Once upon a time, back in the second decade of neocapitalism, or, as it is now more familiarly known, post-Fordism, a telecommunications monopoly, still quite recently released into the private sector, numbered among its subsidiaries a market research company that employed a shifting population of mostly young theatre professionals to conduct telephone interviews. This arrangement was far from unusual at the time. State-funded university programs in the arts and humanities and vocational training programs at a range of state-accredited drama schools were generating a reliable supply of potential and occasional actors, writers, and directors to carry out such work in the lengthy gaps between voiceover auditions and self-funded theatrical productions presented in small theatres above pubs. Personable, overconfident, and hyper-exploitable, these mostly young employees earned just enough money to keep going and enjoyed just enough social interaction with one another to sustain their desire to be or become theatre professionals. By keeping the dream alive they made sure that they stayed in the “phone room” (the term “call center” was not yet ubiquitous) for rather longer than any of them had imagined they ever would. There were moments when they would even start to take pride in their work, almost as though they considered themselves “professionals.”

The bulk of this work was to cold-call from a “list” of contacts, in the hope of persuading whoever answered to participate in a market research survey and, in the event of securing this participation, to conduct a scripted interview designed to produce market data for “the client.” In many cases “the client” was the recently privatized telecommunications company itself, which was just starting to feel the effects of market deregulation with the emergence of its first competitors for wired telephony. Occasionally a business-oriented project related to the future of telecommunications would be undertaken, a process that involved the mostly young theatre professionals having to give the impression they were au fait with such terms as “electronic mail” and “packet switching,” which
would mean nothing to any of them for at least another six or seven years. But far more often the projects undertaken were consumer related, dealing with supermarket locations, malt-based drinks, and domestic telephone services.

Some of the mostly young theatre professionals chose to conduct these scripted conversations using pseudonyms, partly because their own names, when spoken as part of an introductory script for a telephone conversation, would be likely to make a baffled interlocutor hold up the whole business by asking “Who?” but also, perhaps, in order ironically to underscore their own alienation in the workplace, to insist, against all the evidence, that they weren’t actually doing this, not really, that their true self was the one going to voiceover auditions and mounting self-financed theatrical productions in rooms above pubs. These “Potemkin” subjectivities were not the only ones being manufactured here in the “phone room.” Like all such polling and surveillance of the population the surveys initiated here involved the manufacture of wholly fictional subjects to be counted as having responded to, rather than having been produced by, the so-called research. These subjectivities were produced using a range of techniques, from demographic classification—“male, head of household, university education”—and linguistic approximation, involving ingenious attempts to make the answers given by actual people on the telephone tally with the range of possible answers accommodated by the form of the survey—“slightly interested, not very interested, not interested at all.” Occasionally there were fatal flaws in project design that made it nearly impossible to produce the subjectivities needed.

Take, for example, the survey about malt-based drinks. The “client,” so the briefing went, was concerned about a declining consumer base, largely composed of “older” people, who, it was assumed, although this was not actually articulated within the briefing, might not have a great deal of disposable income. The client wanted to reach a “younger demographic” perhaps not currently attracted to the product because of its strong association with the elderly. A special “mixer”—a kind of glass cylinder in which the powder used to make the drink in question could be excitingly combined with warm liquid—had been designed with a view to enticing these potential new customers. The task of the survey was to find out how “interested” these potential new consumers might be in the product if it came accompanied by this “mixer.” The “list” of contacts provided for the purposes of this survey was entirely derived from contact details given by people who had entered a “competition” by peeling off and sending in labels from jars of the product. Yes, the potential new
consumers were all selected from a list of people almost certain already to be consumers. In this theatre of bafflement no amount of vocal training, schooled extroversion, script-delivery skill, or even improvisation could produce the necessary subjectivities.

Similar if less completely circular exercises involved interviewing people in Leicestershire about a supermarket that didn’t yet exist (“No, love, sorry, I’ve not been there”) and a project about telecommunications itself that was almost poststructuralist in its self-reflexivity. In this latter case the “list” was constituted by people who had, in the first place, reported a fault with their telephone service and had subsequently received a kind of customer survey call designed to evaluate their level of satisfaction with the fault-repair service they had received. Most of these people were therefore utterly bewildered (and occasionally a little irritated) to receive, some months later, a further telephone call from a bright and breezy and mostly young theatre professional using a pseudonym asking them questions about how satisfied they had been with the way the previous survey of their customer satisfaction had been conducted. Other projects involved forays into the world of car repairs and international finance capital, in the form of “mystery shopper”-style call sequences, both of which involved entirely unconvincing acts of impersonation. In the first, in which a Scottish auto-repair service company had paid to give its employees telephone training, the task was to make a series of calls—perhaps one or two each every hour—to one of this company’s outlets and present oneself according to a script in which one had broken down or punctured a tire near Aberdeen or Kilmarnock or wherever the outlet in question was located. Few mostly young theatre professionals actually owned cars at this period of neocapitalism, so most were as ignorant of tire brands as they were of “electronic mail.” For some reason they were also encouraged to betray their identities in the most obvious (and offensive) way imaginable by putting on “Scottish” accents with which to make the calls—one of the more interesting uses for drama school “regional dialect” coaching—thereby compounding the public secret of the whole operation’s theatricality with a good dose of class condescension (middle-class southern English luvvie types effectively taking the piss out of presumably working-class Scottish employees at auto-repair shops by producing bad imitations of their speech). The interactions with finance capital involved similar routines (although the impersonations did not involve simulated regional or national identities), in which calls were made to City of London finance houses to ask whoever answered what the LIBOR was.1 It seems quite possible that the responses given in both
these “mystery shopper” scenarios, by workers subject to the surveillance of “performance management” even more acutely than were the mostly young theatre professionals (whose calls were monitored for “quality control purposes”), were as fictional as the identities fabricated to pose the questions, since the aim of both surveys was to address the manner in which information was exchanged rather than to verify its accuracy. Thus both sides of the scripted conversation were completely fabricated. The data supposedly authenticated by being attached to these entirely fictional subjectivities, on either side of the telephone conversation, might be regarded as the pure product of the regime of performance management itself, which has nothing to manage until it performs its own object into being.

In some cases it was often difficult, no matter how hard anyone tried, to secure enough interviews (manufacture sufficient subjectivities) in the more extended surveys to meet the “quota” set for the time period allocated to the “project.” In order that the company should not have to overspend on labor time, and therefore cut into whatever profit margin it had built into the contract with the client, blank questionnaire forms were completed without any further interviews actually being conducted, thereby generating an entirely fictitious (not distorted or dissembling or dissimulating but actually nonexistent) fraction of the UK population, whose randomly assigned preferences and desires, invented by mostly young theatre professionals, would now help guide the market planning of the businesses paying for this “research.” Let no one ever claim that “immaterial labor” produces nothing. The occasional feeling among this workforce, that these scenarios gave them the last laugh, was of course just the kind of illusory compensation that was needed to guarantee their continuing hyper-exploitability. If you can serve the man while convincing yourself that you are really fucking with the man, then you can count yourself really fucked.

This chapter takes up the story of the passionate amateurs of post-Fordism. The mostly young theatre professionals conducting telephone market research are working a job they mostly hate in order to be able to make the work they say they love. They are using their communication skills—developed for the purpose of producing fictional representations on stage—to produce fictional subjectivities in a market economy. Theirs is what is often termed “immaterial labor”: immaterial because it does not produce material goods, rather than because the labor itself is somehow accomplished without material. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s definition is clear: “immaterial labor” is “labor that produces an immaterial
good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge, or communication.” One of the key theoretical contexts for this chapter is the widely held idea that the “artist” in general, and the performing artist in particular, is a paradigmatic example of the immaterial laborer in post-Fordist capitalism and that immaterial labor itself is now taken by some to be the paradigmatic form of labor in post-Fordist capitalism (even for those whose labor seems to remain stubbornly material). It is in this context that the final destination of this chapter—a consideration of the role of conversation, or “idle chatter” in Nature Theatre of Oklahoma’s 2007 production, No Dice—is intended as itself exemplary of an identifiable tendency for contemporary theatre to explore the conditions of its own production. In No Dice a group of actors reperform telephone conversations about their daily struggles to do the work they need to do in order to get to do the work they are now doing—performing this very play. For example:

ANNE: Uh huh.
   So it’s not that rewarding?
ZACK: No.
ANNE: I just . . .
ZACK: No. It’s not. Not really.
ANNE: Did that first compliment make you feel like . . .
   “Hm! I’m good at something!”
ZACK: Yeah!
ANNE: Yeah?
ZACK: Yeah. I finally—
   I finally felt like I could really do something.
ANNE: Uh huh. Did it . . . for a while . . . trick you into thinking:
   “Hm! This might not be all that bad after all!”
ZACK: Yeah, like—
   if I—if I did this forever . . .
ANNE: Uh hum.
ZACK: . . . and uh . . .
   I—I think I’d go a little crazy.³

FROM MAY ’68 TO POST-FORDIST PRECARITY

The year of the telephone market research surveys was 1988, twenty years after May ’68, and the occasion for much retrospective analysis of the events in Paris twenty years earlier, analysis that, as we shall shortly see,
had perhaps more to say about the circumstances of 1988 than it did about the historical events of 1968 and their significance. As Kristin Ross shows, by 1988 a fairly solid consensus had taken shape around what significance was to be attributed to what happened twenty years ago. To be recuperated from ‘68 were precisely those values most readily associated with the now dominant ideology of the 1980s—the neoliberalism championed by the governments led by Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in the United Kingdom and adopted somewhat more shamefacedly in France under Mitterand—the values of the autonomous, self-reliant individual, or the “entrepreneur of himself,”4 happy to live in a world where “there is no such thing as society.”5 Some of the most powerful intellectual voices of this recuperation were former gauchistes now reinvented as media-friendly nouveaux philosophes: André Glucksmann, Bernard Henri-Lévy, Jean-Marie Benoist. They offered (and the French media eagerly consumed), writes Ross, an image of May as the point of origin of a purely spiritual or “cultural” revolution—a “cultural revolution” very distant from the Cultural Revolution in China that had once filled their thoughts.6

The “spiritual” content of this revolution was the liberation of the individual from the previously stultifying effects of Gaullist state conservatism on the one hand and the class politics of the socialist left on the other. This analysis depended upon emphasizing certain (television-friendly) aspects of May ‘68—young people, charismatic leaders, the idea of a “generation” in spontaneous revolt against an uncomprehending establishment—at the expense of others—rank-and-file militants from the working class, the general strike, political mobilizations away from the glamorous and symbolically charged locations of central Paris. In effect this constituted a refusal to engage with the more explicitly political dimensions of May ‘68, in favor of a sociological perspective in which participants were understood as motivated by psycho-social factors (generational rivalry, etc.), rather than acting with political intentions (we might note the influence of analyses such as that of Alain Touraine on this perspective).7 Ross further demonstrates how the consensus was shaped by a presentation of recent French history in which present conditions effectively predicted the past:

May now had to be proleptically fashioned into the harbinger of the 1980s—a present characterized by the return of the “individual,” the triumph of market democracies, and an attendant logic linking democracy necessarily to the market, and the defense of human rights.8
Ross notes that Regis Debray had already, ten years earlier, written of how “the ruse of capital uses the aspirations and logics of militants against themselves, producing the exact result unwanted by the actors: opening up France to the American way and American-style consumption habits.” This logic lent itself readily to the political volte-face performed by the former leftists: in effect their position was to claim that what they had got (in the form of neoliberalism) was what they had wanted all along, even if, back then, they hadn’t known that they wanted it.

Written at around the same time as Ross’s book, and, like hers, clearly influenced by the events of 1995, in which a major social movement and a general strike against Alain Juppé’s program of economic “reforms” returned protest to the streets of France, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s influential and much debated book *The New Spirit of Capitalism* represents a substantial new contribution to the discussion of the meaning of ’68. It is of particular relevance to the present work because of the way it seeks to understand the relationships between work in general and cultural production in particular within the framework of post-Fordism. Originally published in France in 1999, and translated into English for publication in 2002, this work adds little to the chorus celebrating the triumph of the “spiritual” or “cultural” revolution of ’68, adopting instead a critical perspective on the historical elision in which today’s neoliberal capitalism constitutes the legacy of the revolt. As we shall see, Boltanski and Chiapello’s analysis does depend, to some extent, upon precisely this historical elision, even if it takes a far dimmer view of its neoliberal destiny than that espoused by the *nouveaux philosophes*.

In Boltanski and Chiapello’s analysis of France after 1968 the development of the post-Fordist economy in which we now live and work emerged as a response, on the part of capital, to the challenge of ’68. They track the emergence of this response through a survey of business and management theory and related literature through the 1970s and ’80s, identifying the rise to hegemony of contemporary management theory, which they call “neo-management.” They argue that “neo-management aims to respond to demands for authenticity and freedom which have historically been articulated in interrelated fashion, by what we have called the ‘artistic critique,’” and they cheekily supplement this argument with a lengthy footnote that shows the rhetorical similarities between contemporary management theory truisms and the personal and social values promoted by the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem in *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. In this respect, Boltanski and Chiapello appear to reiterate the “ruse of capital” theory of May ’68, which Ross finds in Regis
Debray’s tenth-anniversary reflections, and in emphasizing the importance of the “artistic critique,” they could also be said to be part of the consensus Ross critiques, in which the real struggle of May ’68 was “cultural” or “spiritual,” rather than social or political. More than simply noting these surprising yet somehow predictable continuities between tendencies in ’68 thought and the texts of neo-management, they locate their cause in the transition of an influential generation of bourgeois intellectuals from soixante-huitard activists to 1980s management consultants:

In their formative years the new consultants, who in particular established local discussion mechanisms in the second half of the 1980s, had often participated very actively in the effervescence that followed May ’68. [...] They had become experts in the Foucauldian critique of power, the denunciation of union usurpation and the rejection of authoritarianism in all its forms. [...] They specialized in humanist exaltation of the extraordinary potential secreted in each person [...] in the supreme value of direct encounters, personal relations, particular exchanges; and in the proselytizing adoption of an attitude of openness, optimism and confidence.13

Thus, argue Boltanski and Chiapello, the values of ’68 are carried from the streets into the new capitalist workplace, and the artistic critique is effectively answered: oppressive and hierarchical modes of work give way to teams and networks of professional partners; spontaneity and creativity become prized assets for corporations; work within capitalist production succeeds in satisfying the deep human needs that the revolt of ’68 sought to articulate. Thus I come to love my job.

But this comes at a price, and this is where Boltanski and Chiapello’s account starts to diverge from that presented by the cheerleaders of French neoliberalism. Where the old form of capitalist production—what Boltanski and Chiapello call Taylorized work or Fordism—commanded and compelled the worker’s body (and sometimes her mind) for the duration of the work shift, the new form subtly seduces but nonetheless compels the body and the mind of the worker in his or her every waking moment. If work is the sphere of creativity, what is left to the sphere of recreation, if not to dream solutions to the problems of work? Or, as Boltanski and Chiappello put it more sociologically:

The Taylorization of work does indeed consist in treating human beings like machines. But precisely because they pertain to an auto-
mation of human beings, the rudimentary character of the methods
ey employed does not allow for the more human properties of human
beings [. . .] to be placed directly at the service of the pursuit of
profit. Conversely, the new mechanisms, which demand greater
commitment and rely on a more sophisticated ergonomics [. . .]
precisely because they are more human in a way, also penetrate
more deeply into people’s inner selves—people are expected to
“give” themselves to their work—and facilitate an instrumentali-
ation of human beings in their most specifically human dimensions.\textsuperscript{14}

The “artistic critique” of capitalism has been successfully answered, then,
but in a manner that might remind us to beware what we wish for. How-
ever, it has a partner in anti-capitalist thought, which Boltanski and Chiap-
pello call “the social critique,” which “seeks above all to solve the prob-
lem of inequalities and poverty by breaking up the operation of individual
interests.”\textsuperscript{15} Both were strongly present, they affirm, in the events of ’68,
when the “social critique” bore its familiar “Marxist stamp,”\textsuperscript{16} but more
recently, they write, referring to their book’s genesis in 1995, “social cri-
tique has not seemed so helpless for a century as it has been for the last
fifteen years.”\textsuperscript{17} Far from being answered, this critique has not even been
fully articulated, and for Boltanski and Chiapello, as “sociologists,” this
commands attention, especially if, as we may suspect, the answer to the
artistic critique has exacerbated the inequalities that the social critique
seeks to contest: the freedom and creativity secured for some has been at
the expense of others condemned to low pay, intensified and accelerating
precarity, or long-term unemployment.

Boltanski and Chiapello’s thesis of the two critiques is itself subject to
a critique that returns us to the Rancièrian perspective articulated by
Ross, in which the distinction between the social and the artistic critiques
is seen as a production of bourgeois sociology that serves to obscure an
underlying political continuity. As we have seen, Rancière suggests that
the worker who aspires to participate in the artistic and intellectual ac-
tivities usually assumed to be the preserve of the bourgeoisie poses per-
haps a more fundamental challenge to the security of the bourgeois order
than those who sing revolutionary songs and thus confirm their position.
The unprecedented, even if not ultimately complete, let alone victorious,
alliance between students and workers in May ’68 revealed, as the anal-
ysis developed in \textit{Révoltes logiques} suggests, a potential underlying class
solidarity across sociological categories (students and workers) in a situa-
tion where the subsumption of the university under neocapitalism was
PASSIONATE AMATEURS

creating conditions in which young would-be professionals from the bourgeoisie could start to recognize themselves as workers. Alberto Toscano, in a review essay that considers both Ross’s book and Boltanski and Chiapello’s, suggests as much in arguing that

to distinguish between social equality and cultural liberation is already to betray the paradoxical power of ’68 as the attempt to abolish the functional distinction between these two facets of emancipation (and to preempt, one could argue, the recuperative attempts to play them off against one another). 18

Sociological or market research approaches to the condition of the “cultural” or “artistic” worker might continue to insist that the “phone room worker” and the “actor,” for example, constituted two separate identities, defined by their categories for distinction. A more political analysis would be able to understand how these two people (or statistical units) might be able to inhabit the same body. They do so as workers who sell their labor power, quantified in terms of time, to capital. This is true whether they are employed as actors or as telephone market research interviewers.

Maurizio Lazzarato presents a rather more polemical version of the same objection, informed by the emergence of “intermittent” theatre workers as a key element in the growing European anti-precarity movement:

Les malheurs de la critique de la « critique artiste » conduite par Boltanski et Chiapello sont nombreux, mais le plus grand qui lui soit arrivé, est précisément le mouvement de résistance des « artistes » et des « techniciens » du spectacle et la naissance de la Coordination des intermittents et précaires, dont elle constitue l’expression la plus aboutie.

Les six mots de l’un des slogans du mouvement des intermittents (« Pas de culture sans droits sociaux ») suffisent à faire vaciller toute la construction théorique de Boltanski et Chiapello et à faire ressortir les limites de leur analyse du capitalisme contemporain. Traduit dans leur langage, le slogan « Pas de culture sans droits sociaux » devient en effet « Pas de liberté, d’autonomie, d’authenticité, sans solidarité, égalité, sécurité ». Ce que Boltanski et Chiapello considèrent comme potentiellement « aristo-libéral », comme incompatible avec la justice sociale, devient un terrain de lutte: le seul,
Lazzarato, as we have seen, is the theorist of “immaterial labor” to whom Hardt and Negri direct the readers of *Empire* for a full definition of the concept. Toward the end of the previous chapter I promised that this one would consider the predicament of the passionate amateur of the early twenty-first century in terms of “immaterial labor,” and so, before turning to a sustained engagement with the passionate amateurs of the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma’s *No Dice*, I will conclude this discussion of the post-Fordist aftermath of ’68 with an attempt to explain how the work of Lazzarato, and that of Paolo Virno, might illuminate the conditions in which *No Dice* was produced and of which it speaks.

Two ideas articulated in Lazzarato’s “Immaterial Labor” essay are of particular relevance here. The first is that “immaterial labor” names all labor in post-Fordism, effectively eradicating distinctions between manual and intellectual labor. The second is that the communication now required of all labor is a manifestation of a “mass intellectuality” that poses a political challenge to the owners of capital. This second idea is a variant of one of the core claims of autonomist Marxism more generally, that the political action of workers is autonomous in the sense that it is not merely a response to the demands of capitalism. From this perspective, therefore, what Lazzarato sometimes calls the “great transformation” in capitalism since the early 1970s—the shift to post-Fordism—is a response on the part of capital to the revolt against work mounted in the late 1960s.

Lazzarato articulates the first of these ideas as follows:

The concept of immaterial labor refers to *two different aspects* of labor. On the one hand, as regards the “informational content” of the commodity, it refers directly to the changes taking place in workers’ labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the “cultural content” of the commodity, immaterial labor involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as “work”—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion. Once the privileged domain of the bourgeoisie and its children,
these activities have since the end of the 1970s become the domain of what we have come to define as “mass intellectuality.”

Crucially, if a little confusingly, the concept of immaterial labor should not be understood as marking a distinction between material and immaterial labor. The point is rather to understand that the field of immaterial labor itself is highly differentiated and that it may include workers in all kinds of employment, across all sectors of the economy, from the car factory to the fast-food restaurant, the university classroom and the theatrical stage. It is also to recognize as “work” all kinds of activities that are normally not understood as such, which might for our purposes here be considered to include the production of “amateur” theatre, as well as all acts of spectatorial consumption. Paolo Virno describes this reconstitution of the relation between “labor and non-labor” (or “work” and “life,” as it is so often figured in mainstream discourse) in terms of a new distinction in a post-Fordist economy between “remunerated life and non-remunerated life.” He also suggests that this state of affairs amounts to an effective repudiation of the “proletarianization thesis,” in which all labor, including the intellectual labor normally performed by the bourgeoisie (such as teaching in a university or working in the theatre), has been reduced to the form and status of manual labor and its workers socially declassed as a consequence. For Virno, whose account of “mass intellectuality” tends above all to emphasize “the generic linguistic-cognitive faculties of the human animal,” the reverse is in fact the case in post-Fordism, when Marx’s distinction between “complex” and “simple” labor comes undone:

I hold that the intellectuality of the masses [ . . . ] in its totality is “complex” labor—but, note carefully, “complex” labor that is not reducible to “simple labor.” [ . . . ] To say that all post-Ford era labor is complex labor, irreducible to simple labor, means also to confirm that the “theory of proletarianization” is completely out of the mix. This theory had its peak of honor in signaling the potential compatibility of intellectual to manual labor. [ . . . ] The theory of proletarianization fails when intellectual (or complex) labor cannot be equated with a network of specialized knowledge, but becomes one with the use of the generic linguistic-cognitive faculties of the human animal.

Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, in their review of recent theorizations of immaterial labor, affect, and precarity, point out that, while differenti-
ated, this subsumption of all labor in post-Fordism under the heading of “immaterial labor” still risks obscuring precisely those distinctions between workers that might constitute profound differences in political interests:

While it might be true that most work today is in some sense impacted by information and communications, the grandiosity of such a claim obscures profound differences between different groups of workers—between, for example, the fast food operative with a digital headset or electronic till in their minimum wage McJob, and the highly educated, well-paid cultural analyst.23

On the other hand it also provides at least a theoretical basis for the formation of the kind of “cross-class coalitions” that Andrew Ross identifies has having been produced, in the flesh, by the anti-precarity movement.24 The emergence of such new formations is precisely the point of the second of Lazzarato’s key claims that bears upon this discussion. That is that as capital comes to depend upon the “mass intellectuality” of its workforce, it becomes politically vulnerable to the powers of reciprocal communication and self-organization that it needs its workers to exercise:

Work can thus be defined as the capacity to activate and manage productive cooperation. In this phase, workers are expected to become “active subjects” in the coordination of the various functions of production, instead of being subjected to it as simple command. We arrive at a point where a collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity, because it is no longer a matter of finding different ways of composing or organizing already existing job functions, but of looking for new ones.25

Workers who are “active subjects” involved in “collective learning” and “composing and organizing” in the workplace pose a potential threat to their employers because in acting upon their own autonomy they may come to insist upon and be able to force some reorganization of the terms on which they are employed, even when employers would wish to resist any such move:

Employers are extremely worried by the double problem this creates: on one hand, they are forced to recognize the autonomy and freedom of labor as the only possible form of cooperation in production, but on the other hand, at the same time, they are obliged
(a life-and-death necessity for the capitalist) not to “redistribute” the power that the new quality of labor and its organization imply.

For Virno this means that labor itself becomes the site of political action, thus collapsing the distinction established by Hannah Arendt, upon whose thought Virno explicitly draws, between labor and work, on the one hand, and action (including, as we have seen in chap. 4, speech), on the other:

My reasoning is opposite and symmetrical with respect to that of Arendt. I maintain that it is in the world of contemporary labor that we find the “being in the presence of others,” the relationship with the presence of others, the beginning of new processes, and the constitutive familiarity with contingency, the unforeseen and the possible. I maintain that post-Fordist labor, the productive labor of surplus, subordinate labor, brings into play the talents and the qualifications which, according to a secular tradition, had more to do with political action.26

In the second half of this chapter the aim will be to explore what kind of communicative labor might constitute a mode of political action in the theatre. The crucial word here may be in. Just as the logic of Virno’s argument might be that we should not be looking for political action outside the workplace, we might hold on to the possibility that the political action of the theatre will take place in the theatre, rather than seeking to extend itself into any other part of the so-called real world. This is to insist, once again, that the theatre does not stand to one side of the “real” world or offer an alternative to it: the theatre is a real place, where real people go to work, and where their work takes the form of “conversation.”

NO DICE: “WE WANT TO ENJOY OURSELVES IN SOCIETY, RIGHT?”

The show is about four hours long, perhaps a little less. As the audience enters the theatre, the show’s codirectors, Kelly Copper and Pavol Liška, prepare and distribute to everyone sandwiches (a choice of peanut butter and jelly or ham and cheese) along with a soda (a choice of Diet Coke or Dr. Pepper). Thus fortified for the long evening the public is then welcomed from the stage by Copper and Liška, who forewarn them of the
length of the show but promise that there will be an intermission and that they have saved some of the best bits for the second half. In the performance that follows three principal actors (Anne Gridley, Robert M. Johan-
son, and Zachary Oberzan), joined from time to time by Kristin Worrall (who also plays Erik Satie Gnoissiennes on an electronic keyboard that rests on an ironing board) and by the directors, and accompanied on occasions by either Lumberob or Thomas Hummel, performing beatbox, play out scenes in which all the dialogue is fed to them as iPod recordings of telephone conversations that Liška previously conducted with “coconspirators, friends and relations.” Rather than imitate the voices and intona-
tions of the recordings, however, Gridley, Johanson, and Oberzan present the script in assumed accents (French, Irish, Jamaican, and so forth) and with a gestural repertoire that seems to derive from both television melodrama and disco. The scenes consist mainly of conversations about boring clerical work; aspirations to write stories; the actors’ own efforts to sustain an experimental theatre company; other actors they like; other performances (including a “Dinner Theater” event and the New York appearances of the Moscow Cats Theater); and relationships with food, drink, Radio Shack, and Philip Morris. In other words, the subject matter of this performance is the conditions in which it was made.

A sort of pendant to this performance may be found on the company’s website, in the form of a video in which viewers are invited to “see Nature Theatre of Oklahoma get paid after a work-in-progress showing of No Dice. This is the first time we made any money at all.” The video shows Gridley, Johanson, Oberzan, Worrall, and Liška variously rolling around on the floor among dollar bills, performing fragments of musical theatre dance routines with fans of bills, covering one another with bills, and throwing bills in showers over one another, all to a soundtrack of Ginger Rogers singing “We’re In the Money.” Intercut with this material are intertitles with texts adapted from an essay by the artist Mike Kelley that discuss artworks as both commodities and gifts. The end of the video informs viewers: “At the end of the work-in-progress run in July 2006 the box office was split among the performers. Each received $224.10 for over 115 hours of rehearsal. That’s roughly $1.95 per hour.” This is a company that presents itself as being concerned with time and money. Just before the intermission the company discuss and perform a dance routine, which, they speculate, might serve as a commercial for cigarettes, thereby enabling them to “be the first theatre company that has found a way to—that goes CORPORATE!—that has SOLD OUT! . . . We do— ha!—we do our EPIC.” The “EPIC,” we learn, will be eleven hours long
and will require smoke breaks, so this dance-commercial will “be an invitation for an intermission!”33 The published text indicates that during the intermission M&M candy will be sold to “MAKE MONEY FOR THE COMPANY.”34

The video and the show itself foreground in one and the same gesture both a wholly “unprofessional” attitude to the relationship between time and money and a shamelessly “professional” one. A very long show, at least in theory, takes a long time to make and always takes a long time to perform. If the performers calculate their earnings by the hour, even though they are actually not hourly wages but a share of box office, it would make economic sense to make a much shorter show, since there is no indication that ticket prices are calculated in relation to the length of the performance. The audience is theoretically getting a good deal here then, even if, as the comically apologetic “warning” about duration at the beginning suggests, the actual economy of theatre-going works rather differently, and audiences tend to feel that since they are “giving” their time to the performance, it will have to be very good indeed to be worth four hours of it. The sandwiches and soda therefore seem to function as a kind of placatory counter-gift. There is a great deal of calculation devoted here to creating confusions around calculation. In getting more than they normally get (in terms of the calculable quantity of entertainment provided, plus snacks), the audience might be thought to be keeping the performers’ wages unusually low, almost to a point at which the whole transaction seems to be threatening to depart from the logic of exchange and to participate entirely in an economy of the gift.35

But at the same time, by making these calculations visible as they do, the company insist upon their participation in an entirely rational market of commodity exchange, even if their own behavior within it might be experienced and understood as bordering on the irrational. The irony of exposing their own calculations (which may, of course, be entirely fictional, just like the eleven-hour version of the show, whose existence is nonetheless attested to in publicity materials36) is that the acts of calculation are simultaneously “naïve” (because sophisticated calculation would be far more discreet) and “calculated” (in that they are calculations and in that they seem to feign this naïveté). The idea of getting commercial sponsorship from Philip Morris by taking advantage of the fact that cigarette commercials are not, as far as they are aware, banned in the theatre is both devious and hopeless.37 They come across as complete “amateurs” at being “professional” and highly “professional” in their calculating amateurism.
Another consequence of this attention to the economy of theatre production and consumption is that *No Dice* turns out to be a show performed by real people, rather than by actors pretending to be real people. It is not immediately apparent that this is the case, at least not in the way that it is immediately apparent in the work of Rimini Protokoll. This is the collective “label” under which Helgard Haug, Stefan Kaegi, and Daniel Wetzel make a range of work, much of which, since 2000, has involved employing “experts” to make and perform theatrical projects with them. For example, *Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Erster Band* was a theatre piece in which people for whom Marx’s text had played an important part in their lives appeared on stage to talk about it. In *Sabenation: Go Home and Follow the News* former employees of the Belgian state airline, Sabena, which went bust in 2001, devised and performed a piece that presented the stories of their lives as Sabena employees. In this last case the fact of theatre as a workplace was of course heightened by the fact that performing in *Sabenation* had become at least a temporary job for a group of people who had lost previous jobs as a result of Sabena’s collapse. Just as the performers in *Sabenation* and other Rimini Protokoll shows were employed because of their prior expertise—work they had done or experiences they had had outside Rimini Protokoll—the “employees” in *Nature Theatre of Oklahoma’s No Dice* may be understood as being employed because of their expertise in being members of a theatre company that doesn’t pay them enough to live on. That this means that as a result of “being” actors they might be “good” at “acting” may be said to be incidental, particularly in light of a show that has deliberately worked so strongly against the grain of what might normally be thought to constitute “good acting” or acting defined according to “professional” norms (“lines” not being memorized, silly accents, clichéd gestures, incoherent costumes). This is a show about actors as workers, rather than one in which actors, who always are workers (except, of course, when they are amateurs, in which case they are workers elsewhere), pretend that they are anything else. In this respect, whatever its studied amateurism, it is a show about theatre as a professional activity. That is to say that it has questions to ask about what it means for theatre to be so, questions rather like those thrown up by Lacis and Benjamin’s “Program for a Proletarian Children’s Theatre,” about what theatre might be able to do to the organization of the time of work. Perhaps this is why it insists on making an explicit parallel between itself and the “Dinner Theater,” not just because, in a rather modest way, the audience at *No Dice* eats and drinks during the show, but because:
ANNE: We probably won’t get back . . .
        for like . . . four or five hours
BOBBY: Mmm hm.
ANNE: It’ll be, you know—
        the whole evening will be tied up.
BOBBY: Is your husband going?
ANNE: No, no. No. It’s just a girl’s thing.
BOBBY: Mm hm.
ANNE: He’s . . . (breath. carefully)
        Let’s see . . .
        He’s—NOT—particularly—
        a lover of theater.
BOBBY: Mm hm.
ANNE: If he sees theater that
        he . . . (pause)
        stays awake for—
        it’s usually a large—
        musical—Broadway type
        musical.
BOBBY: Mm hm.
ANNE: (pause) Um . . .
BOBBY: (long pause) That’s good.
ANNE: Heh heh heh . . .
BOBBY: That’s good. (big breath)³⁹

That “the whole evening will be tied up” by the experience of theatre, and that the sleep required for the recreation of the worker in time for his morning’s labor might be interrupted by “a large musical,” starts to suggest a reorganization of the time of work inaugurated from within the time of play. Rather than occupying the time left over once work is done, play here threatens to relegate work to a secondary and subsidiary claim upon time. We’ll start working once this is over, or, as one of the mostly young theatre professionals once said, back in 1988, in response to a manager’s sarcastic question about whether he was going to do any work that day or just sit there reading the paper, “I think I’ll just sit here and read the paper, if it’s all the same to you.”

The play—No Dice—proper starts rather as Uncle Vanya leaves off, with an explicit announcement about both the work of making the play and the work within the play. Everyone has their sandwiches and soda, and Pavol and Kelly have made their introductions:
ANNE: (In a French accent) Are you working?
ZACK: (In an Irish accent) Ohhh yeah! Heh heh!  

Zack (Zachary Oberzan) affirms that he is now at work, making the play, while simultaneously reproducing an earlier conversation in which his “Ohhh yeah!” was uttered on the phone, in response to Pavol Liška’s question “Are you working?” posed as part of the process of generating material for use in the play and answered in relation to some other, non- or pretheatrical work. In reproducing the response originally given to Liška’s question, Zack announces that he is working too, or working again, working, presumably, at the sort of job—acting—that the person whose conversation he is imitating is doing their present job (for Walmart) in order to be able to do. That is to say that Zack is talking about and perhaps even doing two jobs at once: the clerical day job in the past and the (all) nighttime acting job in the present. It could even be the case—although there is nothing to suggest that it actually is—that Zack himself was the person Zack is imitating here: he is, after all, one of the nine people whose conversations are credited in the published text. And in both work situations, the project is the organization of the time of work: in the theatrical present, by posing the question of our relationship to the time of play, and in the recorded past of the conversation with Liška, by “coding TARS right now.”

ANNE: Taurus? It’s like—like the car?
ZACK: No. TAR. 
    T—A—R
    Time Adjustment Request Form
ANNE: Oh, okay
    Time Adjustment Request Form
ZACK: Uh-huh,
ANNE: And that’s—? Wha—
    When they’re asking for time off?
    Or when they’re coming in . . .
ZACK: Yeah when they’re asking for—
    or they missed a punch?
    on the clock—?
ANNE: Mm hm.
ZACK: or um (pause)
    if they wanted to go on vacation . . .
This work in the past, then, is a function of the Taylorist micromanagement of employee time, presumably designed to ensure its maximum (rather than optimum\textsuperscript{44}) use by the employer (Walmart) and the regulation by the clock of the distinction between the time of work and the nonwork times of illness or vacation. The work and nonwork time of the theatre, then, by calling into question the very distinctions upon which the work of “coding TARS” depends and to which it contributes, somehow appropriates the time regulation of the workplace for nonproductive and time-costly redeployment in the space and time of play, even as, despite its comic flirtation with excessive duration, \textit{No Dice} itself remains lodged within the temporality governed by the logic of TARs, performed, as it is, after the end of the “normal” working day. Like the end of \textit{Uncle Vanya}, then, the beginning of \textit{No Dice} offers its audience an extended moment in which to consider their own place in the time of theatre and theatre’s place in the time of their own work and leisure: it issues a time adjustment request.

It is a request with at least a hint of redemption to it, as long as our conception of redemption is limited to a sense somewhat closer to that used in relation to life insurance policies than it is to the messianic. What is to be redeemed, in and through the production and performance of \textit{No Dice}, is precisely the (life)time spent on all those other jobs, some of which seem to have involved little more than the passing of time through the mere occupation of space:

\begin{quote}
\textbf{ANNE:} Like—I had to go to . . .
work a little bit today . . .?
\textbf{ZACK:} At the . . . um . . . real estate?
\textbf{ANNE:} Yeah . . . (pause) Yeah!
Like you go sit in people’s apartments, and . . .
um . . . nobody’s there, really . . .
and like nobody hardly ever comes . . .
\textbf{ZACK:} Uh-huh.
\textbf{ANNE:} And then you just . . .
then sometimes they walk in.
\end{quote}
ZACK: Uh-huh. Like it’s—the—apartments are furnished?

ANNE: Yeah! Like uh—I could just go—if you wanted to sell your apartment, like I’d go sit in your apartment . . . and you weren’t there, and—then people would come and look at it. You know . . .? And I’d just let them walk around and look at it.

ZACK: Uh-huh. But I’d have to go out?

ANNE: Yeah. (pause) But it’s—(breath) It’s not a bad way to like make some money ’cause you just sit there . . . you know, you don’t really do anything.45

The time redeemed by its translation to the stage is the time wasted on the way to doing whatever it is you really want to be doing; the time spent sitting in someone else’s apartment, the time spent processing other people’s time adjustment requests or calling them up to talk to them about nonexistent tire replacements or speculative supermarket constructions. Or, in other examples of wasted time redeemed during the course of No Dice, writing the “same story I’ve been writing for about 20–25 years,” performing for web-cams in Times Square, working without pay for “a bunch of magicians,” watching daytime television, doing a voiceover audition, playing a maniac in a Russian TV crime serial, all of which scenarios involve the subjection of one’s own time to the demands of another’s. Nowhere is this more emblematically the case than in the act of substituting for an absent apartment owner. It is this particularly meaningless occupation—more so, even, than playing the role of a maniac—that points most directly to the work of the actor, whose task is also to occupy the space that is someone else for a specified period of time (especially, perhaps, when the task of the actor is, literally, to speak that other person’s words, word for word). When I was much younger I sometimes imagined that the time spent by an actor pretending to be someone else was time they were losing from their own life. I still think that there is some truth in this early theoretical intuition.

All these expenditures of time in their various wastes of shame are redeemed, either by the making of No Dice (and the payment eventually received for those who do so) or by the conversations (themselves part of the making of No Dice) that have lifted these expenditures themselves from the uninterrupted flow of “dead” commodified time.46 The act of redemption is performed in order to cash in this time and its conversations at the
next level: not, of course, in some “free” or uncommodified time, but rather in the commodification-squared temporality of the theatrical, where an additional portion of surplus value is squeezed from the process, as an almost unnoticed by-product of the industries of real estate, magic, advertising, and Russian television. Just as one might seek to cash in one’s own “phone room” labor by repurposing it years later as academic research. The redemption doesn’t return the time wasted, nor does it make anything all right. It merely reappropriates it by “taking the boring part of my life and making it into art.” For as Anne repeats, presumably reperforming Pavol Liška’s side of the conversation with the TAR coder reperformed here by Zack, “Yeah, that’s when you need me to—It’s like my job is now to... (pause) perk people up [ ...] to make your work... productive.” Liška’s affirmation of this goal—presented moments later in even more “redemptive” terminology as “to take the things that make us... (pause) suffer and turn them into something beautiful”—also sounds like the benign flipside (or ironic reappropriation) of contemporary digital capitalism’s project of turning all our “free-time” social relations into productive work. For, as Tiziana Terranova has argued, this “free labour”—from voluntary participation in the development of “open source” software for corporations such as AOL to the minute-by-minute production of data for advertisers involved in participation in social media like Facebook—has become a structural feature of contemporary capitalism, tending, in the gloomiest analyses, to the complete abolition of any work/nonwork distinction. At stake in this state of affairs, then, is the very survival of the amateur; of the subjects who are the focus, for example, of Jacques Rancière’s studies of proletarian leisure, those whom Kristin Ross describes, in the introduction to her English translation of Rancière’s The Ignorant Schoolmaster, as “workers who claimed the right to aesthetic contemplation, the right to dead time—and, above all, the right to think.” The assertion of such rights might be achieved by the act of closing the laptop and going for a walk or, alternatively, by the application of thought to the transformation of this “dead time” into an object for the aesthetic contemplation of others. Something like No Dice, for example.

While these might turn out to be the directions in which an audience might be encouraged to think in its contemplation of No Dice itself, something altogether different seems to be going on within the frame of its nonfictional action. Here words of encouragement tend instead towards the fulfillment of work. Twice during the first half of the show the same passage of conversation is reperformed, in which one speaker expresses his confidence in the other’s capacity to work his or her way out of their slough of despond, offering such words of encouragement as
BOBBY: I—I’m sorry that, um . . . (breath)
    things are not—(pause)
ROSY at—(pause)
    at your workplace.
[ . . . ]
BOBBY: And I feel like there’s a lot of—
    lot of good WORK being
    done . . . and a lot of
    —GOOD ENERGY
[ . . . ]
BOBBY: Yeah. (pause)
    Well—I think—
    I think we’re—we’re workin’—
    our way towards each other.
    So . . .
    Sounds good?
ANNE: Yes.
BOBBY: So let’s get together and eat
    some—
    eat some hot dogs or
    something.
ANNE: Okay.
BOBBY: Okay?
ANNE: Yeah. Yeah.
BOBBY: So hang in there . . . and . . .
    um . . . I’ll call you.\(^{51}\)

In both iterations, the first performed by Bobby and Anne, the second by
Bobby and Zack less than ten minutes later, the “words of encouragement”
are reperformed in such a way as to ironize their apparent authenticity for
comic effect. Or rather, the performance mode through which these words
are made to appear (the accents, gestures, and costumes of risible inauthen-
ticity) automatically consigns them to the category of the cliché and the sec-
ondhand, not least because they are so visibly and audibly and literally sec-
ondhand (like all verbatim theatre, even though so much of it still seems to
insist upon the authenticity of its relation to the horse’s mouth).\(^{52}\) The effect
is that the inauthenticity is ostended, even if it was never, in the first in-
stance, actually intended. The repetition of the same passage so soon after its
first appearance serves to heighten this effect. The idea that one might even-
tually succeed in moving on from all the dead-time nonwork occupation of
space and, with “the beginning of the MILLENIUM,” enter the promised
land of fulfilling and productive achievement is presented here, then, as always already laughable. But not quite, or rather, only by virtue of its having been made “into art”: whoever first spoke these words (as though words could ever be spoken first) presumably intended them sincerely and struggled with the language available for this interpenetration of the personal and the political to find a way of saying something, however dumb, to someone else, someone they cared about. It’s only in the theatrical act of selecting and re-presenting them that these “words of encouragement,” reentering the circulation of always-already-spoken speech from which they were “first” retrieved, or rather, “redeemed,” gather back to themselves the scuffs and tears of the secondhand and inauthentic.

These “words of encouragement” will appear a third time, almost at the very end of the evening, to be redeemed (cashed in) yet again, but with a strikingly different value. Their value here relates, again, to the sequence of events in which they appear. Anne has just offered her rendition of her favorite scene from Jacques Rivette’s film *Céline et Julie vont en bateau,* which she introduces as follows:

**ANNE:** where Jule is pretending to be Celine . . .

*(pause)* and Celine . . .

*(That’s good!)*

Celine performs in a—Uh—

And she’s a magician . . .

*(long pause)*

But she’s . . . currently

OCCUPIED—uh—in a . . .

*(pause)*

. . . so she can’t—go to the . . .

But CELINE—

is auditioning for a tour that’s going to Beirut!

*(pause)*

But Julie . . . takes her place!53

Anne then goes ahead and reperforms a scene from a film in which someone performs as and for someone else, an audition, an attempt to get a job. The scene of this reperformance redoubles the citational character of the performance in which it appears (*No Dice*) while presenting the mechanism of actorly substitution as the means by which theatrical employment itself might be obtained. The possibility of an infinite regress opens up, in which all performance becomes an audition, the
whole of life an attempt to find work, and not even for oneself, but for someone else; as though the actors of the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma were at work in front of an audience now, in their performance of *No Dice*, hoping that one day someone, maybe one of those someones whose conversations they are reperforming here, might finally, in this new “MILLENIUM,” get an actual and proper job, one that would not be some simulacrum of a job, nor a way of getting the job they really want, but would really and truly be the job itself. It is in the aftermath (in which “everyone seems lost and at an end”) of this theatre of endless deferral, conjured up by the citation of Rivette’s three-hour cinematic exploration of theatrical illusion, that the attempt to redeem the “words of encouragement” will be made.

First “KRISTIN, one of the musicians, who has been silent throughout the show, now steps forward and speaks.” She does so without the accoutrements of audio feed, dramatic gesture, or assumed accent, and she speaks directly to the audience, as herself as it were, about what it is that “we” might be looking for here in the theatre: “We don’t want to enjoy ourselves ALONE . . . but we want to enjoy ourselves in SOCIETY, right?” And our way of “enjoying ourselves” is through “our conversations, for instance, here,” which constitute, she suggests, “a form of ENJOYMENT—actually.” As she speaks the other actors on stage—Anne Gridley, Robert Johanson, and Zachary Oberzan—remove their hats and wigs and earpieces and, thus unmasked, make their way to positions in the audience, from which, “in a normal, quiet, reassuring manner,” they speak directly, each to an individual member of the audience, “the words of encouragement”:

WELL, GOOD TO TALK TO YOU! I—I’M SH-SORRY THAT , UM . . . (*BREATHE*) THINGS ARE NOT—(*PAUSE*) ROSY AT— (*PAUSE*) AT YOUR WORKPLACE—BUT I KNOW THAT IF YOU, YOU KNOW, I MEAN . . . I—I THINK IT YOU—if you—you should just go for it—you know? you should just follow that.57

The familiar theatrical trope of removing the mask, accompanied by the meticulous construction of the tone and manner of the utmost sincerity, would seem to hold out the “authenticity” of the communicative act as an object for aesthetic contemplation: look at us doing the “reality effect.” Yet at the same time, having brought into play the possibility that “we” might be here because we want to enjoy ourselves, in society, in conversation,
and having done so after the dejected collapse of Anne’s Rivettean hyper-theatricality, the performance somehow equalifies the seeming authenticity of these “words of encouragement,” redeeming, perhaps, the affective force—the desire for things to be better—that forced them into speech in the “first” place. In this odd and undecideable moment it feels very hard not to accept at face value, whatever the words, this phatic communication of empathy and solidarity and to prefer such acceptance over the risk of feeling like condescending Marxists out to piss on everyone’s chips:

MAYBE FROM THE—YOU—YOU SEE A CLEARER PICTURE, AND—BLEAKER THAN ME—? AND I’M JUST MORE NAÏVE AND—AND (BREATHE)—AND STUPID—? PFFT!—AND—UNINFORMED—?\textsuperscript{58}

The suggestion, then, is not that these words of encouragement will actually make things any better, nor that anyone will get the job itself—let alone that capitalism will be overthrown—but rather that getting together and eating some hot dogs sometime, having a little conversation, for the sake of it, might, for the time being, be a worthwhile way of spending one’s time. Of being, in time, with others, “in SOCIETY.”

The undecideability of this penultimate moment ebbs away in the concluding sequence of the piece, in favor of a more straightforward alignment of language and sentiment, as the audience hears, for the first time, one of the recordings made as part of the preparation for the show. It is a conversation between Pavol Liška and Teresa Gridley (Anne’s mother), in which they discuss, among other things, how well the production of \textit{No Dice} has gone and how Teresa had been deployed within the show as “our secret weapon.” Gradually the recording fades out to leave only the projection of the transcript visible in the dark, as Pavol and Teresa talk about “choreography” and the pleasure Teresa takes from dancing in her wheelchair. The show ends with the lights back up and an “emphatic, energetic dance.”\textsuperscript{59} As an example of Virno’s “being in the presence of others” this is of course, as always in the theatre, vitiated by the fact that some of the people in the room are clearly not involved in the “conversation” or the “dance.” Indeed it is the clear recognition that the terms of participation are differentiated that distinguishes work like this from more utopian attempts to produce “community” in the theatre or to galvanize collective political action outside it.\textsuperscript{60}

This work knows that it is just half of a conversation about conversa-
tion, and one in which it is as important that the conversation is possible as it is that something significant is said. One possible other half of this conversation—offered with some reciprocal signification in mind—might be to propose that No Dice, in both the manner of its making and the communication it seems to end up making, offers something not far from what Virno suggests regarding “idle talk.” Virno’s proposition is that “idle talk”—condemned along with “curiosity” by Heidegger, writes Virno, as “typical manifestations of the “unauthentic life,” which is characterized by a conformist leveling of all feeling and all understanding,” and as opposed to an authentic relation to the world to be found in work—is now to be understood as “the primary subject of the post-Fordist virtuosity discussed in the second day of our seminar,” that is to say, as constituting precisely the talent for political action, derived in Autonomist thought from Marx’s conception of the “general intellect,” and from which work was once said (by Aristotle and Arendt, for example) to disqualify us. Lodged within work itself, then, is something that is both inimical and its precondition: the “idle talk” that is precisely the communicative capacity of the human that makes work today possible and equally precisely that capacity for solidarity and collective action that carries the potential to undo the terms upon which wage labor is established and that Virno calls “the communism of capital.” Taking a cue from the Nature Theatre of Oklahoma’s use of the word “society”—“We want to enjoy ourselves in SOCIETY, right?”—might this communism be understood as a society rather than a community; a changeable association made of multiple conversations, across the intimate distances of the public space, rather than as a community that might close around its participants?