means more than insecure jobs, more than the lack of security given by waged employment. By way of insecurity and danger it embraces the whole of existence […]. Precarization means living with the unforeseeable, with contingency.''[43]

Yet, in another sense, everything has changed. Precarization, Lorey argues, is no longer confined to the workers, but affects everybody; threatens society as a whole.[44] And it is only because work today requires, as we saw, our personality as a whole; because flexible employment and self-employment are on the rise, and because risks and cares are becoming increasingly privatized, that precarity today comprises our whole existence; that the fear of losing your job coincides with existential anxiety.[45] Or perhaps ''everything must change for everything to remain the same.'' Yet, what no doubt *has* changed is the proposed way out of the capitalist system, or rather the optimism about the potential for such an exodus. This calls for hunting down one final specter: one of revolution, emancipation, and freedom.

Critical emancipations: debating revolution, emancipation, and freedom

When attempting to substantiate the claim that Marx is to be regarded as a founder of discursivity, his ideas about revolution, emancipation and freedom are imperative. To recall, Marx envisioned that the increasing

[41] Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 276.
[42] Cf. Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 28.
[43] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 1.
[44] Cf. Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 29.
[45] Cf. Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 88-90.

exploitation, poverty, and insecurity of the working class would lead to their national and international political organization, and eventually to *their* emancipation from servitude, and *societal* emancipation from private property – by means of a revolution.[46] This societal emancipation, Marx argues in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, ''is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*; not that *their* emancipation alone was at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation''.[47] Now the real specter here, by Marx's own admission, is communism, and I want to highlight here just a few central features of Marx's theorizing on the communist society.

As stated, it is first of all the end of private property: ''the theory of the Communists'', thus Marx and Engels remark, ''may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property.''[48] Stated bluntly, it is, second of all, also the end of history. If history can be equated with ''the history of class struggles'' that starts the *Communist Manifesto*, then the abolition of ''the conditions for the existence of class antagonisms and of classes generally'' contained in the revolution, implies the end of history.[49] Third, communism marks the end of political power, or the state, which is nothing but the political apparatus of the ruling class. ''Political power, properly so called'', Marx and Engels claim, ''is merely the organised power of one class for oppressing another.''[50] Hence, the communist society is, in this sense, a post-political society. Fourth and finally, it is the end of all forms of alienation, and therefore the reappropriation of human essence in the act of free production. This is described perhaps most emphatically in the *Manuscripts of 1844* and in *The German Ideology* in the context of the abolition of the

[46] See e.g. Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 268, 270, 280, 306; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ''Manifesto of the Communist Party'' in *Marx & Engels Collected Works,* vol. 6, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2010), 477-519.

[47] Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'', 280.

[48] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ''Manifesto of the Communist Party,'' 498. Cf. Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 294: ''*communism* is the *positive* expression of annulled private property''.

[49] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ''Manifesto of the Communist Party,'' 483, 506.

[50] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ''Manifesto of the Communist Party,'' 505.

division of labour.[51] Stated succinctly, then, the movement of communism leads to freedom.

From the above constellation, Arendt singles out at least two objects of critique: (1) Marx's concept of history, and (2) his localization of freedom. With regard to the first point, Arendt argues that Marx has confused the course of history with a fabrication process, in the sense that it would have an end. Such an instrumental view of history is dangerous, according to Arendt, since it tends to justify *violence* as a means to bring about the envisioned end of history. ''Violence is the midwife of history'' is actually one of the propositions used by Arendt to capture the essence of Marx's philosophy.[52] This brings us to the second object of Arendt's critique: the relation between freedom and politics. As we have seen, Marx localizes freedom in a society that is post-political. For Arendt, however, freedom is inextricably connected to politics. In her essay ''What is Freedom?'', for example, Arendt argues that ''[t]he *raison d'etre* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.'' Because human freedom can only be actualized in the political realm, she argues against Marx that ''[t]here is no such thing as freedom without politics''.[53]

Lorey's problematization of Marx's theorizing on emancipation, in turn, is directed elsewhere. For the emancipation of the *precarious* rather than the *proletariat*, she says, a historical development of the type described above is stopped in its very tracks by the division and individuation of those who are subject to precarious working and living conditions. That is to say, the precarious constitute a serious problem for traditional forms of political organization and representation. ''The precarious cannot be unified or represented'', Lorey claims, ''their interests are so disparate that classical forms of corporate organizing are not effective.''[54] So the challenge posed by our times, according to Lorey, is to find new forms of organizing, as well as non-representational political agency. Whither emancipation, when national and international political

[51] Marx, ''Manuscripts of 1844'' 296; and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ''The German Ideology,'' 47.

[52] See Arendt, ''Karl Marx,'' 287ff.

[53] Hannah Arendt, ''What is Freedom?'' in *Between Past and Future* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 146. The second quote is adopted from Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 78.

[54] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 9. See also 6, 8, and 61.

organization appears to be virtually impossible?[55]

To fully comprehend Lorey's answer to this question, one needs to keep in mind the Foucauldian background of her theorizing on the government of the precarious, or what she calls ''precarization as an instrument of governing''. For Foucault, and for many thinkers working in his wake, such as Judith Butler, there is no place outside of power relations, and thus any form of emancipation, if at all possible, must be *immanent* to power relations.[56] This explains the terminology of Lorey's final chapter, which uses concepts like ''flight'' (from Deleuze and Guattari) and ''exodus'' (from Virno) to mark *a different relation to* precarious conditions and governmental precarization rather than the end of governing or precarity as such. Lorey's considerations may be conceived as a two-fold downscaling of Marx's ideas on revolution, emancipation, and ultimately freedom.

First, in both Virno and Lorey, revolution has been toned to ''civil disobedience''. Because governing through precarity (that is, governing through dividing vulnerability, contingency, and insecurity over a population) can never fully achieve its goal (that is, to politically and economically control this population), possibilities for individual resistance remain present. By refusing obedience to direct or indirect government, Lorey suggests, one might interrupt the normalization of precarity that she takes to be the defining characteristic of our times.[57] Second, then, universal human emancipation has been replaced by what Lorey terms ''immanent exodus'' and ''constituting'', marking the transition from individual resistances to collective political agency. ''The point is that in the exodus of the many, a constituting, an organizing, of the manifold singularities emerges'', Lorey writes, ''in order to 'return' and funda-

[55] Lorey does not seem to denounce all hope for international political emancipation though. At one point, for example, she remarks that ''it remains to be seen […] to what extent the political protests repeatedly triggered by precarization remain only endemic or whether they might become global and pandemic.'' Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 61.

[56] Cf. Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 99-102.

[57] See e.g. Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 11, 15, 35, 104-5. Cf. Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 69.

mentally change the existing social relations.''[58] Although such a constituting or organizing does not result in security and protection for everybody, it does aim at undermining precarization as an instrument of governing: ''through permanent singular refusals, the small sabotages and resistances of precarious everyday life, a potentiality emerges that subverts the disciplining of governmental precarization time and again.''[59] The actualization of this potential does not lead to a state of freedom from forms of governing (or from servitude, to use Marx's term). At best, it leads to a new division of existential precariousness, one that is (hopefully) more equal and just. Although not stated explicitly, Lorey thus seems to suggest that Marx's ideas are, at least in some sense, not just economically, but also politically, deficient or obsolete.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to test a hypothesis derived from the work of Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida, by turning to some specters of Marx's theorizing on labour, alienation, and emancipation in the work of Arendt and Lorey. To recall, the hypothesis was: *The discursive effect of some of Marx's theorizing about labour gives reason to characterize Marx as a transdiscursive author who remains relevant for our contemporary discourse.* To take stock of my findings, and draw some conclusions, let me go through this statement step by step.

First of all, what discursive effect have we been able to establish? We have seen that Marx substituted the *animal rationale* for the *animal laborans*, which Arendt, in turn, felt compelled to complement with *homo faber*, but only to localize humanity and freedom in political action. Virno and Lorey then deemed it necessary to part from *homo faber* and return to the *animal laborans*, in order to describe the nature of work in the 21st century, which increasingly consists of activities without work that require both a public space and the deployment of our whole personality. Furthermore, we saw how Marx's theorizing on the distinction between productive and unproductive labour formed a condition of possibility for Ar-

[58] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 102. See also Isabell Loray, ''Attempt to Think the Plebeian: Exodus and Constituting as Critique'', trans. Aileen Derieg, *transversal: 'The Art of Critique'* (August 2008), available at https://transversal.at/transversal/0808/lorey/en.

[59] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 111.

endt to make a case for the productivity of unproductive labour, and for Lorey to reveal how the latter has become productive and capitalized in the economy of the present. Subsequently, we discussed that while the greatest threat to the worker in the capitalist system might have shifted from alienation to precarization, this alteration might have only been the condition under which everything has remained the same. Finally, we saw Marx's ideas on revolution, emancipation, and freedom being taken as objects of critique by Arendt, and subsequently being toned to civil disobedience and immanent exodus by Lorey.

So has Marx proved himself to be a ''transdiscursive'' author? Indeed, we have seen that, as Foucault claimed, Marx has produced not solely his own writings, but also the conditions of possibility for the production of other texts, perhaps most notably Arendt's Marx-project. Marx has indeed undeniably made possible a certain number of analogies (e.g. with regard to the concept of surplus labour and worker precarity), but perhaps an even greater number of differences: unproductive labour becoming productive, precarization coming to outweigh or rather transform alienation, revolution and universal human emancipation being substituted for immanent exodus and constituting. We must thus endorse, I think, Foucault's depiction of Marx as one of the most important ''initiators of discursive practices''.

Yet is Marx still relevant for our contemporary labour market discourse? Virno and Lorey both seem to answer in the negative. Drawing on Virno's analyses, Lorey concludes that ''in the Post-Fordist era of cognitive capitalism, Arendt's classifications no longer apply and […] Marx's conceptual apparatus clearly does not seem adequate as a means of understanding contemporary forms of production and their related forms of life.''[60] However, as we already noted, it is still these obsolete distinctions that have enabled these authors to uncover what work in the 21st century consists in: the fusion and/or implosion of these distinctions. In fact, their own conceptual work, which declares Marx's economic and political conceptual apparatus obsolete, is nevertheless explicitly or implicitly developed against this background. Some of Marx's – and Arendt's – relevance today, paradoxically seems to consists in their irrelevance. Hence at the end of the day, we must agree with Derrida that the Marxist inheritance remains relevant and influential for our

[60] Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, 82.

contemporary economic and political discourse.

In this endeavor, we have also supported Derrida's deconstruction of any neat distinction between past, present, and future. For one thing, it has turned out that the past is not really past, for at least a part of it still haunts us in the present. Conversely, the present is not pure present, since it is traversed by reiterations of the past – think e.g. of Arendt's prefiguration of the opening statements by Deleuze, Foucault and Derrida. The future, in turn, is already anticipated in the present, whether in the form of revolution, exodus, or yet something else. Admittedly, I have not really spoken about the future (the future of work, for example). Yet, whatever the future of work looks like (even if it is a future without work), what is certain is that, as Derrida remarks, it will not be a future ''without Marx, without the memory and the inheritance of Marx: in any case of a certain Marx, of his genius, of at least one of his spirits.''[61]

[61] Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 14.