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Freedom and work relate to each other in peculiar ways. Sometimes, they are considered opposites, since it may be only once we get rid of work or have the luxury of a life of leisure that we can be truly free. This was Marx's view, for whom – at least most of the time – a clear incompatibility existed between the realm of freedom and the realm of labour. If labour is determined by sheer necessity in the sphere of production, which we can only hope to organise collectively, then true freedom, defined as 'the development of human powers as an end in itself', necessarily stands against it (Marx, 1991: 959). It is this view that drives hopes for a freedom *from* work, in a leisure or post-work society (Aronowitz et al., 1998; Weeks, 2011).

In other places and at other times, work is deemed a gateway to freedom, and freedom is only to be gained *through* work. In Max Weber's (2002) Protestant work ethic, it is precisely work that saves us; through hard and honest work we can prove that we are worthy of redemption in the afterlife. The promise of redemption through work is perhaps even more prevalent today, albeit in a secular sense. Redemption is no longer understood as something for the afterlife, it offers itself within work. One of the forms in which this promise offers itself is through the notion of play; the knowledge or creative worker is thought capable of finding freedom from earthly demands in a realm of pure expressivity where work cannot be distinguished from play (Butler et al., 2011).

'For those who are truly liberated, i.e. those who are free in spirit, work actually becomes play' (Dahl, 1972: 114), is an early expression of the promise of redemption in work/play – and one which reverberates widely in the new spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Work disappears magically as it morphs into playful self-expression. Play becomes the model for work, and – paradoxically – the laws of playful self-expression (rather than the laws of

business) provide for the supreme form of business (maximum profit) and the ultimate form of living (maximum freedom).

What such corporate and entrepreneurial celebrations of playfulness demonstrate is the deep entanglement of contemporary forms of knowledge work with ideals of freedom. For example, authenticity, the holy grail of existentialist philosophy, and one of the firmest markers of freedom, is today promoted as a palliative for the ills of work (Murtola and Fleming, 2011). If one takes this promise of instant freedom through work at face value, one may conclude that Marx can finally rest peacefully in his grave; true freedom has become available to us through contemporary forms of work.

## Putting freedom to work

But there are, of course, good reasons not to take this promise at face value. While employees do expect to 'be themselves' at work, this desire is made productive and 'put to work' in the interest of the organization. Some companies deliberately use the leisure activities or lifestyle choices of their employees for branding (Taylor and Land, 2010), while social media allow companies to benefit from the engagement, creativity and reputation of their users and consumers (Arvidsson, 2007; Böhm and Land, 2009). The work of creative urbanites is deployed to brand the 'creative city' and attract new investments (e.g. Harvey, 2012), and national governments contribute to this development, for example by promoting voluntary work to compensate for massive cuts in public services.

From a managerial standpoint, here freedom in and through work is the maximization of human resources, from the subjugation of the body to the subjection of the soul. Through self-work the worker transforms him or herself into an unlimited resource, no longer recognizing his or her own limits (Costea et al., 2007). In the way that authenticity, sociality and creativity are put to work, work has also become much more intimate, especially for those working with digital technologies wherein workers take their social networks to work and their laptops to bed (Gregg, 2011). The costs of this unlimited human resourcefulness and this intimacy of work are often stress, burnout and disillusionment.

For some, workers are only able to cope with these consequences via a 'masochistic reflexive turn', which allows us to enjoy the symptoms that work inflicts upon us (Cederström and Grassman, 2008). For others, a bleak picture emerges wherein our 'dead' bodies continue to work while our estranged souls have already left the factories of unhappiness (Berardi, 2009; Cederström and Fleming, 2012). In contrast, the knowledge workers that Susanne Ekman

researched were reluctant to accept disappointment, as she puts it in the roundtable discussion of this issue. They still believed in the fantasies of freedom at work and continued their self-work. The consultants researched by Jana Costas, on the other hand, were also concerned with resisting the regime of work and finding ways of refusing it by trying to draw clear boundaries or to remain invisible to managers (see the roundtable).

The dangers of neo-normative control, and the burnouts that it causes, perhaps require less pity or worry than other aspects of the contemporary regime of work. Freedom and work have, after all, been short-circuited in a freedom *to* work, which today manifests itself in workfare regimes and demands for employability. With austerity another opportunity for states to cut social securities, employability is even more forcefully presented as a cure for unemployment and precarity. Today employability is a prescription for dealing with labour market realities where subjective desires meet capitalist desires in its quest for work (Cremin, 2010). Much like Marx's labourers that are free as birds, today we are even more 'compelled to sell [our]selves voluntarily', while 'the silent compulsion of economic relations' sets the rules of the game (Marx, 1990: 899).

Examples here are manifold. One could discuss, for example, the kinds of labour management practices going on in India's IT industry, which Xiang (2007) describes as 'global "body shopping"', where increasingly disembedded markets allow for a severe flexibilisation of labour and the management of labour flows across continents. Or one could explore the mappings of labour in the creative industries in Asia that the *Transit labour: Circuits, regions, borders*[1] project completed, where 'market, border and zoning technologies' are used to organise and manage the mobilities of precarious labour. In both cases the freedom to work is mediated by production regimes which produce economic relations enforcing the further precarisation of work.

Antonie Schmiz, in her contribution to this issue, provides an example of migrant labour: Vietnamese migrants in Berlin working as self-employed shopkeepers. These have to an extent been forced into self-employment because other options of employment remain barred. Yet migrant workers do appreciate the status, autonomy and flexibility gained through self-employment, which allow them to combine work and family duties in the same place. At the same time, this form of freedom is accompanied by a great deal of self-exploitation (especially long working hours) and sometimes little financial reward. The compulsion of economic relations and the promise of freedom at work here are hard to keep apart.

1 See http://www.transitlabour.asia/about/.

## Antinomies of unpaid work

Schmiz's case of shopkeepers and their self-exploitation points to another aspect of the contemporary work regime: unpaid labour. While an entrepreneur perhaps accepts overtime as a self-inflicted condition, in employment overtime is one example of the ways in which labour today occurs out of hours, out of the office, or even in one's sleep (Lucas, 2010). The term 'free labour' gained prominence through Terranova's study of 'netslaves' whose labour she characterised as being unpaid and 'willingly conceded' (2000: 48). Free labour is certainly not a new phenomenon, as the majority of human labour in history has remained unpaid (Ross, 2012), but it has become even more widespread in the digital social factory, and through arrangements such as internships.

In her contribution to this issue, Joanna Figiel, through a personal ethnographic account, explores the exploitative aspects of the unpaid work of internships in the creative sector. Where internships at galleries or other cultural institutions have become a necessary step for a career in the arts, Figiel highlights the vacuity of many of the promises of value-added for the CV that internships make. Interns often rely on an extended support network of parents who provide subsistence, or friends who offer accommodation, so that free labour here means that organizations can feast on unpaid labour and the social wealth it draws on. In her case, Figiel also observes that interns are hardly used effectively, but perform a kind of affective labour that dissipates the 'negative affectivity' produced by organizations. Free labour here patches up contemporary organizations.

Yet unpaid work can also be performed explicitly as a protest or counterpoint to paid work. Abigail Schoneboom, in her note on 'working through the allotment', explores unpaid work which nevertheless cannot be considered separate from paid work. Allotment users see their work in the garden in opposition to an 'intensified labour process'. Demonstrating the fluidity of boundaries between work and leisure, paid and unpaid work, the allotment represents a relaxing alternative to demanding jobs and care-taking responsibilities while at the same time posing new challenges to managing full and stressful urban worklifes. The promises of work articulated in the work ethic – freedom, enjoyment, self-expression – are here enrolled to contest the work regime (Weeks, 2011: 75). The space of the allotment here must be thought in relation to work's dominance as society's organizing principle, but one which proposes more sustainable kinds of social interaction.

This vision of a society beyond the wage labour/consumption binary is also what drives the authors of our last contribution to work for free as Committee members of the Free University Liverpool (FUL). The contribution is to be read

as an art performance as well as a protest against working conditions in higher education in the UK. The FUL is part of a growing movement of alternative higher education practices in the UK and part of the Free University Network (FUN) resisting the 'marketisation, instrumentalisation and dehumanisation' of higher education. As all people involved in the project are working 'for free', the FUL committee reflects on their own free labour in their protest to achieve free education in the form of an artistic dialogue between three voices.

## The work of art

Figiel's contribution leaves a bleak image of the realities of (unpaid) work in the arts, and an image of art and artistic circuits that offers little hope for a critical or free space outside of the contemporary regime of work. Curiously, Figiel was not the only contributor to the conference (held in spring 2011) concerned with the conditions of production of art. That might be because the conference was held at the *Senatsreservespeicher*[2] in Berlin-Kreuzberg, a former storehouse for emergency rations of West-Berlin but today a lively cultural centre for Berlin's urban art and music scene – enabled by the free and voluntary work of its many users. The murals opposite the entrance by the graffiti artist Blu on the cover of this issue, showing a beheaded white collar worker with gold chains connecting his golden watches, already point to art's reflections on work and the limits of work's promise of freedom.

Considering the way creativity, authenticity and self-expression have become hallmarks of contemporary work, it is perhaps no wonder that in turn art has been captured by the regime of work (Raunig et al., 2011). Yet that is not to say art will not turn to the conditions of its own work, or offer itself as a weapon to question the imposition of work. The work of Santiago Sierra, discussed by Andrés Montenegro in his contribution, is one example of art that openly takes the art industry as well as the wider conditions of work as its object. In a provocative act, Sierra hires cheap labour in the form of migrant workers that he pays to perform 'unproductive' work (e.g. to sit in a box) as part of his performance. Montenegro points out that this raises two issues: Sierra 'blatantly' profits from cheap labour and its exploitation, all the while delegating work and thereby reducing his role as artist to a mere administrative act. Here art tries to challenge working conditions precisely through its complicity, rather than its distancing, from the regime of work and the kind of working conditions it involves.

2 See http://www.artitu.de.

The theatre plays of René Pollesch, explored in Brigitte Biehl-Missal's contribution, also explicitly take the neoliberal conditioning of worker subjectivity as their object. In contrast to Sierra, both Pollesch and Biehl-Missal allow for artistic intervention outside the business context yielding critical ideas and reflections. Pollesch's theatre plays negotiate modern work life demands of self-actualization, devotion and creativity with effects like self-exploitation, financial frustration and emotional burnout. Exploring such critical artistic interventions, Biehl-Missal argues, may provide a lens to criticise contemporary concepts of work in academic scholarship. Art, despite its usurpation in work, is here offered as critical practice pointing to ways of contesting and changing work.

Turning from artistic interventions to 'material interventions' or the agency of objects, Lisa Conrad and Nancy Richter look at the spatial and material aspects of 'free work'. The article shows how desks as a material artefact can reduce or expand workers' autonomy. The authors disrupt the taken-for-granted notions of desks as omnipresent and universal work devices. Instead, they discuss different kinds of desks (sales counters, reception desks, work benches, writing desks, bargaining and negotiating tables, mobile desks, conference tables, etc.) in relation to various theories and approaches. They state that the table as a specific object in the world of work is far from passive; it intervenes in human interaction by structuring or promoting certain activities and restraining others.

## To free oneself from freedom

The final contribution to this issue is a dialogue between Valentina Desideri, a dancer and performance artist, and Stefano Harney, a professor in strategy. In their dialogue they develop the concept of 'fate work', which they understand as an engagement with practices that go against the way capitalism seeks to organize us. Fate work, they emphasize, is not to be seen as strategy: it experiments with forms of living in the present, instead of trying to shape life after an image of a projected future. Strategy, they argue, takes up time and space 'in the name of the future', whereas fate work seeks to free ourselves from the strategies that absorb us and prevent us from acting in and upon the here and now.

What kind of freedom is reached by 'freeing oneself from' something? This must be a form of negative freedom: a place where one is not hindered by that something. But as Desideri and Harney are quick to point out, such a place must not itself become a projected future that we strive towards, which would bring us back to strategizing. Nor should it tempt us into defending a 'free' territory, which would amount to a defensive strategy. Could it make sense to say that one

should strive towards freeing oneself from (projected) freedom? Is this the challenge that one constantly faces, and never overcomes?

There is a passage in Pessoa's *The book of disquiet* where the protagonist questions his dream to be free of all of the necessities of (working) life, and we may read it as a warning against the dream to be freed (from work, in work, after work, etc.). It's a beautiful passage, worth quoting at length:

> Even I, who have just expressed my desire to have a hut or a cave where I could be free from the monotony of everything, that is to say of the monotony of being myself, would I really dare to go off to this hut or cave, knowing and understanding that, since the monotony exists in me alone, I would never be free of it? Suffocating where I am and because I am where I am, would I breathe any better there when it is my lungs that are diseased and not the air about me? Who is to say that I, longing out loud for the pure sun and the open fields, for the bright sea and the wide horizon, would not miss my bed, or my meals, or having to go down eight flights of stairs to the street, or dropping in at the tobacconist's on the corner, or saying goodbye to the barber standing idly by? (Pessoa, 2010: 10)

There is always this danger of longing for a hut or a cave, for a place of freedom outside of work – a place that is sheltered from working life. But like Pessoa's protagonist realizes, we could be fooling ourselves with this fantasy of freedom. Today, we may be fooling ourselves even more when we ask for freedom *within* our working life. As Costas suggests in the roundtable discussion in this issue, perhaps we should try to live without this fantasy of freedom, without the idea of redemption in work.

But can we free ourselves from the prospect of freedom? Perhaps this is as naïve as longing for a hut or cave. Perhaps there is nothing wrong with our lungs to begin with.

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