


## INTRODUCTION

# That Ain't Working: Practices, Policies and Experiences of Non-Work in Western Europe, 1950–2000

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The dividing line between work and non-work structures all contemporary European societies. Decisions on what work is done, by whom, at what price, and under which conditions, shape individual lives and underpin economic, political and social institutions through the production of wealth and inequality. If the dualism of work and non-work invests activities and interaction with meaning and value, producing cultural and social status along the way, it is historically highly contingent. Neither 'work' nor 'non-work' means the same thing across time and space. Yet, while dialectically dependent on one another, non-work has received far less attention by contemporary historians, who have by and large followed a pattern of identifying work with labour, whether in capitalist or socialist configurations. In contrast, the present forum suggests an integrative perspective in which both the practices and habits of not-working while at work and forms of wageless life beyond unemployment figure prominently.

When the British band Dire Straits released its single 'Money for Nothing' in 1985, it became both an instant hit and a notorious pop cultural reference point for two reasons: one was its pioneering use of CGI animation in the accompanying music video when MTV was new, the other its use of homophobic language (or, depending on the angle, its ascription to blue collar workers in a song made both by and for people with university degrees). Indeed, the two aspects were interconnected, as both lyrics and video featured a deliveryman looking at musicians on TV screens (including the Dire Straits) while doing heavy lifting, a scene songwriter Mark Knopfler had incidentally witnessed. Stereotyped with overalls, trucker cap and cigar, the character observes, 'That ain't workin', that's the way you do it/Money for nothin' and chicks for free'. Packed in several layers of intertextual, ironic references, the song is very much about two fundamental questions, namely what qualifies as work and who gets to define it. It also illustrates the significance of practices in tackling that question: carrying, lifting, installing on the one hand, and guitar-playing, singing, posing for the camera on the other. How can both possibly be the same thing: work?<sup>1</sup>

Although with a little more time and space at his disposal than a pop song offers, the head of the venerable Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Axel Honneth, failed to offer any easy answer to this question when he was recently quizzed by fellow critical theorist Rahel Jaeggi in a dialogue-cum-book promotion. Apparently exasperated by Honneth's refusal to offer a workable definition of work, Jaeggi insisted: 'But can you not at least identify a core or range of activities of which *no* community would say this is *not* work?' Yet, a reticent Honneth was not to be dragged down the road of double negation and instead chose to point to the contingencies any firm definition would entail. While it

<sup>1</sup> For a brief unwrapping of these layers see the section on 'Work' in Eula Biss, *Having and Being Had* (London: Faber & Faber, 2020), 63 f.

was ‘unimaginable’ not to regard child-raising, cooking and other forms of care work as work, ‘there are many activities, of which we are unsure, whether they are a part of this core or not. . . . One can play in private stock exchanges, but, for the love of God, this is not something we should consider social labor nor something we should create demand for.’<sup>2</sup>

Jaeggi’s frustration with these evasive manoeuvres illustrates that the dividing line between work and non-work is not only of academic interest or a subject for artistic pastimes but also a fundamental principle along which most (and definitely all contemporary European) societies are structured. If work, as Bénédicte Zimmermann has put it in Maussian terms, is ‘a total social fact’, the stakes for what non-work means are raised.<sup>3</sup> The waged work we are doing, or the lack of it, configures individual lives – career trajectories and income levels, economic and social status, contributions and access to welfare state provisions, identity construction, not least sovereignty over one’s time<sup>4</sup> – while underpinning the viability of the collective and public institutions we are a part of, whether as economic agents or citizens,<sup>5</sup> through the production of both wealth and inequality. Moreover, it is via the dualism of work and non-work that we navigate the complexities of social and economic (inter)action and invest activities with meaning and value or use them to create our social status. Yet the two sides are conceptually strongly imbalanced, as is immediately evident in the latter being defined in opposition to the former. Efforts at systematisation regularly offer whole arrays of different types of work – e.g. reciprocal/tributary/commodified, free/unfree, paid/unpaid, employed/self-employed, formal/informal, private/public, skilled/semi-skilled/unskilled, honest/dishonest, etc.<sup>6</sup> – while non-work has few if any sub-categories but is specified through descriptives: activities such as leisure, caring and non-work obligations, or unemployment and affluence in terms of economic status.<sup>7</sup>

For all its elaboration, ‘work’ itself has remained an elusive concept that runs the danger of being either too specific or too broad, *viz.* Jaeggi’s misgivings. To account for rather than to avoid this challenge, Swedish sociologist J.C. Karlsson, some forty years earlier, made the case for a dynamic definition to trace both historical expansion and narrowing of what constitutes ‘work.’<sup>8</sup> As an example of the latter, efforts to distinguish between ‘work’ and ‘labour’ according to whether or not the former has been commodified by creating exchange value<sup>9</sup> clearly stand out. While heuristically helpful to the synchronic analysis of (capitalist) production as well as to the diachronic study of how ‘labour’

<sup>2</sup>Robin Celikates, Axel Honneth and Rahel Jaeggi, ‘The Working Sovereign: A Conversation with Axel Honneth’, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 23, no. 3 (2023), 326 f.

<sup>3</sup>Bénédicte Zimmermann, ‘Work, Labor: History of the Concept’, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 25, ed. James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 675.

<sup>4</sup>Lionel Jacquot, Jean-Philippe Melchior and Simon Paye, ‘Travailler plus!’, *La nouvelle revue du travail* 11 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/nrt.3231>.

<sup>5</sup>Axel Honneth, *Der arbeitende Souverän. Eine normative Theorie der Arbeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2023), argues for the very impossibility to disentangle these two concepts.

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., Karin Hofmeester, ‘Labour Relations: Introductory Remarks’, in Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden, ‘Introduction’, in *Handbook Global History of Work*, ed. Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 320; Andrea Komlosy, *Arbeit. Eine globalhistorische Perspektive. 13. bis 21. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Promedia, 2014), 56–66; and Sibylle Marti, ‘The ILO, the Politics of Statistics, and Changing Perceptions of Informal Work, 1970–Present’, *Labor* 21, no. 1 (2024): 98–116.

<sup>7</sup>Hofmeester, ‘Introductory Remarks’, 323; Jan Lucassen, *The Story of Work: A New History of Humankind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 364; Robert A. Stebbins, *Pondering Everyday Life. Coordination, Continuity, and Comparison* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 21–67; Alessandro Arcangeli, ‘Work and Leisure’, in *A Cultural History of Work in the Early Modern Age*, ed. Bert De Munck and Thomas Max Safley (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 159–73; Josef Ehmer and Reinhild Kreis, ‘Editorial’, *WerkstattGeschichte* 26, no. 79 (2018): 3–8.

<sup>8</sup>Jan Ch. Karlsson, *Begreppet arbete. Definitioner, ideologier och sociala former* (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 1986).

<sup>9</sup>Chris Tilly and Charles Tilly, *Work under Capitalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 22; Zimmermann, ‘Work, Labor’, 675–7; Marcel van der Linden, ‘The Promise and Challenges of Global Labor History’, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82, no. 2 (2012): 63, defines wage labour as the work done by ‘workers who, as free individuals, can dispose of their labor power as their own commodity and who have no other commodity for sale’.

has come to dominate understandings of 'work',<sup>10</sup> the difference has proven of limited value in capturing concrete, empirical constellations, not least historical protagonists' own perceptions of what they were doing. Consequently, historians such as Jan Lucassen have lately opted for wide, open understandings of work that cover 'all human pursuits apart from free time or leisure' (a difference that, incidentally, is not elaborated).<sup>11</sup> Varying etymologies add more complexity, as the translated titles of Lucassen's own book illustrate.<sup>12</sup> While the 'labourification'<sup>13</sup> of 'work' in the course of European industrialisation has muted the differences between, among others, *avl*, *Arbeit*, *lavoro*, *praca*, *travail*, *werk* or work, older, often distinct connotations continue to lurk below the surface.<sup>14</sup>

Things are further complicated by recent studies showing how the semantic fields circumscribed by 'work' and 'non-work' respectively have an uncanny knack for blurring boundaries and, not least in light of digital communication and the expansion of the home office, collapsing one into the other.<sup>15</sup> However, this is a case in which historical semantics have a job to do catching up with studies of historical practices. That households, for the longest time in human history, have been spaces in which the division between wage labour, unpaid work and non-work dissolves is well known,<sup>16</sup> not least thanks to the efforts of two generations of feminist historians who followed the pioneering work of Louise Tilly and Joan Scott. Their research has abundantly shown how both housework and home-based work are highly gendered, with activities and responsibilities, rights and duties, income and status being unevenly distributed between women<sup>17</sup> and men.<sup>18</sup> That female spheres of reproductive work have long been conceptually and statistically separated from male-dominated productive labour, while being literally the precondition for its continuous reproduction, is one of the ironies of

<sup>10</sup>For a survey of the moral transformation by which antique ideals of labourless life gave way to bourgeois convictions, epitomised in Thomas Carlyle's *Gospel of Labour* (1843) and famously conceptualised in Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* (1904–5), that work was an economic necessity, a social duty and a moral practice, both individual and collective, see Komlosy, *Arbeit*, 12–35; Jürgen Kocka, 'Work as Problem in European History', in *Work in a Modern Society: The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 2–7; and Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imagineries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 42–60.

<sup>11</sup>Lucassen, *Story of Work*, 3; cf. Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden, 'Introduction', in *Handbook Global History of Work*, ed. Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 4, and Stephen Fineman, *Work: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1–3, 13.

<sup>12</sup>So far, *De wereld aan het werk*, *História do trabalho*, *Historia pracy*, *il-ui yeogsa*.

<sup>13</sup>As the editors of this forum discovered, the neologism is not ours: Angela Gigliotti, *The Labourification of Work: The Contemporary Modes of Architectural Production under the Danish Welfare State* (Aarhus: Arkitektskolen Aarhus, 2020).

<sup>14</sup>See Komlosy, *Arbeit*, 36–52, and Maurice Godelier, 'Work and Its Representations: A Research Proposal', *History Workshop Journal* 10, no. 1 (1980): 165–9.

<sup>15</sup>Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz, 'Von der Begriffsgeschichte zur historischen Semantik von "Arbeit"', in *Semantiken von Arbeit. Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), 9–59.

<sup>16</sup>Raffaella Sarti, Anna Bellavitis and Manuela Martini, eds., *What Is Work? Gender at the Crossroads of Home, Family, and Business from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2018); Jane Whittle, 'A Critique of Approaches to "Domestic Work": Women, Work and the Pre-Industrial Economy', *Past & Present* 243, no. 1 (2019): 35–70.

<sup>17</sup>Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1978); Karin Hausen, 'Technischer Fortschritt und Frauenarbeit. Zur Sozialgeschichte der Nähmaschine', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 4, no. 2 (1978): 148–69; Catherine Hall, 'The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology', in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 15–32; Eileen Boris, *Home to Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Gro Hagemann, 'Housewife and Citizen? Gender Politics in the Post-War Era', in *Twentieth-Century Housewives: Meanings and Implications of Unpaid Work*, ed. Gro Hagemann and Hege Roll-Hansen (Oslo: Unipub, 2005), 21–48; Malin Nilsson, Indrani Mazumdar and Silke Neunsinger, eds., *Home-Based Work and Home-Based Workers (1800–2021)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

<sup>18</sup>Here, again, semantic differences are telling: while the work done by women in households can be either paid (home-based work/*Heimarbeit/travail à domicile*) or unpaid (household work/*Hausarbeit/travaux ménagers*, but also care work), repairs and other small jobs usually associated as male duties at home (DIY/*Heimwerken/bricolage*) are unpaid, reinforcing the notion that men's income is procured outside the home; cf. Jonathan Voges, 'Maintaining, Repairing, Refurbishing: The Western German Do-It-Yourselfers and Their Homes', *European History Yearbook* 18 (2017): 109–25.

orthodox economic thinking, whether neoclassical or Marxist.<sup>19</sup> More generally, which activities are defined as work at all and which are not is increasingly determined by the individuals themselves; in turn, this ‘singularisation of the working world’<sup>20</sup> in contemporary European societies renders the relation of work and non-work even more intricate.

The fact that any dividing line drawn between work and non-work based on pay is constantly threatening to disintegrate on closer inspection was not lost on earlier generations of statisticians who tried to come up with stable categories in which to corral the working-age population (itself far from an unequivocal moniker). Reproductive work done by women challenged the efforts at establishing strictly market-oriented conceptions of work that gave rise to and were shaped by censuses across Western Europe and the United States in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. These were, as Nancy Folbre, Christian Topalov and others have shown, historically contingent artefacts that resulted from choices male statisticians made (who might have agreed with Honneth’s mock-outrage at classifying stock market speculation as work, yet are unlikely to have readily agreed with his classification of care work).<sup>21</sup> Alternatives existed: Norwegian statisticians at one point varied from their peers by determining individuals’ occupations in terms not of marketability but rather the nature of the activities performed; as a result, household chores, whether paid or not, qualified as productive work, a decision that was only changed in the course of international standardisation in the inter-war period.<sup>22</sup> Thus, when the architects of post-Second World War welfare states set off in the 1940s, they found the dialectical twins of ‘employed’ and ‘unemployed’ firmly in place (or, as in William Beveridge’s case, had actually helped midwife them) and built institutions and policies around these, including the highly gendered, male-breadwinner centred employment relations of part-time work that have been highlighted for the Dutch case, without being exclusive to the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup>

When these institutions started to unravel at the end of the *Trente Glorieuses*, the narrow understanding of work and non-work in terms of employment and unemployment immediately lent itself to a political, economic and not least of all sociological discourse that was in full crisis mode. Economic downturns, structural imbalances, increasing globalisation of value creation and technological change eroded the fabric of societies that were defined and sustained by, premised on and built for wage labour. The *Arbeitsgesellschaft* that Hannah Arendt had observed in the 1950s became a catchword at the very moment of its apparent disintegration.<sup>24</sup> To most commentators, the diagnosis

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Mary McIntosh, ‘The Welfare State and the Needs of the Dependent Family’, in *Fit Work for Women*, ed. Sandra Burman (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 153–72, and Meg Luxton, ‘Feminist Political Economy in Canada and the Politics of Social Reproduction’, in *Social Reproduction: Feminist Political Economy Challenges Neo-Liberalism*, ed. Kate Bezanson and Meg Luxton (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 11–44.

<sup>20</sup> Andreas Reckwitz, *The Society of Singularities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Folbre and Marjorie Abel, ‘Women’s Work and Women’s Households: Gender Bias in the U.S. Census’, *Social Research* 56, no. 3 (1989): 545–70; Christian Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur 1880–1910* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994), 22 f.; Christian Topalov, ‘Une révolution dans les représentations du travail. L’émergence de la catégorie statistique de « population active » au XIXe siècle en France, en Grande-Bretagne et aux États-Unis’, *Revue française de sociologie* 40, no. 3 (1999): 451–4. See also John A. Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1979), 103–28; William Walters, *Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 12–52; and Bénédicte Zimmermann, *Arbeitslosigkeit in Deutschland. Zur Entstehung einer sozialen Kategorie* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Hege Roll-Hansen, ‘Kjønn, statistikk og politikk – Husarbeidet og ertvervsbefolkningen i norske folketellinger (1920–1940)’, *Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning* 34, no. 4 (2011): 274–89; see also Hege Roll-Hansen, ‘Categories negotiated: Gender struggle over the Norwegian census’, in *Twentieth-Century Housewives: Meanings and Implications of Unpaid Work*, ed. Gro Hagemann and Hege Roll-Hansen (Oslo: Unipub, 2005), 235–51.

<sup>23</sup> Topalov, *Naissance*, 17 f., 372–5; Martin Daunton, *Wealth and Welfare: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1851–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 542 f., 557–60; Kirstin Munro, ‘The Welfare State and the Bourgeois Family-Household’, *Science & Society* 85, no. 2 (2021): 199–206; T.J. de Groot, ‘Part-Time Employment in the Breadwinner Era: Dutch Employers’ Initiatives to Control Female Labor Force Participation, 1945–1970’, *Enterprise & Society* 24, no. 3 (2023): 784–810.

<sup>24</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, ‘Wenn der Arbeitsgesellschaft die Arbeit ausgeht’, in *Krise der Arbeitsgesellschaft? Verhandlungen des 21. Deutschen Soziologentages in Bamberg 1982*, ed. Joachim Matthes (Frankfurt: Campus, 1983), 25–37; Claus Offe,

threatened terminal disease, although the suggested solutions differed strongly on a spectrum from calls to expand (welfare) state intervention to shifting responsibility from the state to individuals in a feat of radical – and forced – subjectivation.<sup>25</sup> That more rather than less and paid rather than unpaid work remained the primary objective remained nearly uncontested beyond punk and the protest movements of the alternative left.<sup>26</sup> Post-productivist critiques as formulated by André Gorz (who predicted the expansion of the non-working sphere) and, a decade later, Dominique Méda<sup>27</sup> were only beginning to resonate with larger audiences, though not necessarily among those who perceived themselves as workers, and have gained significant traction in recent debates on ‘post-work’.<sup>28</sup>

This pattern of worrying about labour that is either scarce or poorly paid or unsatisfactory, or all at once, while devoting little attention to non-work, has repeated itself in virtually all major current debates on work, whether these be about precariousness,<sup>29</sup> ‘bare laboring’,<sup>30</sup> ‘bullshit jobs’<sup>31</sup> or dystopian fears of automation that link Henry Braverman’s influential (but frequently criticised) work on deskilling with Raymond Geuss’s dire warnings against a robot-dominated world with little meaningful work left to people who still have not overcome their obsession with consumption.<sup>32</sup> Against this backdrop, the latest round of AI-inspired whispers about the end of work as we know it might also proceed along well-known tracks, as British sociologist Judy Wajcman has cautioned.<sup>33</sup> About as often as ‘work’ has been bidden farewell because, as one eminent labour historian of the last century once quipped,<sup>34</sup> scholars have tended to mistake the labour movement for the people it represents, it has been welcomed back.<sup>35</sup>

*Arbeitsgesellschaft*. Strukturprobleme und Zukunftsperspektiven (Frankfurt: Campus, 1984); André Gorz, *Métamorphoses du travail, quête du sens. Critique de la raison économique* (Paris: Galilée, 1988).

<sup>25</sup>See the thorough, comparative analysis by Wiebke Wiede, *Das arbeitslose Subjekt. Genealogie einer Sozialfigur in Großbritannien und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland nach dem Boom* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023). Cf. Ulrich Bröckling, *The Entrepreneurial Self: Fabricating a New Type of Subject* (London: Sage, 2016).

<sup>26</sup>For Italian workerism see the memoir by theorist Mario Tronti, ‘Our operaismo’, *New Left Review* 73, no. 1 (2012): 118–39; for West Germany’s Tunix congress and its contributors see Dietmar Süß, ‘Autonomie und Ausbeutung. Semantiken von Arbeit und Nicht-Arbeit in der Alternativbewegung der 1980er Jahre’, in *Semantiken von Arbeit. Diachrone und vergleichende Perspektiven*, ed. Jörn Leonhard and Willibald Steinmetz (Cologne: Böhlau, 2016), 347–70; Joachim Häberlen, *The Emotional Politics of the Alternative Left: West Germany, 1968–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 226–30.

<sup>27</sup>André Gorz, *Les Chemins du Paradis. L’Agonie du Capital* (Paris: Galilée, 1983); for Méda’s conceptual evolution compare Dominique Méda, *Le travail. Une valeur en voie de disparition* (Paris: Aubier, 1995), to Isabelle Ferreras, Julie Battilana and Dominique Méda, eds., *Democratize Work: The Case for Reorganizing the Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022).

<sup>28</sup>E.g. Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 113–50, and Helen Hester and Nick Srnicek, *After Work: A History of the Home and the Fight for Free Time* (London: Verso, 2023).

<sup>29</sup>Robert Castel, *La montée des incertitudes. Travail, protections, statut de l’individu* (Paris: Seuil, 2009), and Sophie Bernard, *Le Nouvel Esprit du Salarié. Rémunérations, Autonomie, Inégalités* (Paris: PUF, 2020). Cf. Marcel van der Linden, ‘San Precario: A New Inspiration for Labor Historians’, *Labor* 11, no. 1 (2014): 9–21, who argues that precariousness is inherent to all labour in capitalist economies.

<sup>30</sup>Byung-Chul Han, *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2010), quoted from the English edition *The Burn-Out Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 18.

<sup>31</sup>David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

<sup>32</sup>Raymond Geuss, *A Philosopher Looks at Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>33</sup>Judy Wajcman, ‘Automation: Is It Really Different This Time?’, *British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. 1 (2017): 119–27.

<sup>34</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Forward March of Labour Halted?’, *Marxism Today* 22, no. 9 (1978): 279–86.

<sup>35</sup>Michel Lallement, ‘Le travail et ses transformations. Une lecture sociologique’, *Revue française de gestion* 190, no. 10 (2008): 43–55; Nina Trige Andersen, et al., ‘Longer, Broader, Deeper, and More Personal: The Renewal of Labour History in the Nordic Countries’, *Scandinavian Economic History Review* 72, no. 2 (2024): 109–25; Stefan Berger, ‘“German Labour History Is Back”: Announcing the Foundation of the German Labour History Association’, *International Labor and Working-Class History* 97, no. 1 (2020): 185–9. For review essays see Jörg Neuheiser, ‘Arbeit zwischen Entgrenzung und Konsum. Die Geschichte der Arbeit im 20. Jahrhundert als Gegenstand aktueller zeithistorischer und sozialwissenschaftlicher Studien’, *Neue Politische Literatur* 58, no. 3 (2013): 421–48, and Kim Christian Priemel, ‘Heaps of Work: The Ways of Labour History’, *H-Soz-Kult*, 23 Jan. 2014, [www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/fdl-136825](http://www.hsozkult.de/literaturereview/id/fdl-136825).



Yet in all these ups and downs, non-work has been conspicuously absent from much of contemporary history debates, in particular insofar as the concept points to practices and habits of not-working while at work on the one hand and to forms of ‘wageless life’<sup>36</sup> beyond unemployment on the other. These are the two, broad categories that the following *CEH* forum sets out to highlight and explore. The three articles that fall firmly into the latter camp (Rósa Magnúsdóttir, Annalisa Martin, Annelie Ramsbrock) cover activities on the margins or plainly outside the formal economy, including activist work, sex work and prison work. With their characteristically large share of unacknowledged work – and with their strong implications of civil and human rights, including that to self-determined work, which underline how closely these (avowedly) universal values in European democracies are linked to the value of labour – these are at best outliers or exceptions in standard depictions of work.<sup>37</sup> Yet as Mala Loth shows, this is by no means self-explanatory, as lines of demarcation have been repeatedly expanded at the Court of Justice of the European Communities. Loth’s inquiry into where labour actually begins and ends in the framework of European welfare states bridges over to the articles that analyse how the boundaries of working and non-working practices were negotiated at workplaces in different trades and industries (Manuela Rienks, Kim Christian Priemel<sup>38</sup>).

Venturing beyond the occupations and industries that have pre-occupied labour and other historians for a long time, such as dockers and textile workers, miners and car workers,<sup>39</sup> the two case studies look at retailing and print shopfloors. Their findings chime in with concepts and observations of anthropologists and sociologists, including ‘organisational misbehaviour’,<sup>40</sup> ‘empty labour’,<sup>41</sup> ‘output restriction’ and ‘marginal freedoms’.<sup>42</sup> Whether apparently trivial activities such as waiting and daydreaming result from management decisions or workers’ (re)appropriation of time and their assertion of autonomy differs strongly from case to case,<sup>43</sup> while absenteeism (such as moonlighting in

<sup>36</sup>Michael Denning, ‘Wageless Life’, *New Left Review* 66, no. 6 (2010): 79–97.

<sup>37</sup>However, the widely read portraits by Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York: New Press, 1974), 64, included not only housewives but also a sex worker who was perceptively grouped together with a model and a female flight attendant, pointing to shared characteristics such as unacknowledged ‘aesthetic labour’; see Chris Warhurst and Dennis Nickson, ‘Employee Experience of Aesthetic Labour in Retail and Hospitality’, *Work, Employment and Society* 21, no. 1 (2007): 103–20.

<sup>38</sup>It is a sad irony that a third article in this section, by our colleague Ilaria Favretto, that would have dealt with ‘Absenteeism of Convenience and Practices of Refusal to Work in 1970s Italy’, could not be finalised because Ilaria was made redundant when Kingston University recently terminated its history programme.

<sup>39</sup>See the rather different special issues on ‘La désindustrialisation, une histoire en cours’, 20 & 21. *Revue d’histoire* 36, no. 144: (2019), and ‘Landschaften der Arbeit’, *Mittelweg* 36 32, no. 2 (2023). Cf. Lutz Raphael, *Jenseits von Kohle und Stahl. Eine Gesellschaftsgeschichte Westeuropas nach dem Boom* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2019); Thomas Fetzter, *Paradoxes of Internationalization: British and German Trade Unions at Ford and General Motors 1967–2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); and Stefan Berger, Andy Crol and Norman Laporte, eds., *Towards a Comparative History of Coalfield Societies* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), and the monumental anthologies by Sam Davies, Colin J. Davis, David de Vries, et al., eds., *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), and Lex Heerma van Voss, Els Hiemstra-Kuperus and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, eds., *The Ashgate Companion to the History of Textile Workers, 1650–2000* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>40</sup>Jan Ch. Karlsson, *Organizational Misbehaviour in the Workplace: Narratives of Dignity and Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Stephen Ackroyd and Paul Thompson, *Organisational Misbehaviour*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2022 [1st ed. 1999]).

<sup>41</sup>Roland Paulsen, *Empty Labor: Idleness and Workplace Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>42</sup>Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 53.

<sup>43</sup>Gösta Arvastson, *Maskinnänskan, Arbetets förvandlingar i 1900-talets storindustri* (Göteborg: Korpen, 1987); Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren, *The Secret World of Doing Nothing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 4, 154–6.

order to raise additional income<sup>44</sup>) and other forms of output restriction have the potential to provoke industrial relations conflict but also to stabilise the social spaces of factory, shop and office, as Michael Burawoy has argued.<sup>45</sup> The varied set of marginal freedoms that cover everything from smoking to going to the loo<sup>46</sup> easily lends itself to historical research and is, indeed, an illustration of that famous if hard to translate notion of workers' *Eigen-Sinn*, their wilfulness and sense of autonomous action.<sup>47</sup>

Evidence of very similar practices in both West and East Europe (and indeed beyond the sub-continent) indicates that Cold War divisions were much less significant on the level of day-to-day (non-)work than the dogmas of markets and planning would suggest. This is aptly illustrated by the career of homers, artefacts that workers produced by using materials and tools in the workspace, during work hours, but not as part of the company's official output. Although a long-established practice that goes under different names – 'faire la perruque' in France, 'government jobs' in the United States or 'foreign orders' in Australia<sup>48</sup> – interest in the phenomenon as well as the British–American term 'homer' spread only after the international publication of dissident Miklós Haraszti's insider account of work in a Hungarian factory. His depiction of homers as expressions of workers' will to subvert management instructions, assert autonomy, exert creativity and engage in altruistic cooperation resonated strongly with observers of work elsewhere. It also illustrated how difficult it is to uphold the division between work and non-work: a homer is emphatically both.<sup>49</sup>

Looking at marginal and not-so-marginal freedoms also erodes the boundaries between otherwise apparently unrelated spheres of toil; homers may be produced in jail or assume the shape of shopping during working-hours when done by retail sales staff. Empty time spent waiting either for colleagues, customers or clients is ubiquitous. Short-term absenteeism happens also behind bars, and sex work is a frequent type of moonlighting. Thus, the different angles chosen by the authors of this forum converge on several common themes: the normative ascriptions to activities as work or non-work; the frequency of unacknowledged, often literally bodily work; the legal rights and titles that connect work and citizenship; the hierarchies and power relations experienced at workplaces at home or outside; the gendered stratification of types and practices of work; the combination of work and non-work as autonomous decisions over individual (life)times; and perpetual disputes – some verbally articulated, some through actions – over the authority to define what, when and where work is done – or not.

Whether or not we live, as Roland Paulsen has argued, 'in a time in which the work concept is in an expansive phase',<sup>50</sup> this forum suggests that any such expansion needs to integrate non-work systematically into analyses of past and present work. This includes our own. Working on work comes at the peril of perpetually comparing one's own situation to historical evidence and vice versa; concepts made in other contexts appear to bear immediate relevance for one's own plight. Certainly, while

<sup>44</sup>Ilaria Favretto, 'Absenteeism of Convenience and Practices of Refusal to Work in 1970s Italy', Paper presented at 'Non-Working Workshop', 26 May 2023; see also Ulrike Schult, 'Labor Discipline in Self-Managed Socialism: The Yugoslav Automotive Industry, 1965–1985', in *Labor in State Socialist Europe, 1945–1989*, ed. Marsha Siefert (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2020), 145–66.

<sup>45</sup>Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*, xii, 81–4, 95–108.

<sup>46</sup>For a brilliant illustration see Ilaria Favretto, 'Toilets and Resistance in Italian Factories in the 1950s', *Labor History* 60, no. 6 (2019): 646–65. Cf. Corinne Maier, *Bonjour paresse. De l'art et de la nécessité d'en faire le moins possible en entreprise* (Paris: Michalon, 2004).

<sup>47</sup>Alf Lüdke, *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrung und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1993); cf. Thomas Lindenberger, 'L'Eigen-Sinn ou comment penser les rapports de domination. Généalogie et évolution d'un concept', in *Qu'est-ce que l'autorité? France-Allemagne(s), XIXe–XXe siècles*, ed. Emmanuel Droit and Pierre Karila-Cohen (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2021), 185–200.

<sup>48</sup>Etienne de Banville, *L'Usine en Douce. Le Travail en 'Perruque'* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001); Michel Anteby, *Moral Gray Zone: Side Productions, Identity, and Regulation in an Aeronautic Plant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Jesse Adams Stein, 'Making "Foreign Orders": Australian Print-Workers and Clandestine Creative Production in the 1980s', *Journal of Design History* 28, no. 3 (2015): 275–92.

<sup>49</sup>Miklós Haraszti, *A Worker in a Worker's State: Piece-Rates in Hungary* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

<sup>50</sup>Paulsen, *Empty Labour*, 173.

working on this forum, we – i.e., the forum’s joint editors Annelie Ramsbrock and Kim Christian Priemel – felt our fate was to provide the journal editors with unwanted waiting time and to vindicate Parkinson’s law that ‘work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.’<sup>51</sup> We were intrigued by views common among some Tuareg that ‘activities performed while sitting down are not work,’<sup>52</sup> even though we respectfully disagree. But then again, we would not have to venture far to find raised eyebrows as to how what we do amounts to work and, if it does, why we are doing much of it during designated non-working times.<sup>53</sup> Alas, that’s the way we do it.

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<sup>51</sup> C. Northcote Parkinson, ‘Parkinson’s Law’, *The Economist* 177, no. 5856 (19 Nov. 1955), 635–7.

<sup>52</sup> Gerd Spittler, ‘Home-Making among the Kel Ewey Tuareg in the Sahara’, in *To Be at Home: House, Work, and Self in the Modern World*, ed. Felicitas Hentschke and James Williams (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 48.

<sup>53</sup> That the division between home, family and waged work is porous at best also in the realm of academic work is of course not new: Joan W. Scott, ‘Writing Women, Work, and Family: The Tilly-Scott Collaboration’, *Social Science History* 38, no. 1–2 (2014): 113–20.

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