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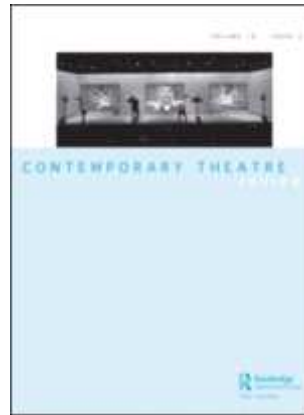
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Gendering Welfare: Acts of Reproductive Labour in Applied Performance Practice

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Gendering Welfare: Acts of Reproductive Labour in Applied Performance Practice

The period between 2010 and 2017 has been a profoundly difficult time for women in relation to work and welfare in the United Kingdom (UK). Female unemployment rose rapidly and failed to recover in line with male unemployment;¹ women, and their position in the labour market, were more widely affected by changes to Lone Parent and Carers benefits;² and poor communication about rises in the female retirement age meant that an estimated 500,000 women have been left unprepared for the delay in when they can afford to stop working.³ Alongside this the Women's Budget Group reported that by 2020 women will have borne 86% of government cuts induced by austerity policies.⁴ In this article, I assert the potential for representations of unemployed women and practices of socially reproductive labour in applied performance to highlight gendered experiences of welfare structures and return notions of the gendered division of labour to the public sphere. This analysis illuminates how applied performance interventions might destabilise rigid distinctions of value attributed to paid and unpaid labour; and further, reconstitute notions of work in socially constructive ways.

It is particularly important to acknowledge the way in which gendered inflections of labour appear in performance given the current prevalence of narratives that express women's growing success in the paid labour market. While

¹ The Fawcett Society, 'The Impact of Austerity on Women', *The Fawcett Society Policy Briefing: March 2012*, March 2012, 7. Available at: <<http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/The-Impact-of-Austerity-on-Women-19th-March-2012.pdf>> [accessed 20 July 2016].

² Women's Budget Group, 'The Impact on Women of the 2016 Budget: Women Paying for the Chancellor's Tax Cuts', *Women's Budget Group*, 2016 <http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/WBG_2016Budget_Response_PDF.pdf> [accessed 20 July 2016].

³ The Fawcett Society, 'The Impact of Austerity on Women', 7.

⁴ Women's Budget Group, 'The Impact on Women of the 2016 Budget', 11.

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10 such gains must be celebrated, this rhetoric of success ignores the persistence of
11 dominant ideas around the gendering of domestic and care labour and fails to
12 acknowledge the continued struggle of underpaid, precaritised, or unemployed
13 women in the UK. As activist collective Feminist Fightback state, 'at the moment it
14 appears that a liberal individualist form of feminism, easily appropriated by and
15 absorbed into capitalism, has won out, leaving the gendered division of labour in the
16 home fundamentally unchallenged within dominant feminist discourses and
17 movements'.⁵ Given the increasingly precarious position of female employment and
18 the occlusion of the unpaid socially reproductive labour that women are involved in
19 it is an important time to consider how representations of work, labour, and
20 unemployment are gendered and examine how such gendered understandings
21 emerge in applied performance practices.

22
23 I will particularly focus on the work of Clean Break Theatre Company, a
24 women-only feminist organization in the UK. Based in North London but working
25 across England, Clean Break was founded in 1979 and works predominantly with
26 women who have experiences of the criminal justice sector and/or secure mental
27 health settings. At the heart of their practice is the objective to share marginalised
28 women's stories and foster the work of female artists. As the company state: '[w]e
29 consistently produce groundbreaking plays dramatising women's experience of, and
30 relationship to, crime and punishment'.⁶ There has been a range of feminist
31 performance scholarship exploring the company's work; however my examination of
32 Clean Break, while recognising their engagement with criminal justice settings as

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53 ⁵ Feminist Fightback, 'Cuts are a Feminist Issue', *Soundings*, 49 (2011), 73-83, 77.

54 ⁶ National Portfolio Application, Clean Break, 2014, unpublished Freedom of Information Request, 3.

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10 central to their company identity, seeks to expand the discussion of their work
11 beyond prison and probation sites.⁷ Therefore, I deprivilege the frames of criminal
12 justice and mental health in this analysis of their work to instead prioritise their
13 representations of poverty and unemployment in a context of austerity. I
14 acknowledge that these different representations and themes of engagement are
15 correlated; it is this correlation that makes the work Clean Break undertake so rich.

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17 I specifically explore *Spent* (February – March 2016), a graduate touring
18 production written by Katherine Chandler and directed by Imogen Ashby. *Spent*
19 follows ‘the story of three women trying to make ends meet and living in a world of
20 easy credit and dangerous debt’.⁸ The play tracks Denise, Nat, and Sam as they
21 attempt to navigate a bewildering world of temporary housing, domestic violence
22 and spiralling bills. All three characters have dependents of a sort – a brother, a
23 partner, a child – and they undertake acts of unpaid care throughout the piece. The
24 cast comprised of Michelle Hamilton, Eleanor Byrne, and Lydia, who are graduates of
25 the Performance Level 2 course Clean Break offer.⁹ As a graduate touring
26 production, *Spent* is part of a model Clean Break have been running since 2012,
27 where graduates from the company’s performance course collaborate with a writer
28 on a short production and an accompanying workshop. Between 2012 and 2016 the
29 company toured 7 graduate productions to 26 venues reaching 3,935 people,
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48 ⁷ See: Alywyn Walsh, ‘Staging Women in Prisons: Clean Break Theatre Company’s Dramaturgy of the
49 Cage’, *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 12.3 (2016), 309-26; and ‘(En)gendering
50 Habitus: Women, Prison, Resistance’, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 24.1 (2014), 40–52; and
51 Caoimhe McAvinchey, *Clean Break* (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

52 ⁷ Clean Break, ‘About *Spent*’, *Clean Break* <<http://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/productions/spent>>
53 [accessed 15 June 2016].

54 ⁸ Clean Break, ‘About *Spent*’, *Clean Break* <<http://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/productions/spent>>
55 [accessed 15 June 2016].

56 ⁹ Lydia chose not to be credited under her full name and so I am not reproducing it here.

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10 predominantly from non-traditional theatre audiences.¹⁰ *Spent* toured England and
11 was performed at a number of universities and conferences during 2016. It was
12 aimed at service providers and support services working in areas addressing issues
13 raised in the play and included a workshop that offered an opportunity to further
14 explore the experiences of the characters. Through an analysis of representations of
15 unemployed women in *Spent*, alongside an exploration of the Clean Break's
16 organisational structures, and an examination practice of remuneration of
17 participant-performers this article argues for the potential of applied practice to
18 perform the value of reproductive labour while concurrently noting the socio-ethical
19 complexity of championing reproduction when it is economically and socially
20 undermined in a the wage-labour market of contemporary global capitalism.

21
22 I begin by outlining how the contemporary UK welfare system continues to
23 gender citizens, arguing that this state apparatus inflects our understanding of
24 gendered divisions of labour. Following this I consider how applied performance,
25 and specifically Clean Break's *Spent*, can be understood as socially reproductive and
26 how articulating the practice in this way positions it as radical in its resistance to
27 distinctions of labour. Following this, I utilise Silvia Federici's work to contextualise
28 Clean Break's representation of women's unemployment as indicative of a broader
29 understanding of the complexities of female interactions with austerity policies,
30 particularly the privileging of their role in reproductive labour. Finally, attending to
31 an analysis of funding and payment, I consider the economies at play in applied
32 performance, exploring how the work involved in such projects might be constituted

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54 ¹⁰ Clean Break, National Portfolio Application, 3.

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10 as reproductive labour, or more specifically care work, and thus how that might
11 affect the value structures embedded in this form of performance. Examining
12 representations of unemployment and practices of socially reproductive labour
13 reveals applied performance's capacity to both perform acts of care and, as a
14 discipline, embody a care-full practice that unsettles traditional forms of value and
15 responsibility but also locates applied performance itself as a precariously placed
16 practice.
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25 **Gendering Welfare**

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27 There is a substantial amount of feminist literature which investigates the
28 implications of the welfare system as a gendering structure.¹¹ However, political
29 science scholar Diane Sainsbury notes the lack of intersection between mainstream
30 sociological analysis of welfare regimes and feminist scholarship: '[t]he units of
31 analysis in the mainstream literature have been the individual or various collectives
32 – classes, occupational groups, generations or households. Seldom have these
33 gender-neutral units been broken down by sex'.¹² Over twenty years on from
34 Sainsbury's statement, The Women's Budget Group highlight the persistent lack of
35 attention to the gendered implications of austerity policies: '[t]he distributional
36 analysis produced alongside the 2016 Budget fails to adequately analyse the impact
37 on women and men, either as individuals or across different types of households,
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51 ¹¹ See *Gender and Welfare State Regimes*, ed. by Diane Sainsbury (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); *Gender, Welfare State and the Market: Towards a New Division of Labour*, ed. by Thomas Boje and Arnlaug Leira (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Gillian Pascall, *Gender Equality in the Welfare State?* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2012).

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54 ¹² Diane Sainsbury, *Gendering Welfare States* (London: Sage, 1994), 2.

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10 despite having been shown methods that are straightforward to use'.¹³ As such,
11 successive Coalition and Conservative government policies have failed to adequately
12 address the impact of gender in relation to welfare.
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16 Socialist feminists such as Elizabeth Wilson and Hilary Land identified
17 patriarchal structures of labour as embedded in, if not acutely intensified by, the
18 introduction of welfare policies derived from the 'The Social Insurance and Allied
19 Services Report' (1942),¹⁴ a report credited as foundational the development of the
20 National Insurance Act in 1946, and the establishment of the modern UK welfare
21 State.¹⁵ Problematically, to access unemployment insurance individuals had to pay
22 into the scheme through a tax on their waged work. As such beneficiaries were to be
23 waged workers rather than, as happened with the provision of healthcare, their
24 status as citizens standing as sufficient qualification.¹⁶ Contributions-based social
25 security was therefore entwined with the gendered division of labour and
26 constituted an economic structure that impeded women securing financial
27 independence. In the domestic labour debate Silvia Federici decried the 'patriarchy
28 of the wage'; social feminists critiquing the introduction of welfare reform in 1946
29 may well decry the patriarchy of the benefit payment.
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48 ¹³ Women's Budget Group, 'The Impact on Women of the 2016 Budget', 3.

49 ¹⁴ See: Elizabeth Wilson, *Women and the Welfare State* (London: Tavistock, 1977); and Hilary Land,
50 'The Family Wage', *Feminist Review*, 6 (1980), 55–78.

51 ¹⁵ 'The Social Insurance and Allied Services Report' produced by William Beveridge and now
52 commonly known as the Beveridge report.

53 ¹⁶ For those unable to pay into the contributions system, The National Assistance Act 1948 was
54 introduced to replace the Elizabethan Poor Law 1601. This act sought 'to make further provision for
55 the welfare of disabled, sick, aged and other persons' and provide accommodation and assistance to
56 those that were deemed destitute.

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10 Since 1946 a number of changes to enable equity across genders in their
11 experience of welfare support have be introduced in the UK.¹⁷ However, since 2010
12 welfare reforms and budget cuts, particularly in relation to caring responsibilities,
13 risk a return to the construction of the woman as precariously placed in relation to
14 social security. In 2010, the Coalition government froze increases in Universal Child
15 Benefit until April 2014, inducing a real terms cut of over ten per cent, and in 2013
16 Universal Child Benefit was abolished. The Fawcett Society have stated:

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23 If, as the evidence suggests, second earners – mostly women – are priced
24 out of the labour market by this change alone, placed alongside other
25 reductions to the support available to working families this policy will
26 reinforce the highly regressive breadwinner/homemaker model of family
27 life. Such a move diminishes both women’s economic autonomy and
28 their potential to engage in public life, including in positions of power
29 and influence.¹⁸

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37 This serves to reconstitute women as domestic labourers and, potentially, as
38 dependents. In such political and economic context, what are the stakes of engaging
39 unemployed women in applied performance projects? Further, what is the political
40 efficacy of persistently depicting female subjects engaged in unpaid reproductive
41 labour?
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¹⁷ The Equal Pay Act 1970 legislated for equity between genders in regards to pay and employment conditions. More recently the New Labour government’s introduction of the National Minimum Wage increased maternity rights and Universal Child Benefit. Additionally, European policies around gender equality have been influential in challenging gender disparity in the UK.¹⁷

¹⁸ The Fawcett Society, 30.

Conceptualising Applied Performance as Social Reproduction

Applied performance is often embedded and enmeshed in caring structures, populated by supportive workers who engage in professional or personal acts of care. Beyond the individual or organisational acts of care that occur within applied contexts, the practice itself, and its accompanying economic characteristics, can be conceptualised as a type of social reproduction and a labour of care. This has become increasingly clear given the growing number of arts organisations now tendering for contracts to deliver previously state administered social services. This shift is evident in, for example, Arts Council England's Cultural Commissioning Programme (2013-17), which worked with 350 cultural organisations to promote public service commissioning of creative companies.¹⁹ To be clear, I do not subscribe to the belief that state provision should be replaced by, or in competition for funding with, arts provision. Indeed, the concurrent defunding of public services and the arts represent a dual disinvestment in the social and cultural life of the UK. Instead what this article seeks to illuminate is how arts practices might be understood to be fulfilling a socially reproductive role in a way that is not currently acknowledged within narrow discourses that attest to the utility of the arts practice as an instrument of the state. Rather, I assert the radical potential of social reproduction as a way to challenge the co-option of applied performance into neoliberal agendas of instrumentality in service to the smooth running of capitalism. As such, conceptualising applied performance as care work intersects with Marxist

Commented [SB1]: I have moved this section up higher as suggested in the peer review – I didn't leave the track change in given that the full section has been shifted.

¹⁹ National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 'Cultural Commissioning Programme', *NCVO* <<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/practical-support/information/public-services/cultural-commissioning-programme>>

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10 considerations of labour, responsibility, and value. Does applied performance as a
11 discipline echo or disrupt the value systems attributed to waged labour and
12 unwaged acts of care or reproduction?
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15 James Thompson appeals to practices of care in community performance in
16 his work on the 'aesthetics of care', which he defines as

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21 a set of values realised in a relational process that emphasise engagements
22 between individuals or groups over time. It is one that might consist of
23 small creative encounters or large-scale exhibitions, but it is always one that
24 notices inter-human relations in both the creation and the display of art
25 projects.²⁰
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32 Such a definition aptly describes the nature of Clean Break's work, which cultivates
33 supportive relationships between those involved in a project, while also privileging
34 the importance of caring relationships in their productions. I build on Thompson's
35 work in recognising the affective value of applying frameworks of care to such
36 practices in order to emphasise the 'mutual activities of sharing, support, co-working
37 and relational solidarity within a framework of artistry or creative endeavour'.²¹
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39 Further, given the particular field of performance and austerity, I consider how
40 *economies* of care operate within applied practice.
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47 Clean Break is deeply embedded in the community within which they
48 work; the performance that the company produce as part of the education
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53 ²⁰ Thompson, 437.

54 ²¹ *Ibid.*, 438.
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10 strand of their work will often tour to service users, people who themselves
11 face issues raised by the work. This performance of community back to itself is
12 a practice that has been critically understood as imbued with care and a
13 potential value for that community.²² Alternatively, *Spent* was created and
14 produced in collaboration with participant performers from the community of
15 women at Clean Break but toured instead to service providers; and yet, such
16 practices remain located around a practice of care. The production can be
17 aligned with ethicist Carol Gilligan's definition of caring which 'requires paying
18 attention, seeing, listening and responding with respect. [...] Care is a relational
19 ethic, grounded in a premise of interdependence. But it is not selfless'.²³ By
20 presenting this performance to providers Clean Break sought to invoke
21 relational practices of care through requiring professionals to recognise their
22 position in an interdependent web of care and to witness and respond to the
23 needs of the women. In doing so 'it is not selfless'; the work Clean Break
24 produce is infused with an agenda, above anything else, to fiercely fight for the
25 needs of their participants. In this sense, the work is never altruistic but in fact
26 always seeking something, namely positive change for the women they
27 represent.

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44 In seeking to promote positive change, *Spent* deployed the labour of
45 participant-performers in order to facilitates the training of social and cultural
46 workers. The performance is an enactment of care for the community Clean Break

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52 ²² See, for example, *Performance and Community: Case Studies*, ed. by Caoimhe McAvinchey (London:
53 Bloomsbury, 2013); Helen Nicholson, *Applied Drama The Gift of Theatre* (Basingstoke: Palgrave
54 Macmillan, 2005); Petra Kuppers, *Community Performance: An Introduction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

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²³ Carol Gilligan, *Joining the Resistance* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 23.

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10 seek to support and concurrently at the service of those professional care workers.

11 Thus, the participants undertake a kind of reproductive labour which allows the care
12 worker to improve their own working practice.
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16 This particular tour, we wanted it to be more about service providers,
17 partly because of the script [...]. [W]e just made the decision at the
18 beginning when we were selling it that we wanted it to be for providers
19 rather than users.²⁴
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24 Clean Break producer Emma Waslin identifies that this decision around *Spent*
25 was due to the understanding that in this instance, these three interwoven
26 stories of domestic abuse, debt, and homelessness enact a more valuable
27 function when shared with service providers. This was further confirmed by
28 Anna Herrman, Executive Director of Clean Break, who explained that the
29 decision to tour the work to service providers was led by the desire to bring
30 about change in the system and the practice of professionals.²⁵ The company
31 thus sought to engender a deeper understanding of the struggles faced by
32 some women and so cultivate a more caring system and a more informed
33 provision of care from workers who will encounter women in similar positions,
34 in their daily work.
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45 In a description of *Spent* on the CLINKS website the production was
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53 ²⁴ Waslin, unpublished interview.

54 ²⁵ Anna Herrman, email exchange with the author, 15 March 2018.
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10 available as a training package to book for conferences, seminars and
11 staff training [...]. The play is performed by women affected by the
12 Criminal Justice System and focuses on the theme of women, austerity
13 and debt. The package is for frontline staff, managers, volunteers, advice
14 workers, support staff and others who want to improve their practice; it
15 uses the play as a stimulus for discussion and critical reflection, and is
16 designed to help you reflect on and identify successful strategies to
17 support women facing issues of debt and poverty.²⁶

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25 *Spent* was therefore presented as a 'package' for the training of staff working in
26 relevant sectors. Performers are working to provide for the continued professional
27 development of their audience; that is, the aims of the production are to address the
28 situation facing women in austerity and to improve the responses of these service
29 workers' to situations and persons. As such *Spent* contributes to the 'reproduction'
30 of such workers with performers tending to the development, maintaining, and
31 nuancing of the quality of work that the attendees are able to provide. This is in
32 contrast to mainstream theatre, which Nicholas Ridout's identifies in postindustrial
33 modernity as 'one group of people spend their leisure time sitting in the dark to
34 watch others spend their working time under lights pretending to be other
35 people'.²⁷ Alternatively, *Spent* is two groups of people at work, both audience and
36 performers, in the institutional strip lighting of classroom or community hall, and

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50 ²⁶ 'CLINKS MEMBER'S NEWS: using the arts to support women', *Clinks*, 22 January 2016. Available at:
51 <http://www.clinks.org/clinks-light-lunch-issue-422-22nd-january-2016#memnews4> [accessed 20
52 December 2016].

53 ²⁷ Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge
54 University Press, 2006), 6.

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10 although the performers are indeed pretending to be other people there is an
11 overlapping of their experiences and those of the fictional women they represent.
12 Such performances disrupt the parameters of work and leisure, engaging in a kind of
13 reproduction of labour that supports this post-industrial economic cycle, whilst
14 remaining partially removed from it.
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20 Further than reproduction, I propose that this is applied performance as
21 what Joan Tronto might term a kind '[p]olitical "care work"' in that it 'requires that
22 those responsible for the allocation of care responsibilities throughout society are
23 attentive to whether or not those processes of care function'.²⁸ *Spent* thus fosters
24 the 'attentiveness' of those in caring roles and allows them to reflect on how their
25 care is distributed. Recounting a performance with a mental health organisation
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31 Waslin commented,
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33 A lot of people in the audience felt a little bit frustrated because they felt
34 we were saying that their jobs weren't being fulfilled. Because essentially
35 we're saying the solution isn't good enough because there's too many
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The service providers in this situation felt the work criticised their practice, in
actuality it was an attempt to acknowledge larger structural struggles people are

²⁸ Joan Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 55.

²⁹ Waslin, unpublished interview.

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10 dealing with and attempt to collaborate on ways to navigate these difficulties. In this
11 sense I would argue that *Spent*, while it was engaged in a form of reproductive
12 labour that may have the potential to reinforce the continuation of the worker in
13 service to capital, helped to create the space of 'political care work' to which Tronto
14 refers. It enables a reflection on how care is distributed and enacted in society.
15 Further, it demonstrates how applied performance can operate to bring the labour
16 of reproduction out from the private and into the public sphere. This is
17 'reproduction' enacted in a societal forum and so disrupts the occlusion and
18 subsequent devaluation of it as a vital form of labour.
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30 **Performing Unemployed Women's Labour**

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32 The domestic labour debate that emerged in the late 1960s argued that labour
33 practices were complicit in the reproduction of gender difference and subsequent
34 divisions of power. Throughout the 1970s there was a feminist movement instigated
35 by activists and scholars such as Selma James, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Leopoldina
36 Fortunat, all leaders in the Wages for Housework campaign, against the assumed
37 inevitability of unpaid reproductive work and domestic labour.³⁰ The private sphere
38 thus became a contested site of anti-capitalist struggle. My focus here is on the role
39 of the public sphere, in this instance the structures and practices of the welfare
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³⁰ See, Selma James, *Sex, Race and Class, The Perspective of Winning: A Selection of Writings 1952-2011* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012); Mariarosa Dalla Costa, *Family, Welfare, and the State: Between Progressivism and the New Deal* (Edinburgh: Common Notions, [1983] 2015); Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labour and Capital* (Brooklyn: Automeia, 1995).

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10 state, in underpinning such gendered divisions of labour both historically and in the
11 early twenty-first century.

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14 In her demand for the recognition of domestic labour as contributing to the
15 foundation of capitalist production Federici notes 'the reproduction of labour power
16 involves a far broader range of activities than the consumption of commodities,
17 since food must be prepared, clothes have to be washed, bodies have to be stroked
18 and cared for'.³¹ The production of *Spent* in 2016 corresponded with the eighth
19 successive year where foodbank usage rose in the UK; the Trussell Trust announcing
20 in April that during the 2015/2016 financial year it provided 1,109,309 three-day
21 emergency food supplies to people in crisis. In its presentation of the reproductive
22 labour involved in producing and preparing food *Spent* brings into focus feminist
23 critiques of the uncritical 'maintenance' of the (male) labourer posed in Marxist
24 thought.

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27 The character of Denise, who is focused throughout the play on gathering
28 enough money to feed her daughter, exemplifies a widely felt experience of
29 unemployment and austerity in the UK post-2010,
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42 DENISE I've got 75p in my pocket and a list that tells me I need bread,
43 milk, bog roll and bananas.³²
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53 ³¹ Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland:
PM Press, 2012), 96.

54 ³² Katherine Chandler, unpublished *Spent* script, 2016. Kindly provided by Clean Break.
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10 Indicative of the tension between care and austerity, this shopping list is a recurrent
11 motif throughout the play, and turns into a constant calculation, an always
12 impossible sum:
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15
16 DENISE Forty nine pence and the 75p that's in my pocket.
17
18 Bread, milk, bog roll and bananas.
19
20 She's hungry.³³
21
22

23 Denise's character consistently conducts these calculations around this list of
24 essentials and in relation to her daughter whom she is trying to feed. Gradually the
25 list decreases as Denise is forced to do the work of reducing these four essentials to
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29 two:
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31
32 DENISE For a second I think if I stare at it for long enough
33
34 it might double. Like I'm Dynamo or something.
35
36 [...]
37
38 Milk 75p, Bread 55p that's £1.30.
39
40 I look at the money.
41
42 Dynamo.
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44 [...]
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46 No Bananas. Not today I tells her.³⁴
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53 ³³ Ibid.

54 ³⁴ Ibid.

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10 Throughout the play Denise makes these calculations, shifting between what she can
11 afford and what is absolutely necessary for the continued subsistence of both her
12 and her daughter. Karl Marx conceptualises labour power as 'a capacity of a living
13 individual; its production presupposed his existence; and therefore the production
14 of labour is dependent upon the worker's reproduction of himself, upon the
15 worker's maintenance'.³⁵ In her ostensibly non-labouring status Denise struggles to
16 ensure her own and her daughter's reproduction through provision of food and
17 shelter. This character continually tries to establish the value of their lives in a
18 context of austerity in which rhetoric around 'generations of worklessness' serves to
19 render individuals worthless.³⁶ Alongside unsettling notions around value, with her
20 persistence in the reproduction of the non-labourer, the representation of Denise is
21 indicative of feminist critiques of Marxist conceptions of 'reproduction'. As Federici
22 argues, Marx's analysis fails to differentiate between 'commodity production and
23 the reproduction of the workforce', that is, to produce and maintain a workforce
24 they must be fed, washed, cared for, and sheltered.³⁷ Such critiques draw attention
25 to the gendered stratification of labour and gave rise to the domestic labour debate,
26 which I referred to above. Denise's calculation in the play, then, can be read through
27 two subversive frames: initially as the inversion of Marx's cycle of reproduction of
28 the labourer, in her base calculation of benefit payment and food provision we
29 witness the acute struggle involved in reproducing the non-labourer; further, in the

35 Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: Dover Publications, [1908] 2011), 158.

36 Tracy Shildrick, Robert MacDonald, Andy Furlong, Johann Roden, and Robert Crow, 'Are 'Cultures of Worklessness' Passed Down the Generations?' (London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, December 2012).

37 Marx, 92.

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10 performance of this constant calculation we see, even prior to preparation, the
11 labour of obtaining food in a context of austerity. As such *Spent* asserts the
12 reproductive labour of an unemployed woman, perpetually 'working out' these
13 figures.
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18 As devastating austerity measures continue to impact the most vulnerable in
19 our society the apparatus of social reproduction embedded in the State is failing.
20 This is startlingly depicted in *Spent*, particularly in the character of the old woman
21 who physically disintegrates as the play progresses,
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24

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26 NAT The old woman. She's skin and bone. Her ring is loose
27 on her finger like its hula hooping.
28
29 So I takes her some chips.
30
31 But I have to pretend they're for me and I'm full.
32
33 She knows what I'm doing. She tells me she don't eat.
34
35 I tells her she has to eat, there's places she can go to get food,
36
37 I been there myself. I say she'll starve to death.³⁸
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41 The character of Nat bringing food to this old woman is indicative of the informal
42 collective networks of care which are emerging across the UK in an effort to deal
43 with situations of desperate poverty. As I noted above foodbank usage in the UK has
44 risen rapidly over the past eight years, alongside this The Food Foundation reported
45 that in 2014 '5.6% of people aged 15 or over in the UK reported struggling to get
46 enough food to eat and a further 4.5% reported that, at least once, they went a full
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54 ³⁸ Chandler, *Spent*.
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10 day without anything to eat'.³⁹ This figure amounts to 8.4 million people. The
11 character of Nat thus highlights the reality of food poverty in the UK and stands as
12 representative of practices of going without so others can eat. Save the Children
13 have found 61% of parents in poverty have cut back on food, with 26% having
14 skipped meals over the past 12 months, and 12% had cut back on food for
15 themselves so their children have enough to eat.⁴⁰ This moment in *Spent* is therefore
16 a double performance, in both the participant performing the scene but also the
17 character of Nat performing her fullness; this latter layer being resonant with
18 everyday performances orbiting food poverty in the UK. As Tronto notes,

28 By analysing care relationships in society, we are able to cast into stark relief
29 where structures of power and privilege exist in society. Because questions
30 of care are so concrete, an analysis of who cares for whom and what reveals
31 possible inequalities much more clearly than do other forms of analysis.⁴¹
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38 An examination of acts of care exposes the economic, social, cultural disparities
39 embedded in society. As such, the depiction of Nat underscores the inequalities that
40 manifest in food poverty and points to the increasing prevalence of networks of local
41 support offering basic services where the state has retracted provision. As an
42 organisation Clean Break themselves are part of a cycle of food redistribution. They
43 receive free food from Fair Share to provide lunch every day for their participants
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51 ³⁹ Anna Taylor and Rachel Loopstra, 'Too Poor To Eat: Food Insecurity in The UK' (London: The Food
52 Foundation, 2016), 1.

53 ⁴⁰ Graham Whitham, 'Child Poverty in 2012: It Shouldn't Happen Here' (London: Save the Children,
54 2012), 8.

55 ⁴¹ Tronto, 174-5.

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10 onsite. Acknowledging the myriad of ways in which Clean Break represent food
11 poverty and also are part of the system which fights it further highlights the
12 intensifying labour involved in accessing food in 2016.
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15 *Spent* depicts struggles which Federici highlights 'are being fought by women
16 who, against all odds, are reproducing their families regardless of the value the
17 market places on their lives, valourizing their existence, reproducing them for their
18 own sake, even when the capitalists declare their uselessness as labor power'.⁴² In
19 doing so Clean Break are able to call attention to these women and enable a
20 platform for their stories to be shared, recognised, and valued beyond the ideals of
21 the market or the welfare state. Indeed, when held against the homogenising
22 constraints of the historical construction of women in welfare discourse *Spent* offers
23 representations of "deviant women": all unmarried, one a single mother, one an
24 elderly homeless woman and none of them either working or settled in the family
25 model of male breadwinner/female homemaker. Yet, these women are framed
26 positively, depicted toiling to reproduce their families (brothers, partners, children)
27 and mark their value even when others construe them as worthless.
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42 **Economies of Reproduction, Structures of Care**

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45 Further to the dynamics of reproduction inherent in applied performance practice
46 and represented in *Spent*, the position of the performers as technically unwaged
47 further resonates with the reproductive labourer, unacknowledged in their
48 contribution to the cycle of capital. In this instance, the 'unpaid' labour of the
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⁴² Federici, 92-3.
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10 performer participants supports the paid labour of applied performance
11 practitioners and the generation of funding revenue for Clean Break as a company.
12 Exploring the financing of participation and remuneration of labour in order
13 illuminates an ambivalence around the payment of the women as participants in
14 such performance. As participants in an arts project, these performers work outside
15 of waged production, partly due to their position as benefit recipients. Waslin
16 explained the difficulties the company had faced in relation to the payment of
17 graduates for performing. Given that three actors tour the country, performing a
18 maximum of three days per week over a two-month period I asked how they were
19 paid for their work, she responded by outlining the complex position which
20 organisations who work with the unemployed are in,
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32 What's interesting about employment is that to employ people who are on
33 benefits messes up their benefit. [...] because actually to come off
34 benefits to go back on the benefit sometimes means that, because of the
35 system, there might be two months where they don't get any benefit or any
36 bursary or any money and we just can't be the reason why they lose
37 money.⁴³
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45 The structures of welfare support in this context thus prevent the performers from
46 being paid a wage for a short period of time due to the financial implications for
47 their State benefits. In this instance the complexity of explaining the situation of
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54 ⁴³ Emma Waslin, Unpublished interview with the author, London, September 2016.
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10 Clean Break performers to Jobcentre Plus led the company to instead provide
11 payment in bursaries. For the *Spent* tour Clean Break allocated, in addition to travel
12 and subsistence costs, £400 for each performer to support the performers in
13 pursuing their continuing development.⁴⁴ This amount was not given to participants
14 as money, rather one participant received a tablet, another a contribution towards a
15 college course she wanted to undertake.⁴⁵ In having to navigate the benefit system
16 that their performers depend on, Waslin commented, 'we are not the people who
17 go to the offices to talk about the benefit, they have to do that so we're actually
18 giving them more life work to do than actually we need to be'.⁴⁶ Clean Break
19 recognise the time that would need to be expended to explain such a contract to
20 Jobcentre Plus and are aware of the potential threat to performers' income it would
21 present. This example also points to the broader structural issue of compensating
22 part-time and precarious workers. Department for Work and Pensions need to
23 become more responsive to shifting such structures and patterns of work. At
24 present involvement in any paid work will negatively impact your benefit; if that
25 work is over 16 hours you will not be able to claim Jobseekers Allowance.⁴⁷
26 Participation in *Spent* thus may thus have led to payments being stopped and a
27 participant being ineligible to reapply for benefit until after the tour finished.
28 Additionally, this application for benefit could take up to six weeks to process before
29 any funds reach the claimant.

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47 In not being able to pay the women involved in *Spent* Clean Break were

44 Clean Break, *Spent* Budget, unpublished Freedom of Information Request, 2016.

45 Waslin, interview with author.

46 Waslin, interview with author.

47 Department for Work and Pensions, 'Jobseekers Allowance: Eligibility', *gov.uk*
<<https://www.gov.uk/jobseekers-allowance/eligibility>> [accessed 1 November 2018].

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10 required to disguise, or rather remodel, the remuneration that they were able to
11 provide. As Thompson notes, when trying to embed care into community arts
12 practice
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17 Decisions about accessibility [...] are not mundane organisational matters,
18 but crucial ethical propositions. In being taken in reference to the ethics of
19 care, they will imbue the project with an affective sense of the importance of
20 mutual respect and regard.⁴⁸
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27 Such material considerations are crucial to practice that enables participation and
28 supports participants, these concerns are particularly acute with performances that
29 directly engage with unemployment and austerity. Within the confines of an
30 inflexible welfare system and a rigid labour structure, the opaque modes of payment
31 within *Spent* could contribute to a devaluing of the kind of reproductive labour
32 which such applied performance projects engage in. Working with unemployed
33 participants causes concepts of waged and non-waged to collide and blurs
34 distinctions of productivity in a capitalist labour market. As Thompson notes above,
35 there is an ethics entrenched in material and organizational decisions central to
36 projects establishing 'mutual respect and regard'. Similarly, labor theories of value
37 celebrate 'the worth and dignity of waged work', identifying such labour as 'entitled
38 to respect and adequate recompense'.⁴⁹ Both paid work and material decisions in
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52 ⁴⁸ James Thompson, 'Towards an Aesthetics of Care', *RIDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and*
Performance, 24.4: 430-441, 438.

53 ⁴⁹ Gus Tyler in Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and*
Postwork Imaginaries (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).
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10 applied performance are therefore inherently bound up with notions of respect. In
11 offering participants bursaries Clean Break offered a resourceful alternative to a
12 wage that seeks to articulate a respect for the labour of the participant performers
13 involved. Thinking more broadly about applied performance, while the role of waged
14 participation remains ambiguous, I urge practitioners to consider how we can
15 publicly assert the worth of the labour participants engage in and reflect on how
16 notions of respect is entwined with notions of the waged and the non-waged.
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23 Beyond the participants and the creative work that Clean Break are engaged
24 in there is a value placed on care in the structural organisation of the company itself.
25 There is a desire and drive among practitioners to support women's participation
26 and when companies have the capacity and awareness to provide comprehensive
27 provision they allow these women's perspectives to be represented in performance
28 projects. For example, between April 2013 and March 2014 Clean Break spent
29 £37,643 on Student Support.⁵⁰ Clean Break has two student support workers (their
30 salaries are not included in the figure I quoted above) who focus on providing help
31 for participants in a range of different areas. Given the particular remit of Clean
32 Break to work with participants who have encountered the criminal justice and/or
33 mental health system there is a focus within this service on assisting students with
34 issues related to probation and challenging/offending behaviour. However, they
35 attend to a range of issues that affect women more broadly, particularly those
36 relying on the welfare system and clients who may have complex lives. Prior to
37 joining any of the programmes Clean Break offer there is a two-stage assessment
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53 ⁵⁰ Clean Break, 2013-2014 Management Accounts, unpublished Freedom of Information request,
54 2016.

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10 process which instigates the holistic process of care offered by the organisation. In
11 the initial assessment women work with student support to identify their suitability
12 for engaging with the company and inform them of any additional emotional,
13 learning, or medical needs they may have. In the second stage of assessment
14 participants detail: specific issues which they might need help with such as debts,
15 finance, employment issues, mental health; alongside which they set out their
16 reasons for involvement and aspirations such as network, self esteem, confidence,
17 getting qualifications. This process allows the company to offer support towards
18 supporting women with these issues and also enables them to signpost women to
19 further support services. Thus, alongside funding for travel and childcare as a
20 company, then, Clean Break offers a range of support that enables women's
21 involvement. Further, this financed support system is an overt form of economic
22 recognition of women's care work embedded in the practice of Clean Break.
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35 This article explores the specific coupling of artistic delivery and pastoral
36 support that is present in the work of Clean Break; but, I propose that the company
37 are indicative of practice occurring across the field of applied performance. The
38 position of applied practice as embedded in social contexts and/or potentially
39 collaborating with participants who are accessing social provision means that
40 applied performance is regularly bound up with practices of pastoral support and
41 signposting to social provision. In a landscape of retracting public services, it is
42 important to consider how performance practices encounter and support individuals
43 with increasingly complex needs. Included in the Clean Break's strategic aims is to
44 '[p]rovide a comprehensive support service for the women they work with, offering
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10 practical, financial and emotional support, in partnership with specialist
11 organisations'.⁵¹ This demonstrates that the provision of care is a central aim of the
12 organisation, and beyond artistic and educational objectives they signpost
13 participants to link up with other organisations for 'practical, financial and emotional
14 support'.⁵² The company's 2014/15 annual report identifies the expanding need for
15 such support in a context of austerity:
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23 Our Student Support Team has been meeting increased need (particularly in
24 housing, debts and benefits) as a result of austerity, cuts and changes to
25 public and frontline services has been a key focus of the year as well as
26 working in partnership with a range of arts and support agencies which share
27 our aims and a commitment to working with vulnerable women.⁵³
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34 This demonstrates how, beyond such overt instances of arts companies tendering
35 for public service contracts, cultural organisations are filling the gaps of social
36 security provision, facilitating people to access housing, debt, and benefit advice. In
37 a context where women's services are being defunded and deprioritised by the
38 Conservative government, arts organisations like Clean Break are utilising social
39 justice funding to support vulnerable women with housing, debt and benefit
40 assistance. They are also providing a safe, women-only space, in which to facilitate
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51 ⁵¹ Clean Break, Clean Break Programme 2012-15, unpublished Freedom of Information request, 2016,
52 7.

53 ⁵² Clean Break, Annual Report 2014-2015, 10. Available at:
54 <http://beta.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-details/?regid=1017560&subid=0> [accessed 15 June
55 2016].

56 ⁵³ Ibid.

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10 their service users' engagement with other providers who offer specialist assistance
11 in a range of different areas.
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16 **Funding and Value in Applied Performance**

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18 Finally, I want to reflect on how applied performance might share some similarities
19 with the systemic underfunding of care work and consequently make such
20 performance implicitly precarious in the current hostile public funding landscape in
21 the UK. In 2011 the Women's Resource Centre found: '70% of women's
22 organisations felt that being women-only made it more difficult to access funding';
23 '52% of women's organisations have been forced to reduce their service provision';
24 '95% of respondents face funding cuts or a funding crisis in the next year and 25%
25 said that further cuts would result in closure'.⁵⁴ I consider the intersection of applied
26 performance and female-focused/female-led organisations and propose this has the
27 potential to contribute to an underfunding of projects and subsequent scarcity of
28 representations of unemployed women onstage.
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40 In many ways Clean Break has grown significantly over the past five years:
41 fostering partnerships with the RSC, Soho Theatre, and the Donmar Warehouse; and
42 cultivating links with educational institutions such as City & Islington; and over 2015-
43 16 the organisation saw an 18% increase in the number of women they engaged.⁵⁵
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47 This expansion has been underpinned by a strong relationship with Arts Council
48 England, where they hold National Portfolio Organisation status and have been
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53 ⁵⁴ Women's Resource Centre, 'Women-only services: Making the Case' (London: WRC, 2011), 2-3.

54 ⁵⁵ Clean Break, Annual Report 2014-2015.
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10 successful recipients of Catalyst funding.⁵⁶ However, in the 2015-16 financial year
11 Camden Council were no longer able to fund the company; a move indicative of
12 broader cuts to local authority funding of the arts in the UK, which have had a
13 devastating effect on provision, with Arts Council England reporting a 19% cut to arts
14 funding across London boroughs between 2010 and 2015.⁵⁷ In responding to the
15 shift in the funding landscape the organisation is undergoing a period of transition in
16 order to collaboratively determine the kind of work the company undertakes.
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23 Clean Break are indicative of the precarity of applied performance, in this
24 instance projects which particularly attend to the concerns of oppressed women, in
25 current funding contexts. More broadly, ACE announced that between 2011 and
26 2014 they spent £14 million on 'bail out' grants for arts organisations that were in
27 financial crisis.⁵⁸ This was spread across 55 theatres, galleries, music, dance, and
28 literature organisations, few of whom were named due to 'commercial sensitivity'.⁵⁹
29 These organisations had to demonstrate they were at immediate and serious
30 financial risk and that their provision was irreplaceable. Now more than ever we
31 need to acknowledge the value of the work such arts organisations undertake and
32 the projects they produce, even if that value is not recognised by market forces.
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43 Conclusion

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47 ⁵⁶ Other major funders of Clean Break include: Big Lottery, City & Islington, Esmée Fairbairn
48 Foundation, and John Lyons Charity.

49 ⁵⁷ Adrian Harvey, *Funding Arts and Culture in a Time of Austerity* (London: Arts Council England,
50 2016), 9-10. Available at: <[http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-
51 file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20\(Adrian%20Harve
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53 ⁵⁸ 'Troubled Arts Venues get £14m Arts Council Bail-out', *BBC News*, 28 May 2014. Available at:
54 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-27518118>> [accessed 20 March 2017].

55 ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

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10 Reading Clean Break's *Spent* as a critique of the way in which women are positioned
11 by the UK benefit system underscores the potential of applied practice to platform
12 and perform the value of women's reproductive labour. Examining *Spent*'s intended
13 audience of service providers, reveals how performance concerned with social
14 development can itself function as a kind of reproductive labour. Concurrently,
15 analysing representations of unemployed women in *Spent* illuminates the
16 insufficiency of categorisations of employment to recognise women's labour and
17 exposes the ongoing struggle to reproduce lives in a period of austerity. Further, my
18 exploration of organisational structures and economies of applied performance
19 draws parallels between unpaid care labour often associated with women and the
20 caring/care-full work of feminist applied performance practitioners. Finally, the
21 financial investment feminist theatre companies are making to build support
22 systems into their practice that enable women's ongoing participation demonstrates
23 the broader capacity of applied performance practice to create structures of care for
24 participants beyond performance.

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38 This article has sought to make legible the financial precarity and social
39 productivity of both unemployed women's labour and applied performance in order
40 to locate each as valuable and in need of increased support and attention. Feminist
41 Fightback assert that '[a]ny feminist response to the austerity measures and their
42 deeply gendered implications will, however, necessitate a re-focus on the home and
43 the socially reproductive labour that takes place within it'.⁶⁰ In navigating a
44 landscape of austerity, applied performance has the potential to equip participants,
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54 ⁶⁰ Feminist Fightback, 78.
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10 practitioners, and scholars with the tools for this refocusing on importance of social
11 reproduction. Concurrently applied performance is itself a mode of that same
12 reproduction, a practice infused with care and attention for participants often
13 occluded from such relational networks support but also an undervalued aspect of
14 the economic ecology of performance and the society. This demands scholarship
15 attend to the reproductive labour of applied arts practice and positions that practice
16 as well placed to highlight the importance of care work within capitalist modes of
17 exchange.
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