Given that I aim to interrogate how concepts of value can be read through the popular dancing body, in Chapter 5 I seek to construct a theoretical apparatus to illuminate ‘values in motion’. While dance scholarship constantly exposes and references questions of worth in its work, to date there are no sustained studies that seek to theorize the ways in which value operates through dance practice. I therefore turn to specific models of value through which I can develop the notion of ‘embodied value’. Initially, I look to philosophy, economics and sociology to examine how scholars within those disciplines have formulated paradigms of value.

First I consider the question of economic value, through the work of philosopher Karl Marx (1867; ed. 1957). In Chapter 3 I identified how popular dance frequently lends itself to commercial exploitation, making it important to examine how the popular is located within specific contexts of production. Second, I focus on class value, as specifically articulated by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and then reconceived through the work of sociologist Beverley Skeggs (2004). The strength of Bourdieu’s work for this study is that it brings economic capital into dialogue with social and cultural capital, which usefully addresses the multiple value systems and taste cultures that shape popular dance practice. Furthermore, Skegg’s (2004) understanding of class as a form of inscription that exists in relation to other identity positions feeds into my examination of how popular dance articulates values of class, gender, race and nation. Third, I look to the matter of artistic value, primarily through the work of several economists (Abbing, 1996; Klamer, 1996; Van den Braembussche, 1996) who illustrate the close ties between economic and aesthetic value. Overall, I seek to show how these values are not distinct, but constantly set in negotiation with each other. This
allows me to conceive popular dance through a tension between how
the body is constrained by frameworks of value and the extent to which
it reproduces, challenges and destabilizes these interacting systems of
worth.

I then locate three further approaches to value that attempt to
move beyond the limitations of the absolutist and relativist position
through reinstating the question of worth. First I examine English lit-
erature scholar John Frow’s (1995) ‘regimes of value’, which I employ
in Chapter 6 to consider how the neo-burlesque striptease community
articulates its own measures of worth. Second, I summarize economist
Michael Hutter’s (1996) ‘theory of play’, which I draw upon in Chapter 7
to illuminate the contingent and contradictory values that character-
ize the dance practices of punk, metal and ska fans. And third, I look
to anthropologist David Graeber’s (2001) ‘visibility of value’, which I
call upon in Chapter 8 to reflect on the explicit and hidden values of
Sunday Serenade, a British Caribbean dance hall. In conclusion I con-
struct a model of ‘embodied value’; that is, the multiple enunciations of
significance, judgement and worth that come into play within the field
of popular dance.

Economic values

In Chapter 2 I touched briefly on the work of Karl Marx in relation to
questions of culture, ideology and the political economy, but I want to
return to questions of economic value in this chapter, given the propen-
sity of popular dance to attract commercial interest. Economic theories
of value can be traced back to the work of Adam Smith, David Ricardo
and Karl Marx (Fekete, 1987). For the purposes of this chapter, I want
to draw attention to the work of Karl Marx since his economic theory
of value and critique of the capitalist political economy has proved so
influential on the field of cultural studies, which in turn informs the
intellectual focus of this book.1

In Chapter 1 of Capital: Vol. 1 (1867; ed. 1957, p. 7) Marx focuses
on the ‘commodity’, which he describes as ‘an external object, a thing
whose qualities enable it, in one way or another, to satisfy human
wants’. Graeber (2001) explains how the Marxist conception of value
does not conflate its price, that is its monetary worth, with its actual
worth. Instead, an object’s value is dependent on the cost of producing
it, which is tied to the relationship between labour and production costs
(Fekete, 1987). Thus, in Marx’s terms, there is a separation of use-value from
exchange-value with an emphasis on the latter (Fekete, 1987). Marx (1867;