MIMETIC ECONOMIES: DESCENDING INTO PLATO'S HIDDEN ABODE OF QUEER PRODUCTION

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"Mimesis has always been an economic problem; it is *the* problem of economy."
— Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography*

Abstract This article explores the entangled relationship between queer theory and political economy through a critical rereading of Plato's metaphysics. Challenging Andrew Parker's claim that Marxist productivism necessitates the "unthinking" of sexuality, the author argues that theatricality—often coded as queer—is not opposed to production but constitutive of it. Drawing on Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's assertion that "mimesis has always been an economic problem", the analysis traces Plato's repudiation of mimetic arts as a moral reaction to the destabilizing effects of market exchange in ancient Athens. Far from being a secondary distortion of "real" labor, theatricality emerges as the repressed condition of production itself: laborers must first performatively approximate Plato's cosmological ideals of endogenous activity, exposing the inherent queerness of productive acts. Close readings of *Ion*, *Sophist*, *Cratylus* and *Timaeus* reveal how Plato's horror of theatrical passivity mirrors his anxiety about market circulation and sexual receptivity. The article critiques Derrida's deconstruction of Plato for neglecting this politico-economic substratum, proposing instead that queer theory might reorient itself toward the *mimetic economies*. Ultimately, the piece reimagines queerness not as production's excluded other but as its hidden logic—a disruptive force within the very "abode of production" Marx sought to unveil.

Keywords queer theory, political economy, labor, Plato, imitation, production

Back to Plato, or Plato from the Back: Political Economy of Queer Theory and *Vice Versa*

A man falls to his knees, moves his lips in prayer and suddenly he believes. This is perhaps the most famous scene of ideological indoctrination ever since Althusser's modern adaptation of Blaise Pascal's seventeenth century precept for aspiring believers. Belief, Althusser reminds us in his famous 1970 "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", presupposes a series of mechanical actions which are, in and of themselves, devoid of ideational content. Only through a ritualized performance in

front of a hailing witness can these bodily citations be misrecognized as a subjective experience of faith. This misrecognition that a ceremonialized reiteration of a set of formalized corporeal acts merely expresses a preexisting inner truth is what ideology in the general sense ultimately *is*, for Althusser. What Althusser calls the "theater of ideology" (ibid: 177) refers to a substitution of production for a "distorted representation" (ibid: 257); a pseudo-activity of using objects not as tools for producing use-values but as theatrical props for the fabrication of fictions.

As much as this Pascalian scene of religious bodily stylization is, on Althusser's reading, an allegory for the birth of ideology from the sensuous world of practical activity, it is also remarkably reminiscent of a certain set of distinctly queer pleasures of flamboyant impersonation and theatrical self-display. After all, what kind of a man prefers golden chalices and incensories over hammers and sickles? The one who ostentatiously falls to his knees and surrenders his tools in exchange for adornments cannot but evoke a certain pathological predilection for theater typically associated with the cultural trope of queerness. To suppress the naturally productive impulse and engage instead in a superficial game of pretense is not only to mystify the relations of production, it is also to exhibit a certain kind of theatrical penchant for imitation and passivity. To abstain from production proper, to opt instead for the production of shadow appearances, is at the same time to partake of a certain kind of queer enjoyment that is always in excess of a strictly economic calculation of profit and expenditure, production and consumption; a decadent enjoyment that Althusser will ultimately refer to as "superstructural".

This is, at least, the general intuition propelling Andrew Parker's influential 1991 essay "Unthinking Sex: Marx, Engles and the Scene of Writing" on the fraught relationship between queer theory and Marxism. There Parker wants to liberate critical theory from the deeply entrenched Marxist reflex to privilege relations of production at the expense of sexuality. By drawing attention to private correspondences between Marx and Engels, Parker claims that the Marxist concept of production is forged by an implicit reference to (homo)sexuality as its constitutive outside. When pressed against the historical realities of surging reactionary forces (most notably, the rise of Bonapartism), the productivist edifice is inherently predisposed to explain away these ostensible aberrations of dialectical progression by taking recourse to the queer trope of theatricality understood as faux-production (Parker, 1991: 33).

On Parker's reading, Marx defines production antithetically. Ultimately, producing amounts to little more than to not being an actor and — by a long chain of figurative associations — to not being queer. Because theatricality carries a distinctly homosexual connotation of unproductive passivity which cannot yield a surplus — a barren quasi-labor of "producing" fictions — Parker concludes that the very ontological concept of production as it emerges in Marx's philosophy of history exhausts all of its explanatory potential once confronted with its abjected and indeed queer other. As long as production remains the common denominator of social theory, sexuality must remain unthought. It is only by "unthinking sex" that we can posit production as the ontological kernel of reality.[1]

[1] For interpretations of Marx's treatment of theatricality that diverge from Parker's see Crowling and Martin, 2002 and Joseph, 2002. For general considerations about the relationship between productivism and theatricality see Phelan, 1993 and Baudrillard, 1975.

Despite its anti-productivist ethos, Parker's thesis has been in fact immensely productive for queer theory. Over the course of the last three decades, the procedure of "queering" a host of mutually heterogenous texts that are otherwise not commonsensically understood as neither queer nor overtly sexual has become a ubiquitous hermeneutic strategy. One can legitimately make a claim for a "queer universality" without having to provide Marxist credentials or having to make a connection to the ostensibly more general field of "political economy". At long last, it seems that queerness has become epistemologically emancipated.[2]

While I do not intend to diminish the immense field of possibilities that Parker's thesis has had for queer theory, I do want to take a step back and ask about the conceptual, political and imaginative routes to queer theorizing that this move away from production has in fact foreclosed. To the extent that queer theory has traditionally been very much attuned to the Derridean suspicion of binary pairs, should the opposition between producing and pretending to which Parker alerts us not make us pause before we dismiss production entirely in search of new horizons of queer possibilities? After all, queer theory teaches us that, more often than not, the "outside" turns out to be on the "inside" so that what has been repressed from the domain of intelligibility continues to perform its generative work below the veil of what is conceived as socially legitimate. The original turns out to be just as derivative as the copy and homosexuality seems to be implicated in heterosexuality from the start (Butler, 1990). Should a similar logic not apply to the dichotomy between acting in the ontological and in the theatrical sense of the term? Rather than a stumbling block that needs to be cast aside to clear the way for a queer universality, could production itself be available for the well-rehearsed procedure of "queering"? How would such a procedure look like? What would it mean for theatricality to be implicated in production?

Harking back to the Pascalian scene of religious conversion, we might ask if kneeling down and lip-syncing to the familiar verses is not itself a kind of labor from which religious ideology is said to estrange us? Althusser's phenomenology of ideological indoctrination resembles the phenomenology of practical activity to the point in which it becomes increasingly difficult to tell one from the other. Is production indeed something that needs to be dispensed with for sexuality to come into its own, or does the very possibility of this, ultimately undecidable, confusion between producing and imitating provide for precisely the kind of queer wager that Parker was looking for? Consider in this context Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe's provocative thesis:

> Mimesis has always been an economic problem; it is *the* problem of economy. From the very moment that money intervenes, there is generalized depropriation, the risk of a polytechnics or of an uncontrollable polyvalence, the exacerbation of desire, the appetite for possession, the triggering of rivalry and hatred (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 124).

For Labarthe, the mimetic logic of desire, as well as the ensuing confusion of identities and the proliferation of socio-sexual antagonisms, all belong to the domain of economy, they are in fact the *paradigmatic* problem of what Bataille might

[2] For an exhaustive overview of the strained relationship between Marxism and queer theory see Hennessy, 2018. See also Crosby et al., 2011. For a comprehensive attempt to outline the contours of a queer Marxism, see Floyd, 2009.

have called "general political economy".[3] By extension, we might say that, to the extent that it tackles the inherent polyvalence of desire and the concomitant impossibility of a coherent identity, queer theory has always already been a kind of a political economy and *vice versa*. To ask about the nature of production and exchange is always already to ask about the nature of desire. As soon as the circulation of goods and money is set in motion, desire and mimesis are locked into a bittersweet bind whereby the undecidability over who belongs to the class of producers and who is merely trading in shadow appearances propels the formation of a nascent Western conceptuality; a regime of truth production based on a futile pursuit of the phantasmatic original that Derrida will famously refer to as the "metaphysics of presence". In fact, Parker's dismissal of Marx seems to borrow much of its purchase from Derrida's famous thesis:

> This Marxist discourse presupposes an essence of humanity, of production as transformation of raw material, an essence of technique, etc., in short a network of philosophical determinations that have been handed down from the history of metaphysics; and in making practice a motif or value or essential reference, whose generality can no longer be exceeded, it makes of practice […] the essential determination of being, of what is and what is to be thought (Derrida, 2019: 59).

However, one might wonder why the same logic should not hold in relation to the metaphysical question of *being* that has preoccupied Derrida throughout his career. Does the philosophical discourse on being not presuppose a similar "essence whose generality cannot be exceeded", even if that essence is revealed to be tainted by *différance* from the start, as it is in Derrida's analysis? Why should the philosophical discourse be granted an innate generality that the politico-economic discourse is assumed to lack? What is the operative understanding of the "economy" here? For Derrida, much like for Parker, the "economy" turns out to be, to borrow Samuel Chambers' formulation, no more than "a metaphor for the circulation of philosophical tropes and concepts" (Chambers, 2022: 97). Chambers argues that Derrida consistently elides the economic question of the social production of *value* by subsuming it under an ostensibly more general heading of the production of *meaning*. But it is in no way self-evident why value should be classified as a subset of meaning. Such a hierarchical categorization runs against Derrida's otherwise radically non-categorical ethos. In this way, the exchange of money and commodities becomes coextensive with the exchange of philosophical concepts, creating a kind of fiction in which philosophical production of concepts is tacitly presumed to precede the processes of social production in general.

The strenuous relationship of queer theory and political economy which Parker's article unequivocally holds up to view seems to have been inherited directly from Derrida's blind spot to the economic question of production and exchange. After all, Parker's repudiation of the Marxian *problématique* is self-consciously performed on the "scene of writing". What kind of an imaginary of the "economy" allows itself to be allegorized by the metaphor of writing? Is writing here a metaphor for production in general, or does production function as a synecdoche for what is in fact a very particular kind of specifically *philosophical* production?

In *What is Philosophy?* Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze offer a rather different account of the origins of Western conceptuality. They claim that "philosophy" is an

[3] See, Bataille, 1988.

aspiration to think with concepts rather than with figures. Such an aspiration, they argue, was born in ancient Greece as a result of the closure of empire brought about by the proliferation of market exchange. More specifically, they maintain that philosophy cannot account for its origin within its own terms, its genealogy is a question of "milieu" (Guattari and Deleuze, 1994: 96). Deleuze and Guattari describe this proto-philosophical "milieu" in a manner that recalls Labarthe's intuition about the inherent affinity between, on the one hand, the mimetic rivalry characteristic of desire and the logic of exchange characteristic of market relations on the other:

> At least three things are found that are the de facto conditions of philosophy: a pure sociability as milieu of immanence, the "intrinsic nature of association," which is opposed to imperial sovereignty and implies no prior interest because, on the contrary, competing interests presuppose it; a certain pleasure in forming associations, which constitutes friendship, but also a pleasure in breaking up the association, which constitutes rivalry […] and a taste for opinion inconceivable in an empire, a taste for the *exchange* of views, for conversation (ibid: 89-8).

The decentralized movement of exchange – circulation of foreigners, money, goods – propels the exchange of opinions, it creates what Deleuze and Guattari call a "plane of immanence" which, in return, calls for an account of its own multidirectional flows; an account that can no longer be one of imperial projection of a sovereign unitary center (this is what Deleuze and Guattari call "thinking with figures") but one that must be *conceptually* construed. According to this view, not only is the philosophical domain of conceptuality inextricable from the politico-economic domain of production and exchange, but the very notion of sexual desire cannot be grasped without taking recourse to the intersection of these mutually co-constitutive registers.[4]

If mimetic rivalry, as well as the aspiration towards conceptuality, both emanate from a general movement of circulation, where does that leave Parker's conclusion that thinking production requires us to "unthink sex"? Can we even think sex if we have unthought the economy in this expanded sense? If the milieu that allows us to think with concepts is at the same time both the politico-economic milieu of market exchange and the libidinous milieu of erotic rivalry, would it also not follow that the relationship of queer theory to political economy should be one of affinity, rather than one of mutually exclusive antagonism? Rather than an attempt at the erasure of sex as an analytic category, might the paranoid concern over who is "actually" working and who is merely pretending to work be indicative of precisely the kind of sexual(ized) competition that both Deleuze and Labarthe are calling attention to? Might the rivalry over the status of a non-imitative producer ultimately designate a *paradigmatic* model of sexual rivalry in general?

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[4] In *Subjects of Desire*, Judith Butler (1987) advances a similar claim in relation to Hegel's conceptualization of bondage. For Butler, the subject's desire to emancipate himself from the body – a cornerstone of Hegel's political economy – is paradigmatic of sexual desire in general. In order to demonstrate his freedom from corporeality, the bondsman takes to work. However, this working will take the form of a repetitive and compulsive bodily dramatization characteristic of laboring and gender alike (see Arruzza, 2015). Butler's reading of Hegel, therefore, points to the interchangeability of sexual and economic rivalry. Both emanate from a desire to occupy the phantasmatic structural position of the original; a position which, according to Deleuze's and Labarthe's axiomatic, would not be conceivable within the confines of a sovereign center entirely exempt from the deterritorializing forces of market exchange.

The claim that to think sex we have to unthink production seems all the more surprising if we consider that at the dawn of Western thought, we encounter a virtually identical dichotomy between producing and imitating that Parker attributes to Marx. Although Derrida's philosophical procedures predispose us to search Plato's text for a theory of *being*, Plato's *Republic* can also be read as a treatise on the division of labor.[5] His metaphysics of forms is intended to serve a distinct politico-economic purpose of helping us discern the proximity of each class of producers to the heavenly "originals". The social ladder is just as immutable as the heavenly forms themselves: philosopher-kings fare the best, craftsmen fare relatively low. However, no one scores as low as the class of performance actors (such as poets and rhapsodists). In fact, Plato considers them to be so far from the original that they fall outside of the division of labor entirely. Considering the genealogical kinship of queer theory with the tropes of theater and performance, might queerness ultimately refer to a positionality in relation to the division of labor?[6]

This paper is designed as an exercise in imagination. Given the notable influence of Derrida's writings on queer theory more generally,[7] I want to imagine how queer theory might have looked like had Derrida himself decided to pay more attention to the salient politico-economic dimension of philosophical concepts, specifically that of writing which he distills primarily from his deconstructive reading of Plato. By reading Derrida reading Plato, I want to uncover the queer potentialities of approaching the "scene of writing" as a scene of production in disguise. I suggest that this kind of an amended deconstructive reading of Plato's categorical dismissal of mimetic arts may reveal something rather more tangible than a metaphysical priority of difference over identity.

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[5] In the context of political theory, Plato's treatment of mimesis is typically associated with the questions of law and justice. In a seminal text "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority", Derrida argues that the foundation of law is not so much *just* as it is *performative* – a kind of originary mimesis without an original. In a nuanced reading of this argument, Glendinning (2016) claims that although justice is irreducible to law, it is at the same time only possible within the performative orbit of the law, thereby inscribing the argument about the inevitability of law within the confines of the stage. In the following article, I want to employ a deconstructive reading of Plato to advance a similar argument in relation to the modern politico-economic thesis about the inevitability of labor.

[6] This claim is an attempt to reconceptualize the old Butler (1997) vs. Fraser (1997) debate by disrupting the unacknowledged presuppositions which set the very terms of that debate. Butler famously refused Fraser's recognition-redistribution dichotomy and argued that concerns over identity are not "merely cultural" but are from the start implicated in the wider kinship and class structures. However, both theorists base their arguments on a traditional view of class rooted in the labor-capital relationship. This focus misses a prior issue: the nature of labor as such. Using labor merely as a synonym for class assumes that the physical act of working is a straightforward, natural process, exempt from social mediation—an assumption that seems at odds with Butler's emblematic skepticism of the epistemological accessibility of "nature". My analysis, therefore, starts with a fundamental question: what if the problem begins with the very concept of labor? This article dives into Plato's theory of forms in order to reconstruct an alternative genealogy of that concept, one that goes beyond the habituated historicist reflex to situate it within the confines of modern political economy.

[7] See Hite, 2017.

Plato excludes the performance actors from the domain of proper being because of their improper use of *techne*; that is, poets and rhapsodists are the way they are because of the *manner* in which they produce. If queerness is a conceptual marker for a series of exclusions from the domain of proper being, it is also the case that those exclusions are performed on the scene of production. In this sense, I attempt to extract from Plato's texts a concept of queerness as a repudiated mode of production and in this way demonstrate how queerness and production are implicated from the start. By dismissing mimesis as a proper model of activity, Plato wishes to foreclose the uncanny prospect that imitation might be *the only* available mode of action in general. The "hidden abode of production" might have been queer all along.

Unthinking Writing: Queer as a Mode of Production

In *Phaedrus*, Plato famously recounts the myth of Theuth, the old Egyptian god of technical inventions. All is good in the ancient kingdom of Thamus until the visitation of the god Theuth who presents the king with his most propitious innovation: the art of writing. Theuth pitches the technology of letters to Thamus as an "elixir of memory and wisdom" (Plato, 1984: 62). Thamus, however, prudently refuses Theuth's offering for reasons that are going to attract Derrida's attention. Plato speaks through the king's mouth:

> For your invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who have learned it, through lack of practice at using their memory, as through reliance on writing they are *reminded from outside* by alien marks, not from within themselves by themselves. So you have discovered an elixir not of memory but of reminding. To your students you give *an appearance* of wisdom, not the reality of it (ibid).

The real exchange, of course, is the one between Theuth and the humans; one that is forfeited by the king on firmly antitheatrical grounds. Unlike the Pascalian believer in Althusser's allegory, Plato sees through the ruse of ornamentality which would make us believe that mere adornments can ever stand in for any real competencies. On Plato's reading, letters are a kind of shallow embroidery that would bestow upon its students the outward appearance of mastery but without the "reality of it". They merely alter one's appearance, but do not in any way alter one's being. For Plato, letters function as hollow reminders that attach to the body by the way of mechanical recitation, leaving the soul entirely unaffected.

The prospect of ornamentality introduced by the representation of speech in writing has opened up an ontological rip between being and appearing. It has conjured up a whole host of actorish figures seeking to profit on the account of Theuth's invention. With the emergence of letters, memory withers away and is surreptitiously supplanted by superficial rhapsodizing and vacuous rhetorizing. Because letters merely *look like* thoughts, they quickly become of interest to those histrionic types eager to manipulate appearances to their own advantage. Actors stand accused of the same crime as the subjects of writing:

> […] and what are we to say of a man who at a sacrifice or festival, when he is dressed in holiday attire, and has golden crowns upon his head, of which nobody has robbed him, appears weeping or panic-stricken in the presence of more than twenty thousand friendly faces, when there is no one despoiling or wronging him (Plato, 1961a: 430).

What prevents Socrates from getting duped by the kingly figure seeking to enchant the spectators by the way of trifling ornamentality is precisely his metaphysically elaborated apprehension of writing. This is why Socrates is doggedly alert in the presence of actors. He accuses the actor of mobilizing objects to intervene into the way in which he appears in front of an audience. The actor, in other words, uses a crown in much the same way in which humans would use letters if they were to receive Theuth's gift: to adopt an appearance devoid of reality.

The theme of theatrical production and its phantom-like offsprings occupies a central place in Plato's *Sophist*. In the dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger sets the terms of discussion: "Production […] we define as any power that can bring into existence what did not exist before" (Plato, 1961b: 1013). "For imitation is surely a kind of production" (ibid) the Stranger argues, yet immediately warns that whoever chooses to produce in this way participates in "queer" (*atopos*) (ibid: 983) acts of mimicry defined as "using one's own person as a tool from manufacturing semblances" (ibid: 1015). While on the metaphysical level this "queer" production is made possible by taking shelter in the "darkness of non-being" (ibid: 999) on the level of technique it involves employing one's own body or voice to counterfeit traits or speech of others (ibid: 1015). For Plato, the trouble with theatricality lies within neither of these two discrete levels but within the thespian's capacity to engage in acts of their conflation. The art of mimicry consists in making it appear as if the speech which originates in a written script (the level of the *tekhne*) is actually stemming directly from the soul (a metaphysical locus derived from Plato's theory of Forms). The sophist borrows his own person to be animated by an external power while his agency in the matter consists solely in misrepresenting that animation as an expression of his own interior self which, as a consequence of this borrowing, begins to progressively peel off.

What is queer about this production by the way of mimicking? In ancient Greek, *atopos* – translated as "queer" in Francis Cornford's translation – literally means "out of place". Because the sophist merely strives to embody by the way of "words and actions" the ideas which he does not himself produce, but only entertains at a distance, his "productions" turn out to be imports from an absent elsewhere. The queer production is in this sense a case of exchange posing as production, a substitution of production with mere importation.

Derrida zeros in on this theatrical ploy when he argues that Plato's beef with the sophist revolves around "the perversion that consists of replacing a limb by a thing [...] substituting the passive, mechanical "by heart" for the active *reanimation* of knowledge" (Derrida, 1981: 108). The sophist is still animated, to be sure, but the animating center is now displaced from the interiority of the soul onto the exteriority of the text. In other words, sophists approach a dialogue like professional actors: they cite, even when they appear to be speaking. The real horror of this artificial bodily comportment is not simply that it is achieved *in disregard* for the intimate sense of self but, much more ominously, *at the expense of it*. The possibility of this type of soulless, marionette-like animation orchestrated from without is opened up by a self-effacing surrender to the queer pleasures of recitation/impersonation. Theatricality and writing are of the same order: both substitute being with its mere representation.

In all of these instances writing turns out to be dangerous because it puts under suspension the ideal of a living, breathing presence as an organizing principle of the emergent Western conceptuality. Such is at least Derrida's famous claim proposed in

his "Plato's Pharmacy". On Derrida's reading, the purpose of these theatrical figures in Plato's texts – from actors and sophists to poets and rhapsodists – is to personify the operation of writing originally understood on the metaphysical model of presence. With the gift of writing, Theuth is essentially offering a technical possibility of deferring presence. What Plato fears, however, is that this deferral will turn into usurpation, that the self-presence of a speaking subject will be lost to writing. Once annotated, human knowledge sinks back into the inert materiality of the grapheme and ceases to be a property of the human. The technology of writing outstrips its auxiliary mnemonic purpose and usurps the proper ontological location of the soul. Instead of reminding the soul, it possesses it: it turns the reciting body into a moving carcass hollowed out of its spiritual substance.

For Derrida, the fear of this loss of presence to possession by the grapheme leads Plato to repudiate writing and instantiate dialectics in its place as an art of living conversation conducted between self-present beings. In writing, knowledge is autonomized, it acquires a curious capacity to take a course of its own, detached from the purview of an intentional subject. This is why writing colludes with the inanimate. In repeating the letters by rote, the reciter merely gives an impression of life, when in reality he has become something of a ventriloquist of death. Derrida writes:

> Writing would be pure repetition, dead repetition that might always be repeating nothing, or be unable *spontaneously* to repeat itself, which also means unable to repeat anything *but* itself: a hollow, cast-off repetition […] Pure repetition, absolute self-repetition, repetition of a self that is already reference and repetition, repetition of the signifier, repetition that is null or annulling, repetition of death (ibid: 135).

As a technology of citation, writing repeats what is already in existence and hence only ever generates a hollow yield. Writing is in this sense a proliferation of copies that eclipse the original. The productivist undertones of Plato's repudiation of writing are not lost on Derrida:

> [Writing's] ineffectiveness […], its improductiveness, a productiveness that is only apparent, since it can only repeat what in truth is already there. This is why – Socrates' first argument – writing is not a good *tekhne*, by which we should understand an art capable of engendering, pro-ducing, bringing forth (ibid: 134).

Writing is therefore a mere imitation of effectiveness, a staging or miming of production, a theater of laboring. In lieu of being moved from within itself, in writing, the body is animated by an alien source: it is led to ventriloquize a written mark, much like an actor citing a script. Indeed, Plato recasts these imitative exploits as a problem of animation (*empsuchon* meaning to animate or more specifically to "ensoul") in which the foreign substance of writing comes to possess the mimic's overly excitable body and animate it as "a kind of phantom" (Plato, 1984: 64). To the extent that the grapheme allows one to reabsorb it through mechanical repetition, writing inserts itself in the place of a self-propelled bodily movement, and in this way begins to erode human productivity from the inside. In writing, the "alien mark" (ibid: 62) takes on the role of an agentic subject properly belonging to the laborer. Rather than serving as a tool of genuinely novel production, the mark reproduces itself autonomously by the way of empty repetition, detached from intentional human control. Instead of engaging in creation, the subject of writing resorts to citation and thereby comes to resemble an actor more than a laborer.

This is why Plato's repudiation of the mimetician's use of writing invokes not merely a threat of death as a metaphysical prospect, but more specifically the threat of death as a problem of a general economy; that is death as *automation*. Labarthe's reading of Plato outlined in his *Typography* inflects the Platonic trope of death precisely towards this economic register:

> The main thing, perhaps, is to render [the mimetician], in effect, *unheimlich*, as the image in a mirror, the double, the living being made into a thing (the animated inanimate) – or even (why not?) as that other kind of double that deceives regarding its "life": the mechanical doll or automaton (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 92).

For Derrida, however, the economic terminology in which Plato's repudiation of writing is encased never merits more than a cursory glance: its function is merely to buttress Plato's broader metaphysical commitment to presence understood on the particular philosophical model of *being*. Derrida is, in other words, all too quick to reinscribe the economic problem of *tekhne* back into the metaphysical orbit of life and death, being and appearing, presence and absence. His main target in "Plato's Pharmacy" is to deconstruct Plato's metaphysical model whose "original" instantiation we are to find in his rendition of the myth of Theuth. On Derrida's reading, this is not so much (or not primarily) a myth of writing as a problem of production technology, but of writing as a problem of (non-)*being*. Theatricality is in this sense a secondary effect of writing and only ever appears when writing – understood by Derrida as "*that very thing* which cannot let itself be reduced to the form of presence" (Derrida, 1997: 57)– is in need of some kind of personification. The entire army of mimeticians which Plato labors to dialectically defeat throughout his writings is, for Derrida, enlisted in what is essentially a *metaphysical* pursuit of presence.

By extension, then, the opposition between theatricality and productivity, which Derrida here identifies, is necessarily cast as a secondary effect of a prior philosophical investment in a particular ontological standard. But Derrida never provides us with the genealogy of this standard itself. He appears to have accepted Plato's casting of letters as giving out an appearance specifically of wisdom (*sophia*). Presence then becomes an ideal that Plato imposes *ex nihilo*; an ideal that is entirely divorced from its social context and simply superimposed upon society from a philosophical high ground (and that can, consequently, be philosophically deconstructed).

Even though Derrida is notorious for his radicalization of contextuality (the argument that there is no *being* preceding its context), by accepting Plato's inscription of presence into the domain of philo-*sophia*, he has also, inadvertently, accepted that the *attachment* to presence itself is without a context. In other words, while presence is revealed in Derrida's analysis as an unattainable dream of a self-enclosed *being* liberated from all contextuality, the metaphysical *pursuit* for this impossible ontological standard is, paradoxically, precisely of the kind that being itself is not: self-generated, self-enclosed, locally produced within the confines of the Greek *agora*. This decontextualization of the very desire for presence, I argue, ultimately works against Derrida's own deconstructive effort to do away with presence.

In Plato's *Cratylus*, the seemingly metaphysical problem of the estrangement of originary presence by the means of written language is, through a crucial mythological excursion, in fact posited as a problem of market exchange. There, Plato tells us that language in general (both oral and written) is the invention of Hermes, the god of trade and travel. Socrates speculates:

> I should imagine that the name Hermes has to do with speech, and signifies that he is the interpreter, or messenger, or thief, or liar, or bargainer; all that sort of thing that has a great deal to do with language (Plato, 1961e: 444).

In his *Trickster Makes This World*, Lewis Hyde directs our attention precisely to this moment in *Cratylus* in which Plato takes recourse to the metaphor of the market to propose a theory of the origin of language:

> Plato thought not only that Hermes invented language but that he did so in relation to 'bargaining', which implies that a prime site of linguistic invention is the marketplace, another place where we are likely to meet strangers with strange goods, and, crossroads-wise, find ourselves forced to articulate newly. Moreover, the market at the crossroads may be a metaphor for metaphor itself, or for any original speech, the linguistic flowers that sprout at the crossroads of the mind (Hyde, 2010: 299).

Rather than language being superimposed upon the economy (economy as circulation of tropes and concepts), here it is the economy that gives substance to language (language as circulation of strangers and goods). For Plato, the general metaphor for linguistic invention is the market, or exchange in the general sense.[8] What propels linguistic creativity is allegorized by a god whose proper domain, if such a god can even be said to have one, includes bargaining, thievery, exchange, embellishments, the principle of non-proximity, unfamiliarity, queerness. The realm which Hermes presides over is without any stable locus, he is referred to as the "god of the crossroads", without a home and always on the move. His is the power of dispersion and decentralization; all of those social effects of expanded international exchange that Alfred French tells us became increasingly preponderant in fourth century Athens:

> The survival of Athens as a center of exchange by the international fraternity of commerce, which functioned as a mass of arrangements between individual entrepreneurs, was not subject to directions by governments, and was influenced by mainly economic and pragmatic considerations (French, 1991: 31).

At once without a stable locus and without a content, neither properly here nor properly there, in between, permanently at a crossroads, Hermes – an "epi-predator who works with the signifiers themselves rather than the things they supposedly signify" (Hyde, 2010: 75) – appears on the pages of Plato's *Cratylus* as a deification of what Derrida calls *différance*: "the pure movement which produces difference before all determination of the content" (1997: 62).

Language sprouts at the crossroads where the need for bargaining propels linguistic creativity. It burgeons from the interplay of in(de)terminable differences and in this it resembles its maker – the god of exchange and thievery. If Plato can cede this type of productivity to such a protean creature, this is only because language as such is here understood as a sophistic reduction of Ideas to mere signifiers. Hermes invents language by dispossessing it of its referent. This is why Socrates can ultimately dismiss the study of language as inferior to philosophy which alone can allow access to things in themselves (Plato, 1961e: 473).

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[8] This will be Rousseau's (1990) claim about alphabetic writing emerging as a direct response to the merchants' need to find the least common denominator of all languages in order to facilitate and expand foreign trade.

Language, in other words, together with the play of differences from which it emerges, is purely a question of appearances, ornaments, images – rhetoric. Much like Derrida's *différance*, the primary determination of language for Plato is that it evades closure. It allows for exchange precisely *because* it trades in mere images. The transactions of language are of a fundamentally different order than those of dialectics. De-anchored from any stable locus, language is fated for the crossroads, for the market, for exchange, for the eternal fluctuations of empty husks hollowed out from all ideational substance. This is why Socrates associates the etymological labor of naming with the lifeworld of pre-Socratic process philosophers and decidedly refuses to fall into the same "whirlpool":

> I myself do not deny that the givers of names did really give them under the idea that all things were in motion and flux, which was their sincere but, I think, mistaken opinion. And having fallen into a kind of whirlpool themselves, they are carried round, and want to drag us in after them (Plato, 1961e: 473).

At the same time in which Plato intuits the radical openness of language, he is immediately driven "to fix this vertigo" (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 122), to assign it a proper place, a "kingdom" of Ideas which will anchor the ever-moving world of market exchange in a stable locus with a centralized authority within the confines of the *Republic*. Zizek argues along similar lines:

> In breaking with the "closed" mythic universe, the Ancient Greek sophists […] played upon the self-referential abyss of language, which turns in its circle, lacking any external support. Plato's main task was to deal with this predicament which he experienced as a true *horror vacui*: aware that there could be no return to mythic closure, he tried to control the damage by re-anchoring language in the meta-physical reality of Ideas (Zizek, 2012: 42).

Although Zizek here wants to oppose what he sees as Derrida's "democratic materialism", understood as a metaphysical-materialist defense of the plurality of existence, and advocate instead for a materialist rehearsal of "Plato's assertion of the meta-physical dimension of "eternal Ideas"' (ibid),[9] what is missing from both Zizek's and Derrida's version of materialism is a genealogical account of the 'horror vacui' itself. For how is it that Plato's vertigo emerges at a particular point in time, exemplified by historically particular figures, all of whom come to share a remarkably particular set of predilections for imitating laborers? Neither Derrida's "democratic materialism" nor Zizek's materialism of the void are fully equipped to address these questions (they are in need of supplementation). From a purely metaphysical

[9] For Zizek, this will consist in granting the autonomous metaphysical status to Plato's experience of 'horror vacui': "The ultimate divide between idealism and materialism does not concern the materiality of existence ("only material things really exist"), but the "existence" of nothingness/the void: the fundamental axiom of materialism is that the void/nothingness is (the only ultimate) real, i.e., there is an indistinction of being and the void […] In order to get from something to nothing, we do not have to add something to the void; on the contrary, we have to subtract, take away, something from nothing." (Zizek, 2012: 60). Formulated in this way, the opposition between Derrida's *différance* and Zizek's void is elaborated on a purely metaphysical field where the materialism of affirmation confronts the materialism of negation (i.e., excess vs. lack). By pointing to the social relations of exchange subtending Plato's metaphysical speculations, my point is precisely to displace the very field in which the philosophical game is played.

standpoint, these remain no more than inconsequential figurations of a particular structure of thought which, in the final instance, must remain immaculately intuitive and perfectly self-propelled.

It is in this context that Labarthe's reading of Plato can yield important insights. Labarthe points to a particular moment in Book X of Plato's *Republic* in which we are introduced to mimesis as a metaphysical problem. Much like the students of letters are said to be 'reminded from the outside by alien marks', here a painter is described as merely grasping the exterior surface of an object, circumventing its interior essence. Here is the full paragraph from the *Republic* before I turn to Labarthe's pertinent intervention:

> Then the mimetic art is far removed from truth, and this, it seems, is the reason why it can produce everything, because it touches or lays hold of only a small part of the object and that a phantom, as, for example, a painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts, but nevertheless if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter (Plato, 1961c: 823).

This will be one of those moments in Plato's writings (on par with the myth of Theuth) where imitation is theorized as an explicitly metaphysical problem of the nature of being; imitation as a kind of ornamental use of objects in which an interior depth is represented by its outward surface appearance (a representation which always comes at a cost). Here Labarthe raises an important question that Derrida never quite thinks to ask:

> For if painting consists, with regard to each thing, in 'miming' it [*mimétiser*] such as it appears, and in producing, in conformity with its specular essence, the "phantasm", if, in this way – although in miniature and under the form of the idol – painting can make anything (that is, make everything the other *demiurges* make) it is hard to understand why its privileged function would be to paint "a shoemaker, a carpenter, or any other craftsman without knowing any of their trades", and consequently, what commits it to representing all the bodies of tradesmen, as is said in the Republic at 598b-c (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1989: 94-5).

To paraphrase Labarthe's question: if mimesis is primarily a metaphysical problem for Plato, then why do all mimeticians mime specifically the scene of production? That is to say, if theatricality is merely an exemplification of an ostensibly more general operation of writing, why is then the producer the paradigmatic object of theatrical representation? Whence his archetypal exemplarity? What accounts for this "onto-ideo-logical reduction" (ibid: 95)? On a more general level: why is production taken as the original kernel from which theatricality diverts us?

For Labarthe, the metaphysical desire for presence is not so much a *causa sui* as it is for Derrida, but rather an effect of a social order that has become increasingly dependent upon the importation of goods from foreign markets and the introduction of money that such circulation demands. The metaphysical vision of an ideal state in which each member is designated a "proper place" is directly inspired by a desire to ensure the self-presence of a community whose internal boundaries have become blurred as a consequence of a newly emergent market economy. In other words, before being a metaphysical ideal, presence is for Plato a moral reaction to a pronounced ubiquity of monetary relations. Labarthe argues:

> And we know that soon after [the opening of the discussion on justice in Book I], when under pressure from Glaucon Socrates ceases to dream of the ideal poverty of his primitive city and sees himself forced to envision a "real" State, mimesis is immediately introduced (with the throng of imitators, painters, sculptors, poets, rhapsodes, actors, dancers, theater agents, make-up artists, the fabricators of feminine adornments [II, 373ff.]) along with the market economy's procession of plagues (money, goods for consumption, prostitution, the multiplication of trades, domestic and external violence, and so on). Mimesis has always been an economic problem; it is the problem of economy. From the very moment that money intervenes, there is generalized depropriation, the risk of a polytechnics or of an uncontrollable polyvalence, the exacerbation of desire, the appetite for possession, the triggering of rivalry and hatred (ibid: 124).

Rather than merely a symptom of a prior investiture in presence as an ontological standard – an investiture that would itself be without precedent – Labarthe wants to read Plato's horror of theatricality as a moral reaction to an economic phenomenon couched in metaphysical terms. The circulation of figures and concepts that Plato puts into motion cannot be separated from the social context marked by an unprecedented circulation of people, goods, and money. This is why all of Plato's mimeticians mime craftsmen: they are conjured up by Plato as personifications of market forces against which Plato devises a metaphysical "shield" consisting of Ideas that are stable, immutable, and perfectly localized. This is also the reason why, whenever Plato endeavors to elaborate his theory of Ideas, he is driven to conjure up a throng of craftsmen: from shoemakers and cowherds to generals and ship pilots. Their purpose is to anchor the whirlpool of market circulation in a stable metaphysical locus and preclude the non-representationalist prospect of difference before it can make itself legible within the terms of philosophy itself.

Productivism and the horror of theatricality therefore appear simultaneously, they precede Plato's metaphysical theory of representation and function not so much as derivatives of a prior metaphysical framework, as Derrida is all too quick to assume, but as essentially *moral* reactions to market exchange. In other words, Plato's realm of Ideas is everything that the fourth-century Athens is not.[10] If the laborer becomes *proverbially* vulnerable to mimetic appropriations, this is because the very commitment to presence as a metaphysical ideal already presupposes a specific set of economic relations based on exchange, import, and credit (that is, relations based on some form of *absence*).

The global circulation of foreigners, capital, and commodities fuels a parallel exchange of opinions, forming what Deleuze and Guattari term a "plane of imma-

[10] Alfred French argues that the economic conditions of the fourth-century Athens have been defined primarily by an increased importation of foreign goods which turned Attica into a hub of international exchange whose flows eluded any form of centralized control from the government. See French, 1991. Similarly, Kristy Shipton points to the increased monetization of Attic society over the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. together with an increased prominence of private banks in regulating social life. See Shipton, 1997. All of these are critical responses to Moses Finley's influential argument outlined in his *The Ancient Economy* – a seminal work on the economic system of classical antiquity – where he argues for what would come to be known as a "primitivist" conception of ancient economic relations marked by an absence of large-scale monetary modes of relationality and a "peasant-like passion for self-sufficiency" (Finley, 1999:108). For a comprehensive overview of post-Finleyan research on economies of the ancient Greek world see Scheidel and von Reden, 2002.

nence"—a flat, interconnected field without a hierarchy. This complex system, in turn, demands a new model to account for its multidirectional currents. This philosophical model cannot be based on the imperial idea of a sovereign power projecting its will outward. It must be a conceptual framework built from the ground up to reflect the system's inherent complexity:

> This is where one thinks no longer with figures but with concepts. It is the concept that comes to populate the plane of immanence. There is no longer projection in a figure but connection in the concept. This is why the concept itself abandons all reference so as to retain only the conjugations and connections that constitute its consistency. The concept's only rule is internal or external neighborhood (Guattari and Deleuze, 1994: 90).

This absenting of all referentiality which Plato attributes to language, and which he wants to sharply distinguish from philosophy as a "study of things in themselves", is here understood as a precondition for the formation of concepts; that is, as a precondition for *philosophia*. Not only is Plato's distinction between philosophy and rhetoric revealed here as untenable, but also any attempt to isolate philosophy from the social field of immanence in which it emerges. For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy repeats in the conceptual register the movement of displacement characteristic of market exchange. However, at the same time in which philosophy emerges from this generalization of exchange, it also works to halt its indeterminacy; to extract the concept from the immanent field of amicability which served as its condition of possibility; to emancipate it from its originary relationality, to distill it and make it absolute, self-sufficient, and fixed:

> Philosophy takes the relative deterritorialization of capital to the absolute; it makes it pass over the plane of immanence as movement of the infinite and suppresses it as internal limit, turns it back against itself so as to summon forth a new earth, a new people. But in this way it arrives at the nonpropositional form of the concept in which communication, exchange, consensus, and opinion vanish entirely (ibid: 99).

This is, I argue, the context in which labor emerges as a proto-concept of Plato's philosophy. The "new earth" will be one of clearly demarcated social locations in which each is accorded a position according to a pre-arranged cosmological hierarchy of being, entirely exempt from the radical indeterminacy brought about by the flows of exchange. Labor performs precisely this function of foreclosing "communication, exchange, consensus, and opinion" – it is simply a matter of representing the eternal Ideas; of "passing over the plane of immanence as movement of the infinite". The binary opposition between production and imitation serves the purpose of safeguarding the apparently *ideal* division of labor from the intrusion of the overtly immanent, and hence political, origin of that division. Poets, therefore, must be banished from the polis because the mode in which they produce makes the mimetic nature of *all* production overly apparent.

Unlike Labarthe, however, Derrida interrogates Plato's conception of mimesis on Plato's own territory – that of metaphysics. Derrida's attempts to extend his deconstructive treatment of presence to the level of economy (e.g., the argument that Plato demotes writing for being unproductive) end up reducing the economy to a particular epistemic arena for the further elaboration of metaphysical concepts. We are ultimately invited to reinscribe the bodily mimesis of Plato's figures from the economic domain of production and exchange into a metaphysical domain of being

and appearing. From that moment onwards, the entanglement of mimesis with the world of work to which Labarthe refers us can only ever appear as circumstantial. To the extent that queer theory has traditionally borrowed much of its conceptual apparatus from Derrida's treatment of mimesis, it also inherited Derrida's cursory approach to political economy. In what follows, I attempt to briefly sketch out a queer reading of Plato that is attuned to the politico-economic aspects of Plato's metaphysics.

Ion's Choice: Queerness Between Immorality and Indolence

This interplay between metaphysics and political economy becomes especially apparent when one reads *Timaeus* – a dialogue on the cosmological order of things – against the backdrop of *Ion* in which Plato launches a passionate repudiation of a professional Homeric rhapsodist. The former is a properly metaphysical explication of the correspondence between thinking and being, while the latter is an account of the true nature of the theatrical occupation of rhapsodists. Although given at two different levels of abstraction – one metaphysical, the other economic (Ion is exposed as lacking control over his own *techne*) – these two dialogues complement each other in a way that makes Labarthe's argument on the moral nature of Plato's metaphysics starkly discernable.

Ion is an "enthusiastic" (*entheos*) rhapsodist who memorizes poetic texts and travels from one polis to another to deliver his recitals. From the outset, he is introduced as someone whose profession dictates a predilection for ornamentality: "I often envy the profession of a rhapsode, Ion; for you have always to wear fine clothes, and to look as beautiful as you can is part of your art" (Plato, 1961a: 426). Ion is therefore at once a foreigner to Athens[11] — a figure of a traveler —and someone who is keenly aware of appearances, a kind of a traveling merchant in his own person. Socrates' flattery, however, turns out to be a lampoon in disguise given that Ion is quickly forced to admit that his technique of reciting Homer is not far removed from the fine clothes that adorn his body, that his poetic lore is as shallow as his ornaments. Socrates reproaches Ion:

> You are […] possessed by Homer and when any one repeats the words of another poet you go to sleep, and know not what to say; but when any one recites a strain of Homer you wake up in a moment, and your soul leaps within you, and you have plenty to say (Plato, 1961a: 430).

The sleepiness in which the Homeric rhapsodist falls into in the absence of familiar verses reveals a more general condition of passivity common to rhapsodizing and writing alike. Both are understood on the model of ornamentality. Without an author to defend it, Plato writes in *Phaedrus*, "writing is unfortunately like a painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence" (Plato, 1984: 63). When asked to speak in their own name, letters, much like their reciters, merely "point to just one thing, the same each time" (ibid: 63). Mechanical repetition of verses, which throws Ion into

[11] What the Greeks referred to as a *metic*: a free non-citizen residing within Athens; not quite Greek, but also neither a slave nor a barbarian and hence a liminal figure. See e.g. Kristeva, 1991 and Derrida, 2000.

an inanimate state of sleep, arrests the endogenous bodily animation and supplants it with an eternal sleep of paintings. By reciting written texts, Ion becomes like the adornments that he wears: *still*. The argument wielded against Ion will serve as a springboard for Plato's cosmological theory of corporeal movement outlined in *Timaeus*:

> Now of all motions that is the best which is produced in a thing by itself, for it is most akin to the motion of thought and of the universe, but that motion which is caused by others is not so good, and worst of all is that which moves the body, when at rest, in parts only and by some external agency (Plato, 1961d: 1208).

What Ion ultimately stands accused of is the suspension of this metaphysical principle of endogenous activity shared by all proper craftsmen, in favor of an exogenous mechanical movement enabled by a perverse alliance with objects which cease to be used as tools of production and begin to function as theatrical props for fabricating appearances. Instead of representing the Idea, Ion reverberates an already existing text and in this way allows himself to become possessed by a foreign force. His painting-like passivity is at odds with the golden cosmological standard of endogenous motion: he is, quite literally, moved "in parts only and by some external agency".

This threat of passivity looming over Ion is a subtle yet consistent link between Plato's productivism and his vehement antitheatricalism. As a reciter of poems, Ion is easily transposed into a state of divine inspiration verging on "severe possession" (Plato, 1961a: 429) in which he allows god to use him as an instrument: "God takes away the minds of poets, and uses them as his ministers" and "[…] by the mouth of the worst of poets [God] sang the best of songs" (ibid: 429). Here Ion is charged with borrowing his own mouth to God to be used as a tool and in this way exposing himself to the loss of sovereign corporeal agency – a weighty accusation considering the fact that it constitutes the grounds on which a male citizen of ancient Athens could be legally stripped of citizenship.[12]

David Halperin's influential account of Athenian political regulation of the male body demonstrates that passivity is a menace that can be generalized from poets and sophists all the way to male prostitutes. Receptivity, understood by Plato as a primary precondition for poetic possession, is at the same time the rationale for excluding prostitutes from the public life of the polis. Halperin writes:

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[12] In ancient Athens, the regulation of male sexual receptivity was not primarily about prohibiting homosexual acts *per se*, but about rigorously protecting the political integrity and social status of the citizen (*polis*). The fundamental cultural rule was tha a free-born adult Athenian male citizen could never legitimately take the "passive" or receptive role (*pathēma*) in a sexual act with another male. Athenian society was structured around a clear hierarchy of penetration. To be the penetrator (*erastēs*) was aligned with masculinity, dominance, and active citizenship. To be penetrated was associated with femininity, submission, and political incapacity (a status shared by women, slaves, and foreigners). Allowing a citizen to be sexually used by another man was seen as a profound threat to his personal autonomy (*eleutheria*). Since the city-state was composed of autonomous citizens, a man who could be dominated in this way was considered unfit for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, which included voting, holding office, and fighting in the army. His body was, symbolically, not his own to command. In addition to Halperin's (1999) seminal study see also Dover, 1978; Winkler, 1990; Davidson, 2007; Cohen, 1991.

> No person who prostituted himself could be allowed to speak before the people in the public assembly because his words might not be his own; he might have been hired to say them by someone else, someone whose interests did not coincide with those of Athens, or he might simply want to bring about a political change that would advance his private interests at the expense of the public good – servility and greed evidently being the dominant features of his personality (Halperin, 1990: 98).

The prostitute borrows his body to be used for the pleasures of others and in this way creates indelible doubt over the origin of all of his subsequent animation: in addressing the assembly, to whom might he be borrowing his lips this time around? What external force yet again uses his body? Indeed, much like the enthusiastic rhapsodist is transposed outside of himself and, in the course of this possession, leaves his own person vulnerable to exterior influences, so too a prostitute opens himself to penetration by an outside force and in this way becomes unfit for participation in the public life of the polis. In this sense, both poets and prostitutes are excluded from the city on the same grounds: they fall outside the purview of a community of producers whose rightful members are animated from within; a community whose internal political structure is therefore "most akin" to the motions of the cosmos.[13]

Rather than stemming from a larger cosmology of sovereign forces, however, Halperin argues that the loss of citizenship status (*atimia*) inflicted upon those suspected of sexual receptivity was a direct response to concerns over the autonomy of the male body which was seen as threatened by the prospect of clearly discernable economic difference (Halperin, 1990: 96). This politico-economic backdrop of passivity, productivity, citizenship, and exchange, against which Plato's metaphysical repudiation of writing is mounted, is easily lost if we follow Derrida's inscription of the problématique of writing directly into the orbit of purely metaphysical concerns over life and death:

> The magic of writing and painting is like a cosmetic concealing the dead under the appearance of the living […] It makes the corpse presentable, masks it, makes it up, perfumes it with its essence […] Death, masks, makeup, all are part of the festival that subverts the order of the city, its smooth regulation by the dialectician and the science of being (Derrida, 1981: 142).

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[13] Plato's anxiety of receptivity resonates directly with republican readings of Marx which argue that the core problem with capitalism is that it subjects the working class to an arbitrary, alien power. This power—the impersonal force of the market and the private power of capital—deprives individuals and the polity as a whole of their freedom understood as self-government (autonomy). See e.g. Gourevitch, 2015; Roberts, 2017; McNally, 2011; Wood, 2017. Given that the destigmatization of bodily objectivization is one of principal contributions of queer theory (Bersani, 2010; Salamon, 2010; Puar, 2017; Doyle, 2013), the humanist commitment to the ideal of autonomy becomes the main stumbling block for queer readings of Marx. However, inscribing the concept of labor into an idealist, Platonist schema also inflects that concept away from Marx's materialism, pointing us to readings of Marx that posit labor as the object of Marx's critique, rather than an attempt to affirm action as an autonomous metaphysical principle. Consider e.g. Moishe Postone's claim that "according to Marx […] social labor *per se* – the productive activity of human beings in general [*Arbeit sans phrase*] – is a mere phantom, an abstraction that, taken by itself, does not exist at all" (Postone, 1993: 56). Unlike Parker's reading of Marx which posits social labor as an ontological kernel of reality, here labor is exposed as a stage haunted by the very queer theatricality it seeks to exclude. The logic of desire, impersonation, receptivity, and the circulation of signs is not external to the economic "base" but is the very medium through which economic relations are themselves constituted, sustained, and naturalized.

However, in comparing Ion's sleepiness to the stillness of paintings, Plato is not so much concerned with the metaphysical problem of death as he is with the political problem of passivity. Because Ion is merely a puppet on a string through which God himself exercises his poetic skills, he also, by extension, lacks a trade properly his own. Plato lures Ion into one of his elenctic traps in order to demonstrate that, unlike a general, a cowherd, a pilot, a charioteer, a physician, or a spinning-woman, all of whom indeed actively participate in production, Ion only knows how to "look like" a skilled artisan but is in fact nothing more than a charlatan: "[…] you are only a deceiver, and so far from exhibiting the art of which you are a master, will not, even after my repeated entreaties, explain to me the nature of it" (Plato, 1961a: 434). Plato concludes his verdict in a passage that merits some attention:

> You have literally as many forms as Proteus; and now you go all manner of ways, twisting and turning, and, like Proteus, become all manner of people at once, and at last slip away from me *in the disguise of a general*, in order that you may escape exhibiting your Homeric lore (ibid: 434).

Ion's thespian talents are here compared to those of Proteus, the prophetic Homeric god of oceans whose elusive, watery essence allows him to take on multiple shapes and, in this way, mislead those who would capture him. In *Timaeus*, Plato will posit this liquid-like receptivity as a metaphysical principle in its own right. The "receptacle" (*chora*) will be precisely such a protean, formless materiality whose only property consists in awaiting imprint of the eternal Forms: "[…] the matter in which the model is fashioned […] is formless and free from the impress of any of those shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without" (Plato, 1961d: 1177). The procedures by which Plato repudiates Ion's theatrical recitals – the denunciation of his readiness to open himself up to external influences – parallel the qualities ascribed to the receptacle; namely, its receptivity that enables it to fully accommodate the active inscription of the Idea. The very same passivity that marked Ion as politically suspect is in *Timaeus* elevated to the metaphysical quality of inert materiality as such. Much like Plato's understanding of matter itself, Ion is quite literally *impressionable*. His receptive capacities to receive imprints from without enable him to become possessed by the writings of others.

Indeed, the diagnosis of Ion's "slippery" nature is entirely coextensive with the peculiar ontological status that Plato attributes to the receptacle: "[…] an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible" (ibid: 1178). Receptiveness and passivity are, therefore, attributes common to materiality and actors alike. However, Ion pays a high price for his collusion with materiality: he becomes like the texts that he recites. Superficial, listless, and sleepy, Ion has traded his own subjectivity for the thespian power of receiving multiple forms. How do we account for this transition from the purely metaphysical description of the receptacle in *Timaeus* to the morally charged condemnation of the theatrical in *Ion*?

Socrates concludes his dealings with Ion by leaving him with an option to pick his poison: he must be either morally corrupt and hence politically pernicious, or he is without art and hence perfectly unproductive from a metaphysical standpoint, albeit morally neutral and politically harmless:

> And if you have art, then, as I was saying, in falsifying your promise that you would exhibit Homer, you are not dealing fairly with me. But if, as I believe, you have no art, but

> speak all these beautiful words about Homer unconsciously under his inspiring influence, then I acquit you of dishonesty, and shall only say that you are inspired (Plato, 1961a: 435).

Ion is presented with an impossible choice. He must confess to being either corrupt or to being useless. Although Socrates presents the latter option as both more likely and less incriminating, we have ample reason to suspect that he has vested interest in misrepresenting Ion's skill as a benign chicanery given that this interpretation would simultaneously neutralize the danger that theatricality poses for Plato's larger metaphysical edifice. What is tacitly at stake for Plato is his entire metaphysical schema that presupposes the very same theatrical receptivity which he denounces in Ion and which could indeed legitimize, from within Plato's own terms, Ion's claim to production proper.

Before dismissing him as merely a harmless simpleton, Socrates raises the prospect of Ion practicing a skill that is so inventively devious that one may well suspect the sincerity of Plato's offhand treatment of the seemingly innocuous rhapsodist. He reproaches Ion for his attempt to enlist his passive receptiveness to assume a form of an active, form-bestowing artisan. The charge is not simply that Ion is a deceiver who has "as many forms as Proteus" but that, among all of his many forms, he comes specifically in the "disguise of a general"; that he disingenuously presents his theatrical nature as itself an expression of activity, on par with that of the army general who represents something of an ideal of virile, laborious agency – one that is ostensibly immune from the perils of exchange, penetration, and ornamentality. Ion, the impressionable rhapsodist, takes on the mask of an impressioning laborer thereby evincing that labor could itself be no more than a mask. This is the true horror of theatricality that perturbs Plato: with actors, out of the multiplicity of guises that it can adopt, the receptacle, that "natural recipient of all impressions" (Plato, 1961d: 1177), assumes the form of its opposite and in this way demonstrates that impressing can itself be a receptive endeavor modeled on the principle of imitation.

The trouble for Plato is that this possibility of histrionic inversion inheres already at the cosmic level. Recall that in *Timaeus*, at the moment in which Plato wishes to oppose the receptacle to the active principle of endogenous animation of which craftsmen partake, he writes that "the motion produced in a thing by itself is *most akin* to the motion of the universe [*kai te tou pantos kinesei sungenes*]" (ibid: 1208). From this follows that labor is not coextensive with the motion of the universe but operates by the way of imitative approximation. If that self-ruling motion is indeed "the best", as Plato claims it to be, then this is so because it is the best at *simulating* Plato's cosmological ideal of production as driven by endogenous activity. Before being an operation of impressing upon a receptive surface, labor is therefore an act of staging, citing, replicating, becoming the most alike, and as such comes directly from the actor's toolbox.

Impressing and receiving, producing and exchanging, labor and theatricality: all of these binary oppositions that were supposed to uphold Plato's productivist commitments are at risk of being swallowed by the whirlpool of *différance*. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler raises a similar point in relation to Plato's prohibition of any active participation of the receptacle in the production of form: "What appears to be prohibited here is partially contained by the verb *eilephen* – to assume, as in to assume a form – which is at once a continuous action, but also a kind of receptivity" (Butler, 2011: 24). The confusion between action and receptivity which the traveling

rhapsodist precipitates is not simply metaphysical, it entails a disruption of an entire social order. This is the prospect that Socrates wishes to foreclose in advance by "graciously" granting Ion a way out: confess that you are not really *doing* anything, that your recitals have no effects, that you are merely playing games and only then will I let you go free from moral reprobation. This is how Ion can remain perfectly inconsequential even as his very appearance warrants the mobilization of an entire metaphysical armory to dispossess him of his claim to efficacy.

This is precisely Mladen Dolar's point in "The Comic Mimesis" when he argues that a fear of productive imitation lies at the heart of Plato's philosophy. As much as Plato would like to dismiss imitation as a marginal phenomenon that can be simply decreed away by banning poets from the city, it is precisely the horrifying image of an actor always already hiding behind the mask of a laborer that propels Plato's entire productivist edifice. Dolar argues:

> But there is the reverse danger, never quite avowed but constantly in the background, namely, that imitation strikes back, it impinges on the original, it has an impact on it, it changes it, although the original, *eidos,* is such that it couldn't possibly be changed or swayed. One makes a copy, not even that, a copy of a copy, and the world of ideas seems to be shattered; it has to be firmly defended against any such intrusion. Imitation shapes the imitator, and it shapes the model that is imitated (Dolar, 2017: 580).

The true horror that theatricality provokes in Plato's thinking is not merely that this actorish promiscuity is dangerously similar to a laborious virility; that this impact which imitation has on the original is impossible to differentiate from the impact that the laborer exerts on receptive matter (which is to say, theatricality is more than an epistemological concern), but, rather more alarmingly, that the active cosmological principle of production is itself of thespian nature; that productivity may be more like exchange (and hence like the procession of actorish figures that engage in it) than like production. In this sense, the reason why Plato repudiates the effects which theatricality has on the actor (passivity, loss of selfhood, malleability, impressionability, etc.) is precisely that these in fact approximate the effects to which a laborer must become exposed if his animation is to be evaluated as "most akin" to that of the universe. He must stage a theatrical performance of labor which would make the object appear in the form of a receptacle; a poetic form *par excellence* which depends on the laborer's thespian capacity to enact impressing, to mimic the corporeal movement which is most likely to be perceived as leaving a mark and to thereby, out of a boundless multiplicity of possible aesthetic representations, paint a picture of matter as infinitely pliable.

But in the course of staging such a representation of matter, the laborer must himself become actorish and therefore, much like the matter which he stages, susceptible to impressions. The relationship between a laborer and his productive effects is unnervingly similar to that of an actor to his audience: it depends on persuasive mimicry, rather than on substantive transformation. If Plato is to establish a hierarchically structured community of producers, ranging from craftsmen to philosopher-kings, then these producers must expose themselves to Plato's evaluation so that their labors may be adequately compared to the already posited cosmological standard of endogenous motion. And in the course of this comparison, their labors may appear more similar to the movements of the market than to those of the cosmos.

Or — what is arguably even more disturbing for Plato — the spectatorial standpoint which the division of labor mandates may reveal an unsettling affinity between Plato's cosmology on the one hand and the proliferation of immanent standards of comparison brought about by market forces on the other. In Plato's ideal polis, the ostensibly transcendental cosmological standard of endogenous motion must become immanently available for the craftsmen's laborious, approximative efforts. In this way even the most vertical of social hierarchies become organized upon a tacitly horizontal axis.

This is the genealogy of Plato's horror of theatricality. In order to enact Plato's ideal of autonomous activity, the laborer must expose himself to an arbiter's gaze and become passive in the course of doing so. The laborer must first receive the form of a laborer as one of his masks if he is to convincingly present materiality as receptive and, by extension, himself as productive. In other words, before engaging in production, the laborer must first become an actor. It is for this reason that the conception of production as a unilateral activity of impressing upon passive matter depends on the already implied presence of a repudiated notion of theatricality as an art of receiving impressions from alien sources.

How might a laborer produce without first having recourse to an external model of endogenous animation; without a theatrical elaboration of such a model which is necessarily alien to his own approximative efforts; one which, as Derrida claims of writing, "doesn't come from around here […] comes from afar, is external or alien to the living, which is the right-here of the inside"? (Derrida, 1981: 104). Is that endogeneity of corporeal motion not itself obfuscated by the virtue of its constitutive dependence upon an external model? Might the arrival of the god of writing, or that of an impressionable rhapsodist, on the scene of production in fact precede the constitution of a self-enclosed community of producers? Before engaging in production, do humans not enter first into a relationship of exchange with Prometheus who, according to the ancient Greek myth, indebts them by stealing the gift of fire from the gods? To the extent that there is no receptive surface always already available on the scene of production before its aesthetic adequation or personation in the figure of an impressionable mimetician, theatricality functions as a constitutive outside of production: as that without which production cannot even appear on the scene as an intelligible form of partaking in the world. Behind Plato's productivist antitheatricality, there lies a tacit realization that acting may indeed be the oldest of professions.

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Gospodarstvo Mimeze: Silazak u Platonov skriveni svijet queer proizvodnje

Sažetak Ovaj članak istražuje isprepleteni odnos između queer teorije i političke ekonomije kroz kritičko čitanje Platonove metafizike. Dovodeći u pitanje tvrdnju Andrewa Parkera da marksistički produktivizam nužno zahtijeva represiju mišljenja o seksualnosti, autor tvrdi da teatralnost – često kodirana kao queer – nije suprotstavljena proizvodnji, već je za nju konstitutivna. Oslanjajući se na tvrdnju Philippea Lacoue-Labarthea da je „mimeza oduvijek bila ekonomski problem", analiza prati Platonovo odbacivanje mimetičkih umjetnosti kao moralnu reakciju na destabilizirajuće učinke tržišne razmjene u drevnoj Ateni. Daleko od toga da se radi o sekundarnom iskrivljavanju „stvarnog" rada, teatralnost se pojavljuje kao potisnuti uvjet same proizvodnje: radnici prvo moraju performativno aproksimirati Platonove kozmološke ideale endogene aktivnosti, otkrivajući tako inherentnu queer narav svih produktivnih činova. Pažljivo čitanje Iona, Sofista, Kratila i Timeja otkriva kako Platonov užas od kazališne pasivnosti odražava njegovu tjeskobu zbog tržišne cirkulacije i seksualne receptivnosti. Članak kritizira Derridinu dekonstrukciju Platona zbog zanemarivanja ovog političko-ekonomskog supstrata, predlažući umjesto toga da bi se queer teorija mogla preusmjeriti prema mimetičkim ekonomijama. U konačnici, članak reinterpretira pojam queer-a ne kao isključenog Drugog proizvodnje, već kao njezinu skrivenu logiku – disruptivnu silu unutar samog „skrivenog područja proizvodnje" koje je Marx nastojao razotkriti.

Ključne riječi queer teorija, politička ekonomija, rad, Platon, imitacija, proizvodnja