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On Labour & Performance

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Performance Research

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Editorial Statement

Researching performance, anticipating tendencies, mapping practices, documenting processes, stimulating inquiry, performing research. Since 1996 *Performance Research* has set a precedent that has become standard for thematic and cross-disciplinary ways of bringing together the varied materials of artistic and theoretical research in the expanded field of performance. Working closely with designers, artists, academics, theorists, performance practitioners and writers *Performance Research* resists disconnected, disembodied, and disinterested forms of scholarship. We prefer instead the possibilities of imagining the journal as a dynamic space of performance that produces inspiring conversations, unlikely connections, and curious confluences. Our emphasis on contemporary performance arts within changing cultures and technologies is reflected in the interdisciplinary vision and international scope of the journal. *Performance Research* continues to combine writings and works for the page in an interplay of analysis, anecdote, polemic and criticism; interweaving the oblique with the conflicting, the pivotal with the resistant, and the eclectic with the indispensable.

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Labour, Life, Art

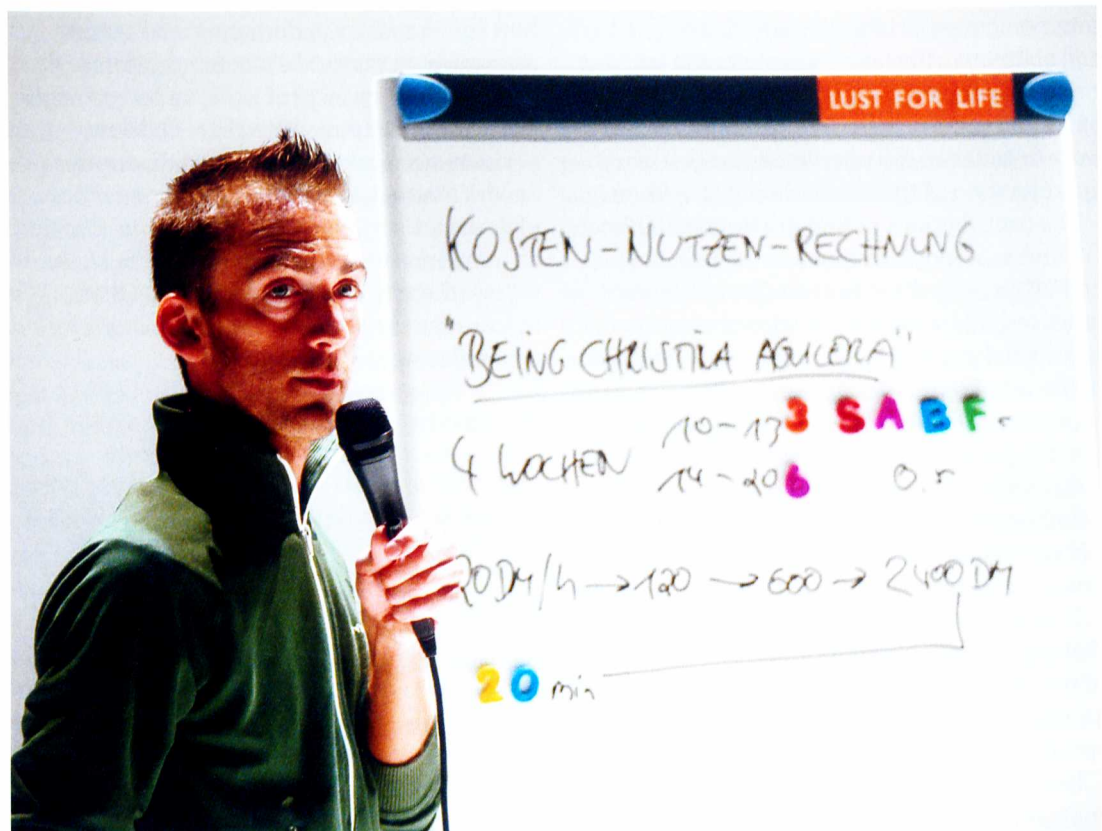
On the social anthropology of labour

GABRIELE KLEIN

Work supposes, engages and situates a living body.
Jacques Derrida

Perform Performing is the name of a trilogy in which the Berlin-based dancer and choreographer Jochen Roller addresses the question, Can dance be described as labour? The central idea: even a performance is nothing more than a commodity. In the first, and indeed (also financially) the most successful part, with the title *No Money, No Love* (premiere in November 2002, Podewil, Berlin), Roller

addresses the relationship between labour and profession. Because of insufficient state funding that might otherwise safeguard his existence as an artist, he is forced to take on various jobs. This labour alone allows him to carry out his profession as a dancer. Roller shows that labour, defined in time intervals, produces distraction. Working hours redefine the concept of labour: working hours represent that which happens during labour – and they can also act as rehearsals for a performance, divorced from the job itself.



■ Jochen Roller with flipchart. From his performance *No Money, No Love* (2002).

Roller uses the piece to address the precarious living conditions of a freelance artist who can only afford to dance thanks to many other jobs: as a t-shirt folder at H&M, as a call-centre agent with German Rail, as an employee of an escort service, as a bike courier, envelope sticker and salesman for abs muscle trainers. Roller calculates for his audience the precise amount of what he has earned from all of the jobs and what his profession, namely the production of dance, costs him; he estimates how many t-shirts he must fold for H&M in order to afford one minute of dance. The stimulus for his dance originates from the work processes of his jobs. He presents to his public the manner in which he rehearses for a dance performance while working: *No Money, No Love* is a performance in which a dancer performs other professions. As Hannah Arendt might say, he dances the relationship between labour and work. In *The Human Condition* Arendt described labour as one of the three fundamental forms of activity that form the *vita activa*. Labour is repetitive, never-ending, thus consumed as soon as it is produced without leaving anything lasting behind. It only comprises activities that are necessary to sustain life, with nothing beyond that. The condition to which labour corresponds is sheer biological life. Work, the second activity, has a beginning and an end. It leaves behind an enduring artifact. The specific human condition to which the activity of work corresponds is the world.

In the second part of the trilogy, *Art Gigolo* (premiere in April 2003, Kampnagel, Hamburg), Roller questions the social relevance of the art of dance, which serves as the justification of state funding of culture. Is art worthwhile? Roller's answer is no. At least not in the sense of economic value realization. He believes that art cannot be economized. The consequence of this realization is the figure of the artist as an 'art gigolo', who perceives the social desire for art not as labour but rather something that is satisfied from a sense of passion. Artistic labour here becomes non-labour. With this artistic figure of the art gigolo, Roller follows the path of historical literary figures who design the

relationship between labour, profession and life by many different means: romantic good-for-nothings such as Oblomov or Bartleby, bohemians like Oscar Wilde or idlers as in the novels of Marcel Proust.

In the third part of the trilogy, *That's the way I like it* (premiere in 2004, Saarbrücken), Roller poses the question of the future of art in neoliberal societies. Which 'technologies of an entrepreneurial self' does the artist need if, on the one hand, he is exposed to the conditions of production in capitalistic markets, but when, on the other hand, the social demand for art is declining? Roller's answer is: The artistic work of the performer itself becomes a work performance in which the production of added value in terms of symbolic capital is decisive for the existence of the artist's subject. The adequate artistic format for this is the lecture performance, which exhibits the process of artistic work, thus legitimizing artistic creation as a process of labour. The artist appears here as a self-creating value chain, encompassing all areas of life and labour.

The trilogy about the question of the anthropology of artistic work, which was developed between 2002 and 2004 and was at the time provocative, was buried rigorously by Roller at an art event – the ideal platform for generating symbolic capital – and that is not all. After performing the piece almost 150 times in twelve countries, thus amassing not only symbolic capital, he put on the piece *No Money, No Love* for the last time at the opening of the International Summer Festival at Hamburg's Kulturfabrik Kampnagel in August 2009 – and thereafter 'minted' it. Roller auctioned off the performance to the guests of honour who were invited to the festival opening in the elegant Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, the economic centre of power in this wealthy Hanseatic city. An ideal environment, therefore, for an auction. An invited auctioneer from Sotheby's calls out around ten items, none of which has any material value. A Hello-Kitty case is auctioned, which had been on stage 147 times and which has, as Roller says, 'a performance history'. This can be bought by auction, says Roller. Also

on offer: an audio recording of the applause and the baggy green Adidas trousers that he wore during the performances (auctioned for €500) and a flipchart with flight case, full of dents from being transported and covered in the stickers of airlines who flew Roller to the various performance venues. 'It looks like a sculpture,' it was said. The license for Roller's one-minute choreography *being christina aguilera* can also be purchased: the highest bidder receives a video recording and a lesson in which Roller teaches the moves. From now on the 'new owner' of the choreography can perform it. The revenue from the auction went to young artists, to enable them to develop a performance for the next Summer Festival. Stipulation: the performance must be able to be described time-effectively in one sentence.

The auction marks the end, the total sell-out of the work of art. At the same time the question arises as to the relationship between the true character and the commodity character, the usage value and the exchange value of a performance. For Roller's performance is primarily about the constitution of the artistic subject in and through the merging of labour, life and art.

Yet the biopolitical interlocking of labour, life and art is not a specific feature of the artistic existence. It is also not solely characteristic of post-Fordist working conditions, as suggested by some texts emulating Hardt, Negri, Virno and other post-Fordist thinkers, who pay little attention to the historical perspective (see Negri

et al. 1998 and Hardt and Negri 2000). Allegories and emblems of labour already appeared as early as in the sixteenth century. The aesthetic debates around 1800 then addressed the connection between art and labour as a biopolitical concept. As demonstrated by Begemann and Wellbery (2002), the aesthetics of genius (e.g., in Herder or Goethe), and the associated idea of the autonomy of the work of art as an alternative to the concept of structured, disciplined labour, can only prevail when it establishes labour as an artistic concept and binds it to biological metaphors.

For this reason, this text takes a historical perspective. It outlines the ideas that connect the concept of labour with the 'humanization of the human'. They are thus joined with those processes of subjectivization of the Modern Age, which understand the socialization of the subject as individualization. They are theories that determine the discourse on labour even in the twenty-first century. This consistency of the discourse on the relationship between labour, life and art seems to contradict the statements that have been announcing the end of labour since the late twentieth century. It also appears to counter those views that consider labour, as a central social structural category of the working community, to have been replaced by communication, the central structural category of the media society. It can be seen, however, that the modern interpretations of labour that have developed since the sixteenth century continue to have social effectiveness, especially in those places concerned with the aesthetics of labour.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY: THE (MALE) BODY OF WORK

As early as the sixteenth century, a time of great upheaval in forms of thinking and living, Thomas More, Francis Bacon and Tommaso Campanella formulated large utopias of social organization against the background of colonial policy, the Reformation and foreign trade. The centralization of the power of space and the view, and the monetization of the exchange of

■ Picture from the film adaptation of 'Oblomov' by Ivan Gontcharov by Nikita Mikhalkov (1980)..



goods, provoked new forms of rule that followed expansive principles. Money, as a medium of exchange, thus received the function of capital. At the same time, labour became a specific category of the organization of the social, which from that point on followed the new principles of productivity, rationality and discipline. In the process, labour was first removed from the context of living and reproduction and granted its own independent organization. Reward for labour changed: no longer was the mere satisfaction of existential living conditions at the forefront but instead – in the course of the Protestant ethic – the inner satisfaction provided by labour itself.

Images of labour in the Renaissance show work above all as physical strength, and only as the strength of the male body. They are an allegory for the concept associating physical labour with male productivity, and that which fantasizes a strong male working body as a symbol of male fertility.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: BECOMING HUMAN THROUGH LABOUR

In the context of early liberal enlightenment thought in Europe from the end of the seventeenth century, a discourse emerged not only concerning the individuality of man but also, in connection with this, about his individual capability to work. The latter is considered to be the characteristic that made humans human in the first place. Accordingly, becoming human no longer represents being free of labour in order to be able to produce culture and serve society, as was the concept in ancient times. Becoming human means, rather, transforming bodily physicality into culture by means of labour and continuing to develop culture ever further through the *techné* of human labour.

The Protestant work ethic became the forerunner for this historical and initially class-specific reinterpretation of the concept of labour. The fact that the ‘citizen’ worked meant that he positioned his concept of living in contradiction to the non-working nobility. It is



■ Stéphane Mallarmé painted by Édouard Manet in 1876.

a bourgeois, male, European and white working ethos, at first fed by religious and then by enlightenment reasoning, which spread globally because of colonialism and later imperialism, thus becoming the basis of global capitalism.

Through labour – as described paradigmatically by John Locke in his theory of work in the seventeenth century – humans can appropriate things and claim ‘natural rights’ to them. In Locke the balance already shifts in the ambiguity with which the concept of labour is imbued: labour means on the one hand annoyance or hardship, as derived from the Bible (i.e., *molestia*, labor) and, on the other hand, the production of work (*opus*, work). Locke moves his attention to the production of work and describes this as a medium of self-production. The subject must therefore produce itself. A subject moves to the fore here as *Homo faber*, who considers human works to have value in themselves. In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt contrasts this figure, which first appeared with Max Scheler in 1928, with the figure of the *Animal laborans*, that human who understands labour purely as a means to safeguard existence and sees goods manufactured by humans as having no inherent value but instead reduces them to their practical utility.

These antipodes in the subject figures of labour provoke historically and systemically a number of other differentiations: between those who work more or less, between physical and intellectual work, between those who produce and those who do not, those who



■ The Tiller Girls.
Photograph, Berlin 1925.
© TheTiller Girls
www.tillergirls.com

are creative and those who are reproductive, between alienated and non-alienated workers or between workers and the lazy or idle. They are expressed semantically in the differentiation between 'work' and 'labour', '*ouvrir*' and '*travailler*', 'idleness' and 'laziness', '*l'oisiveté*' and ' *paresse*', material and immaterial work.

But these distinctions also follow an objective: to conduct a truth/knowledge discourse about successful or unsuccessful subjectivization. It is a discourse that became a social dispositive in the twentieth century. Hannah Arendt claims: 'The modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labour and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a labouring society' (1958: 4).

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: LABOUR AS A CONCEPT OF LIFE

As is well known, the eighteenth century marks the beginning of the Modern Age, with the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and early forms of industrialization. The modern working society, establishing itself in parallel, is based on comprehensive innovations – whether in economic liberalism, the establishment of modern science, the invention of, for example, the steam engine, programmable looms or chronometers, the organization of the division of labour, the assertion of industrial education or knowledge of physiology and medicine. In turn, the concept of labour also changes: it becomes more distinct and is interpreted

dazzlingly. At the same time, work becomes a value in itself and a benchmark of successful life. It is considered both a productive activity and a disciplining category, as an anthropological and also a physical concept and ultimately as the dialectic counterpart to capital.

The figure of the working man is just as dazzling as it is ambiguous: as *Homo faber* he becomes the protagonist in the technical domination of nature; as *Homo oeconomicus* he appears as a self-serving, rationally acting, utility-maximizing agent; as a producer of goods he becomes the object of national economic thought; as a living organism he becomes the focus of biopolitical considerations; as a diligent and self-sufficient being he advances to become the role model for educational programmes; as a productive force his body becomes an object of health policy; as an allegory of proper living he becomes a symbol of totalitarian ruling systems.

A key characteristic of labour is the interminable and boundless nature of industriousness. Admittedly, this does not apply conceptually to directed labour but to creative production.

Even the human body is defined analogously: decoded according to the model of the machine, it is attributed a competence to legitimize itself – like an engine – only in the mode of production and permanent employment.

'The work-centredness of nineteenth-century society,' writes Rabinbach, 'was largely a phenomenon of the work-centredness of the metaphor of the human motor' (1992: 300). This metaphor functions completely via the 'working body' and the 'labour power as the organizing principle of nature and society'.

When even the existence of the living body is seen as labour, and when not only those activities are considered to be work that serve the purpose of labour and production, then labour is bound to life itself. Joseph Vogl concludes from this:

'Since the end of the eighteenth century... labour... has amalgamated with the concept of life itself' (2002: 30)

NINETEENTH CENTURY:
THE BODY WITHOUT FATIGUE

The effect of a connection between labour and life is the idea of a body without fatigue, which developed in the nineteenth century into a physical utopia of the emerging industrial society (see Rabinbach 1992). The labour *force* now became the decisive variable of economic calculation, and with it, mental and physical fatigue became the central objects of scientific research.

Those who do not allow themselves to become involved in this biopolitical concept of the body are interned in the disciplinary institutions described by Foucault, in which the ethics of labour are trained, working moral is taught and the laziness of the body is expunged.

The social concept of the working man is institutionalized socially with this biopolitical strategy. Prisons are work camps: punishment is followed by labour, which serves to form subjects who are willing and able to work, and leads, as is later claimed, to their resocialization. The National Socialist dictatorship and Soviet communism were to perfect this strategy perfidiously in the twentieth century.

Labour thus becomes total. In his habilitation Martin Jörg Schäfer describes convincingly how leisure and idleness lost their intrinsic logic in the course of the nineteenth century and became the negative foil of labour (2013, see also Etzold and Schäfer 2011). The programmes of enlightened education also propagated the expulsion of laziness. Their credo: Prepare for life, and this begins as soon as one starts to work 'independently'.

The totalization of labour as life is also represented in the modern theories of art. The aesthetic theory from the end of the eighteenth century describes artistic productivity as privileged work that is free from external constraints. It is a narrative pattern that defines the specific connection between labour, life and art and which remains current in 'Western' cultures until the beginning of the twenty-first century – as demonstrated by Roller's trilogy. Particularly in its definition as non-labour, or

better labour, art should manage to assume a privileged position and to question the sense and the patterns of social perception of work from the perspective of being freed from labour.

This Enlightenment thus adopts the idea of self-confirmation through labour, which Max Weber already attributed to the Calvinism of the seventeenth century. The enlightened bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century formulated this into a labour and subject culture. From now on the question arises: Cannot man *not* work?

MARX'S ANTHROPOLOGY OF LABOUR

The self-creation of man through labour finds its most prominent expression in the nineteenth century in the texts of the young Marx. While his concept of labour relates to the collective, he addresses the term as an anthropological category. Labour means initially physical exertion; the term mixes with the *topos* of the self-creation of man through work and with metaphors of reproduction and creation. Labour becomes a medium, which creates humans as humans. Thus the worker creates not only goods with his labour but it is also a reciprocal process: the work itself creates

■ Still from the 1895 film
by the brothers Lumière: *La
Sortie des Ouvriers de L'Usine
Lumière à Lyon.*



the worker. Labour becomes a basic condition of being human and the basis for every form of human productivity. In the practice of work, labour is confirmed as labour, as is the humanity of the working human. He is then empowered to be his own ruler.

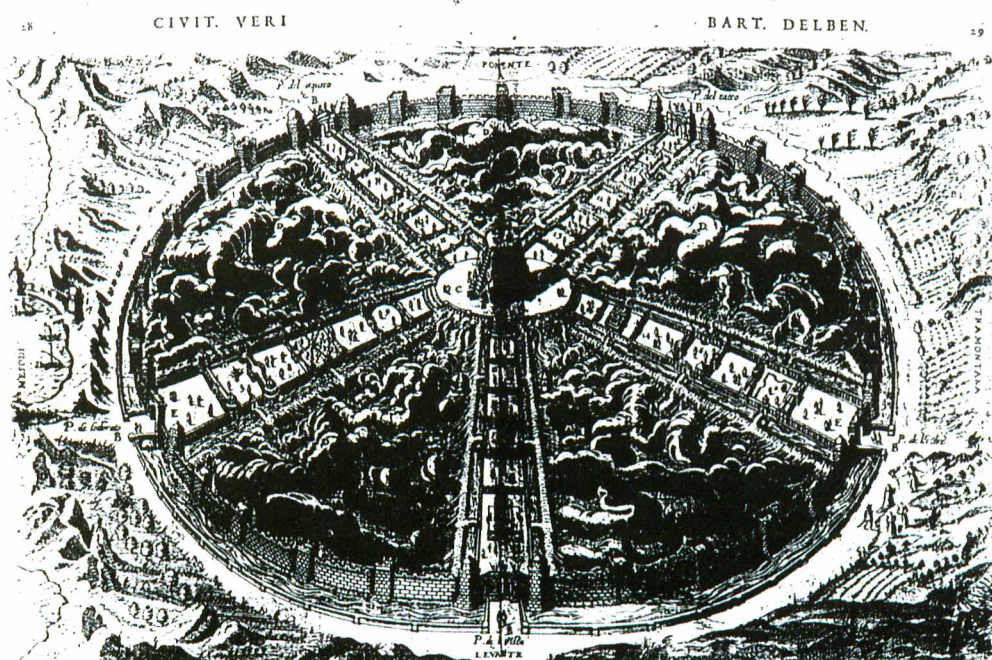
Marx's concept of labour, derived from German Idealism, displays a proximity to the aesthetic concepts of the late eighteenth century. Here, too, patterns of inclusion and exclusion can be found in the form of the demarcation of the aesthetic and of art, of the work of art and of artistic production in contrast to other means of production. We see here: the peculiarity of work and working is constituted not only in relation to alterities. Werner Hamacher sees this as the 'minimum structure of labour' when he writes that work is characterized by the fact that it is 'oriented towards something that it can never itself become' (2002: 155–200).

SUBJECT FIGURES OF MODERNITY: WORKERS AND ACTORS/PERFORMERS

It is perhaps not surprising that the subject figures of Modernity find characteristic form in the figures of the worker and of the actor. Though they might at first glance seem very different, they are in fact very similar. Just as the working man finds his human nature only in work, the actor is characterized by the fact that he expresses himself in constant inconstancy. It is precisely this ability, as argued in the research premise of a project by Jörn Etzold (<http://www.kunst-u-arbeit.de/teilprojekte/etzold-schauspiel-arbeit>) that characterizes modern man: the modern human, who can become everything, who can make himself everything, who is flexible and mutable – it is an anthropology that ascribes this competence of self-creation to the human by attributing no substance to his life. Only labour provides the human with substance. The actor is the one who has made this inconstancy a profession. The actor experiments with the subject model of modernity and presents the possibility of change and the wide variety of inconstancy.

TWENTIETH CENTURY: THE CRISIS OF LABOUR AND ART

At the turn of the twentieth century, imperialistic politics, national states competing for political and economic power, capitalistic means of production, technology-induced appropriations of nature, labour conflicts by strengthened workforces and union movements, and a comprehensive cultural crisis caused society once again to falter. Mobilization and acceleration, increases in productivity and performance maximization are the keywords of the time, and strength and domination are the credo of the expanding capitalism. These were also the keywords of Frederick Winslow Taylor and his student Frank Bunker Gilbreth, when they founded modern labour studies at the beginning of the twentieth century. Their premise was that 'every single act of every workman can be reduce to a science' (Taylor 1919: 31) Their objective: to optimize work processes. They examined different groups of workers and wrote down their working procedures. Their approaches, however, differed: while Taylor analyzed the work processes of the most productive workers, in order to discover the optimal working process, Gilbreth devoted himself to the laziest worker, who carried out only the most necessary steps. Thus were both diligence and laziness integrated into organizational theory and the labour sciences in the re-establishment of the 'factory regime' (Marx), which from that point differentiated between the workers' movement and working knowledge, and between physical and intellectual work in industrial production. The findings of cinematography and the moving-photographic studies by Étienne-Jules Marey became the technical aids of recording, making working processes precisely measurable. Labanotation, published by Rudolf von Laban in 1928 with the title *Kinetografie*, was also useful, especially in the optimization of labour efficiency, and became an important writing system of labour studies. After all, notation and recording are the key means to do justice to both of the tasks of labour studies: the adaption of labour to humans and the adaption of humans to labour.



- A. Civitas VERI sive MORVM.
- B. Quinq. vrbis huiusce portæ significationem habentes quinq. sensuum exteriorum.
- C. Tres sensus interni. Nempe sensus communis, Vis imaginandi, Memoria.
- D. Valles in quib. atriâ vitiorum.

- E. Palatia virtutum moralium, per eaq. transitus in arcem & templa virtutum mentis.
- F. Tria genera vitæ humanæ. Voluptarium, Activum sive Politicum, & contemplationis sive philosophicum.
- G. Venti mundi, quorum decem, habent significationem voluptatium, decem aliq. dolorum.

■ Bartolomeo Delbene,
Civitas Veri Sive Morum,
Paris, 1609.

VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF LABOUR: THE FILM

Yet not only cinematography provides the basis for a visual anthropology of labour. The new image medium of film raised the presentation of labour to a prominent guiding principle. Images of labour were the first archetypical pictures. At the first public presentation of the Cinematographe in 1895, the Lumière showed the 50-second short film *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumière à Lyon* [Workers Leaving the Lumière factory in Lyon]. They thus established not only the documentary method in early film history but also positioned a motif – the worker ‘after hours’ – a motif that has found many imitators, such as in the genre of the ‘factory gate’ films in England, in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow Up* (1966), in Peter Tscherkassky’s *Motion Picture* (1984), in Hartmut Bitomsky’s *Der VW-Komplex* [The VW Complex] (1989) or in Harun Farocki’s *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* [Workers Leaving the Factory] (1995).

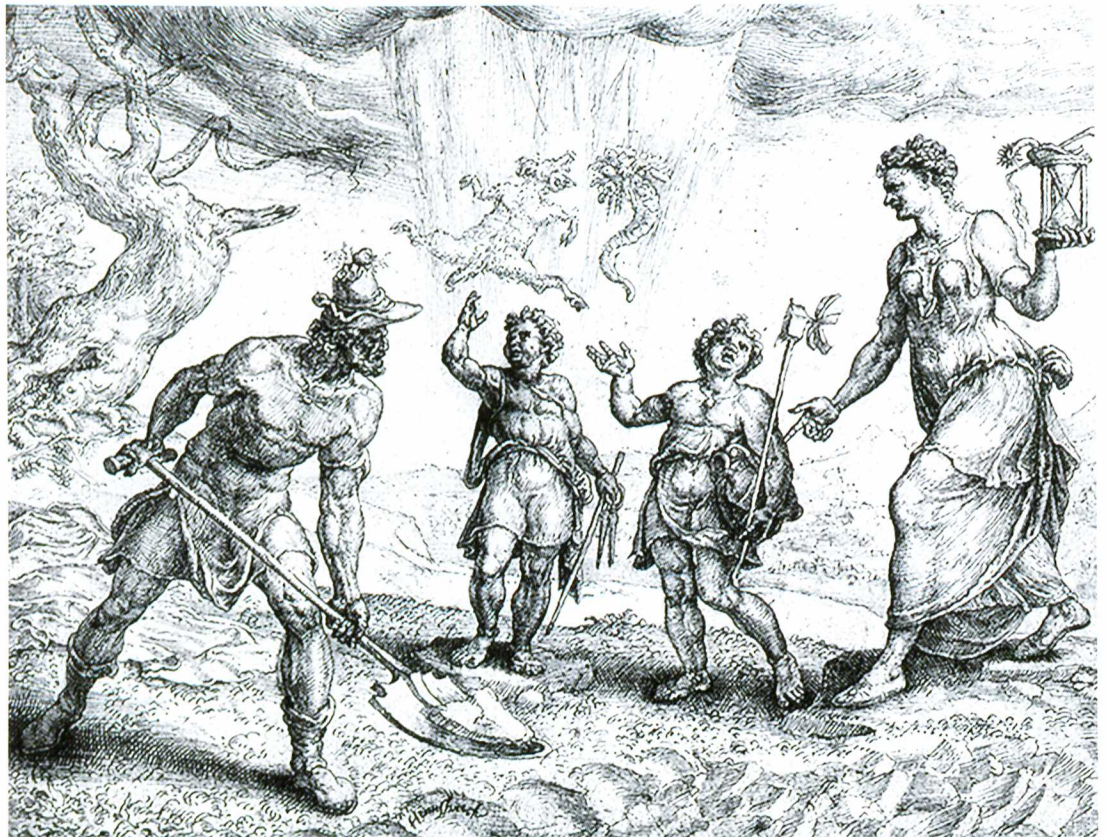
The departure from the factory would become the image of the crisis of working society in the twentieth century. The automation of working processes, the decline of the mining, steel and automobile industries, the globalization of the markets and the associated outsourcing of the processing industry to so-called ‘cheap-wage countries’ intensify the discourse about the crisis of labour. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the discourse on labour has spread to the opposing poles of the ‘future of labour’ (see Beck 2000) and the ‘end of labour’ (see Rifkin 2001).

In this area of tension, the concept of labour shimmers as an open and at the same time empty term. Labour is now determined as an all-encompassing life context, which comprises every form of productive action. Not only does the entire life consist of labour, but labour has penetrated everyday life itself.

Work finds itself in all areas of life, not only in terms of terminology, ‘fitness work’ and

'relationship work' being just two examples. All practices of everyday life are infused with the term 'work' and are considered to be work. Work takes place everywhere and at every time. With the 'universalization... of the concept of labour' (Baecker 2002: 221), work has become an all-encompassing means of operating of life, in which even relaxation from work (whether through sport, at the theatre, on vacation or at parties) has become the supposedly playful practice of a strategy of self-care on the part of the working person. Konrad Liessmann speaks of a 'labourization' of life (2000: 85), which has entered even those descriptions that aim to provide advice for a satisfying life beyond the heteronomy of work and its associated illnesses (depression, burnout etc.). At the end of the twentieth century the discourse on labour thus leads to a biopolitical strategy of normalization, in which the concept of labour is synonymous for the naturally appearing technologies of the self.

The crisis of labour corresponds with the crisis of art. The field of art is also expanding between talk – always current since the time of Hegel – of the 'end of art' (see Geulen 2002) and its continuation (see Danto 2000). In this discursive field of tension, artistic practice is transformed by the pattern of all-encompassing and permanent productivity. The aestheticization of human life, discussed since the 1980s, which envelops all areas of life beyond art, is the reverse of the practice that understands artistic creation as a specific contribution to civic work. That statutory basis of this civic society is no longer the social state with its welfare-state protection and subsidization but rather the neoliberal cultural society with the so-called 'creative types', now understood as a permanently productive class that is always at work – the only social group to whom the term class can still be applied. Like labour, art thus becomes a term that is both without substance and at the same time overcharged.



■ Maarten van Heemskerck,
Allegory of Labor, 1571.

The fact that life is organized as labour means that the social and political conditions exist to intervene in life itself. In this biopolitical strategy, everyday practice and discourse are closely connected in the context of labour, life and art. For not only can the concept of labour become a biopolitical regulative because of its openness and lack of substance; the permanent talk about labour is a key element of the effectiveness of the bio-power. Whereas in the nineteenth century the artistic existence was defined precisely by its distance from labour, its existence in the twenty-first century has become the leading dispositive of contemporary society. It has been much described, in emulation of Boltanski and Chiapello, how the working living methods still attributed to artists in the nineteenth century, such as creative, project-oriented, flexible work, the creation of a work biography, self-presentation and self-styling, the documentation of one's own creation, have become the working ethos of neoliberalism. Against the background of this narrow interweaving of labour, life and art, perhaps Jacques Derrida's reduced definition of work is also legible:

Work supposes, engages and situates a living body.

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