

and life. This is achieved, initially, by way of the absence of any substantial modification to the bottle rack's form, thus thematizing the *experiential* content of both the suspension of the material flow of life and the fluid permeation of artistic and non-artistic activities *within their contradiction*. It is Groys's most valorized art practice – Duchamp's readymade – that potentially disrupts his reflections on art as a mode of the practice of contemporary life.

Hammam Aldouri

Fear of a frozen planet

Peter Fleming, *The Mythology of Work: How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself*, Pluto Press, London, 2015. 224 pp., £60.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 74533 487 5 hb., 978 0 74533 486 8 pb.

Ursula Huws, *Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2014. 208 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.00 pb., 978 1 58367 464 2 hb., 978 1 58367 463 5 pb.

When will work be over? This question, both urgent and plaintive, increasingly imposes itself as any fulfilment of the emancipatory promise of automation is indefinitely deferred and as work intensifies in both quality and quantity. These two books offer complementary interventions into the question of how work persists and how capitalism has survived its most recent secular crisis. The secret of this survival for Fleming is to be found in the successful promulgation of an ideology of work that creates a compulsion to labour that has little to do with economic necessity. For Huws, identifying the central site of confrontation between labour and capital through describing a typology of contemporary forms of labour is the central aim.

At the heart of Fleming's account of the ideology of work is what he terms the “‘I, job’ function”: the transformation of work from something we do into something we are. It is this that takes the stage when work is no longer necessary and working has become little more than a pointless cultural ritual or symbolic gesture aiming to mitigate the experience of abandonment. Such ritualization takes a form analogous to addiction; an internalized coercion, nicely illustrated by Fleming as the overwork-paranoia complex spiralling out from the ideological truth that, although your fears about your colleagues may be simple paranoia, neoliberalism really *does*

hate you, and doesn't care if you know it. Fleming's touchstone here is Deleuze's essay on societies of control, in which biopolitical regulation goes virtual and viral. Whereas in disciplinary regimes of labour the worker moves between defined and regulated times and spaces, now there is, Fleming argues, only the totalized ‘frozen planet of work’ in which the present appears to be permanent and in which every day is a work day. *The Mythology of Work* reads against Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* in this regard to describe a totality now ‘virtual and viral rather than only structural’. If this perhaps suggests an oddly literal reading of Lukács's text, it nonetheless leads Fleming to his central claim that dialectical reason can no longer provide us with a means of escape because the densely complex and unpredictable meshing of labour and capital leaves no discernible outside space, no standpoint beyond this frozen planet from which contradictions may be productively identified and exploited. This totality is of course false, but its falsity cannot be revealed because there is no positive antithetical moment through which the dialectic can progress.

The concept of abandonment is central to Fleming's arguments in this regard. The ‘I, job’ function is premised on the terror of abandonment, generating a compulsive need to work according to an ‘all or nothing’ logic. This logic threatens abandonment as the disciplinary outcome of any momentary infraction of neoliberalism's constant and insatiable demand for presence, attention and contact. In this position, however, workers should conceive themselves not as permanently terrorized by the threat of abandonment, but as always already abandoned. This thesis is advanced in a particularly interesting way in the final two chapters of the book, discussing first the perverse logic of corporate ideology as ‘false truth telling’, and, second, the dialogic culture of neoliberalism that seeks a transformation of the worker into a ‘speaking machine’ ritualistically engaged in speech that is never *to* power, but always already *with* it. In this culture, ‘All is public yet nothing is permissible.’ The corporation's cynical acknowledgement of its own contradictions, aggressions and failures – the general outlook that Fleming calls “‘Fuck you!’ capitalism’ – seems to render dialectical critique, as a mode of dethroning power through the revelation of its constitutive contradictions, obsolete.

The strategies of resistance Fleming considers viable under these conditions include the activation of minor, ‘peasant’ knowledges, histories and discourses, the deployment of humour and cunning,

and above all the act of desertion as a mode directly subversive of neoliberal's desperate need for attention. Such subversion cannot take place in the forms of dialogical engagement that power offers its subject since the *form* of those engagements always supervenes over their content, as demonstrated by the ironic absorption of images of resistance and revolution into corporate discourse. Resistance, if it is possible, cannot take the form of speaking to power, but only of silence and, more crucially, desertion.

In his conclusion, Fleming argues that contemporary emancipatory praxis must be 'inoperative' from the standpoint of capitalist rationality – that is, inscrutable to it – if it is to find some space beyond the totality of work from which to envisage a world beyond work. This, however, raises difficult questions. Fleming's book is clearly trying to engage such a position through its polemical refusal to treat work with anything other than contempt, since to do otherwise would presumably be to engage in precisely the ritualistic yet attentive dialogue through which control insidiously operates. This leads Fleming at points to a somewhat trivializing account of, for instance, work-related and stress-related suicides, which are read as signs of the catastrophic lack of perspective attendant on the unavailability of any 'outside'; an outside from which it would be obvious that 'killing yourself over a trivial thing like work', a 'stupid little office job', seems 'unfathomable'. This is perhaps simply a question of tone, but it may also indicate the difficulties of the kind of intellectual absenteeism Fleming wishes to prescribe; that is, the desertion and silence over the human costs of work that might inevitably be entailed by the 'inoperative' critique he recommends.

Perhaps Fleming is right, and any such intervention would carry us back into the empty, formalized dialogic regime of neoliberal rationality. But Ursula Huws's essay collection is an interesting counter-example to Fleming's polemical disengagement from the specific configurations of work at the present time. Her book gathers together essays published between 2006 and 2013, all of which are engaged with questions of the different forms of labour emerging and being transformed by the dynamics of global industrial restructuring, automation and digitization.

For Huws, the survival of capitalism through its most recent, still ongoing crisis is less a matter of ideological control and more a matter of the perpetuation of one of its fundamental dynamics: the need to continually open new fields of accumulation by bringing more areas of life within its scope, a dynamic Huws examines here in relation to art and culture, public services, and sociality. Each of these topics is the subject of an essay here examining the processes of standardization and routinization essential for new areas of everyday life to be primed for accumulation. While Fleming regards the rise of the 'I, job' function as the paradigm shift in working culture, Huws from another angle argues that occupational identities have declined in significance. Increasingly standardized and interchangeable skills mean that offshoring is a constant threat and a disciplining



mechanism. Workers can no longer depend on their reputation or past successes; they must now begin anew with every contract, entering into the rituals of 'boasting and supplication' that the contractual disaggregation of business activities has normalized.

Against the background of this generalized tendency towards standardization and interchangeability, however, Huws performs a vital differentiation of forms of work that brings into view the central locations of the encounter between capital and labour. Labour and capital are densely enmeshed, but this does not mean no contradiction between them can be identified. Capital may be endlessly mobile, but

labour is not. Virtual and viral activities still occur within, between and against activities that occur in real time and space. In the collection's concluding essay, 'The Underpinnings of Class in the Digital Age', Huws offers a compelling intervention into the conceptual problems entailed by digital labour, digital commodities and the increasing enmeshing of consumption and production in the online context through an investigation of the applicability of the labour theory of value to these cases. Rejecting the notion that everyone who is not part of the capitalist class may be regarded as part of the 'multitude' or the 'precariat', or some other undifferentiated formation, Huws seeks to identify those forms of labour in the digital economy that are directly productive of surplus value for individual capitalists.

For Huws, neoliberalism is by no means a smooth, undifferentiated and seemingly permanent present. This is because the commodity form remains at the heart of her analysis of capitalism. Commodity production continues to be of primary significance because it is the location of direct antagonism between the capitalist employer and the employee dependent on the wage. Labour of this kind – directly productive, paid labour on which the worker is dependent – is defined by Huws as the 'knot' at the heart of capitalist social relations, and is to be distinguished from other forms, including unpaid labour and labour that is productive for capitalism as a whole rather than for individual capitalists (reproductive labour), as well as from forms of profit generation that do not engage labour directly (rent, trade). Huws rejects the assumption that every item which is bought or sold and which can be regarded as a commodity must necessarily be the product of labour, and instead directs attention to the relations of its production. Furthermore, she traces the ways that industrial restructuring motivated by capitalism's need for new fields of accumulation is in fact continually drawing more and more activities into this directly productive category of labour. Far from being an increasingly anomalous form on which wider solidarities cannot be established, this 'knot' of contradictions is the scene of continually proliferating antagonism and hence of politics.

There are plenty of potential ambiguities about this. Fleming, for instance, notes that the selling off of state assets (such as railways and utility companies) now means that some investors in formerly publicly owned enterprises in Britain are not private companies but in fact *state-owned* enterprises based in France and Germany. This makes the firm distinction

Huws draws between productive labour (labour for individual capitalists) and reproductive labour (in which she includes public-sector work) difficult to maintain in an absolute way. Such attempts to differentiate are, however, essential if we are to locate the actual sites of contestation between labour and capital. As Huws's work should remind us, the confrontation of capital and labour may be virtually staged, but its points of contradiction do not vanish in viral networks of control.

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Without force

Charity Scribner, *After the Red Army Faction: Gender, Culture, Militancy*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2014. 312 pp., £34.50 hb., 978 0 23116 864 9.

The Baader–Meinhof terrorist grouping, which existed between 1970 and 1998, but was most active in the 1970s, continues to make its presence felt in German life. Charity Scribner tabulates what she terms 'the cultural remains of a radical intervention'. There are fiction films, documentaries, artworks and entire exhibitions – most notably 'Regarding Terror' at Kunst-Werke Berlin in 2005; musical compositions, plays, dance pieces and books – fictional, factual and factional, endless books, working through this episode of German history, in German, for the most part, and attuned to the political and cultural questions that seems to press in on postwar Germans. These many reflections, absorptions and diagnoses of the armed struggle of the Red Army Faction (RAF), as Scribner puts it, 'have attained an unparalleled degree of density'. Scribner's study adds to this, but, because it is in English, it also acts to communicate some of the debates and some of the ways in which the phenomenon of a small terror cell has become a full-scale cultural phenomenon. She explores a variety of works that allow both the communication of German history and the evaluation of political debates from the perspective of today, under the twin pressures of feminist resurgence and the apparent extension of transnational terrorist activity. At the same time, it is also an exploration of the practice and image of the female militant and what lessons might be gleaned from her fate – specifically the fates of Gudrun Ensslin and Ulrike Meinhof – in an epoch defined by Scribner as 'postmilitant'.