

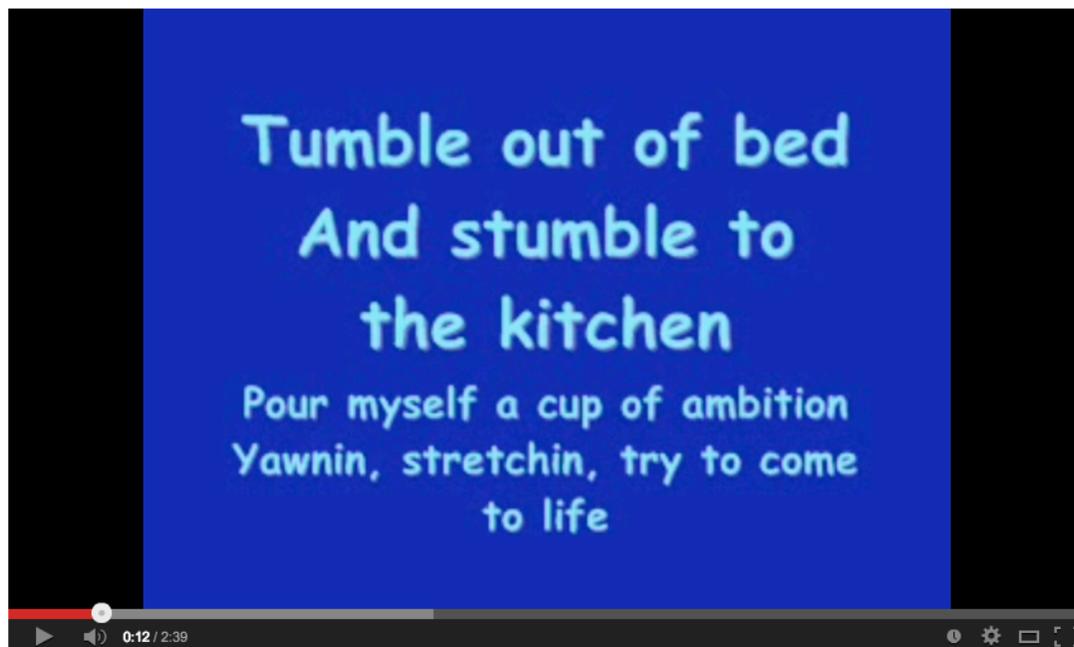
Semantics & Reproduction of Neoliberal Ideology: How 'Labour' became 'Work'

In the dictionary, 'Labour' is defined as, amongst other things:

[P]hysical work, especially manual workers, workers considered as a social class or political force [. . .] *the labour movement* [. . .] the process of childbirth [. . .] work hard; make great effort: *they laboured from dawn to dusk* | *she was patiently labouring over her sketchbooks* [. . .] work at an unskilled manual occupation [. . .] till (the ground): *the land belonged to him who laboured it* [. . .] have difficulty in doing something despite working hard.

'Work' is defined as, amongst other things:

[W]ork as a means of earning income; employment [. . .] the place where one is employed [. . .] be employed in a specified occupation or field [. . .] a task or tasks to be undertaken [. . .] good or moral deeds [. . .] a thing or things done or made; the result of an action [. . .] literary or musical composition or other piece of art [. . .] everything needed, desired, or expected [. . .] be engaged in physical or mental activity in order to achieve a result; do work [. . .] produce as a result [. . .] make efforts to achieve something [. . .] (work on/upon) exert influence or persuasion on [. . .] use one's persuasive power to stir the emotions of.



Generally, we may think of these two words as virtually interchangeable, yet there's a distinct difference between the emphases on each of these words. The deviation of meaning between the two terms is a movement in parallel, and bound explicitly with, changes to industrial labour in the West: our era of post-Fordism. Post-Fordism entails that large-scale mass-production methods pioneered by Henry Ford is of the past, and systems of labour are now geared more towards using small, flexible, manufacturing units. This bind increases reproductive imperatives for 'work' as moral condition within neoliberal ideology.



As stated in the dictionary definition, “social class or political force” is inherent in the word ‘labour’, which stems from Karl Marx’s work on the potential of *labour power* (*Arbeitskraft*), and the commodities produced by said labour force can be read in Marxian terms through the *value-form*: the relationship of *worker* and material production with its economic and social value. Following from Marx, we can (simply) visualise the function of capitalism as an operation of production and consumption.



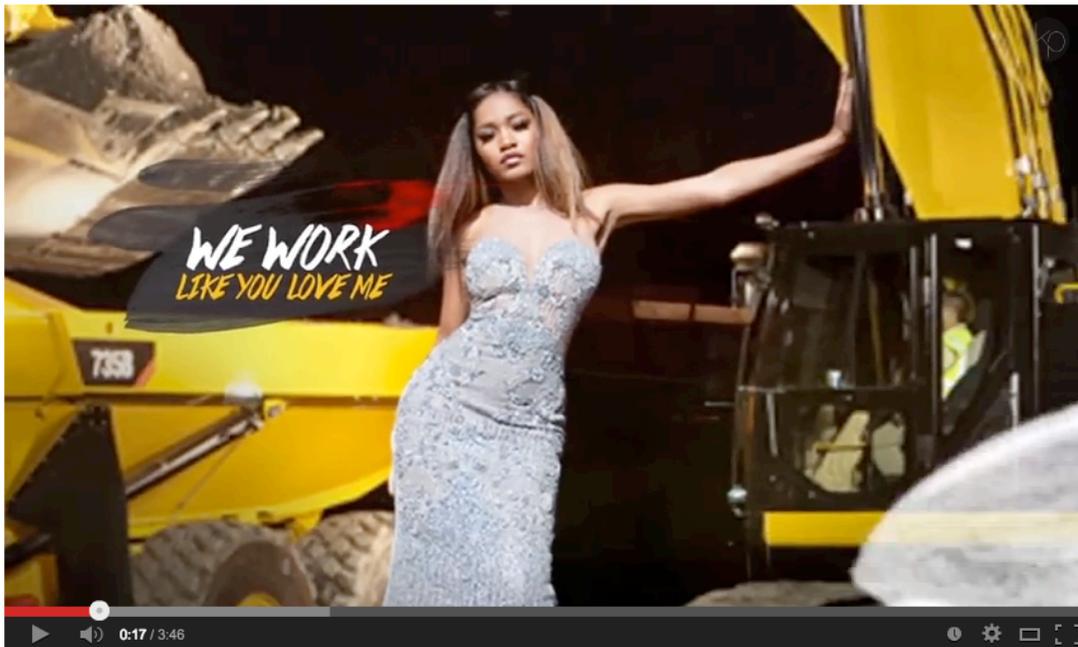
There have been recent nods to the complexity and blurriness of this relationship, demonstrated in terms beginning as buzzwords and becoming staples of description for current systems of capital; terms such as 'prosumption', which alludes to immaterial laboring (running a blog, working in a call centre, as IT support at a company, and so on and so on), and the less definitive collectivisation of labour force – as non-distinct from the consumer force. Prior to 'prosumption' we have seen that attempts to illuminate the blurred image of labour under capital is most notably undergone in the work of feminist theorists on the place of *reproduction* in Marx's equations. As put by Silvia Federici:

Marx failed to recognize the importance of reproductive work because he accepted the capitalist criteria for what constitutes work, and he believed that waged industrial work was the stage on which the battle for humanity's emancipation would be played.

The shift from 'labour' to 'work', is more than a change in the use of words, it is a marker of the contemporary through its distinct incorporation of capitalism's reproductive demands, which extend further than the production of more workers through childbirth. Reproduction of 'work' is exemplified in the aspirational understanding of *life* under capitalism, the perpetuation of the American dream is central to work's image, and instillation of work-as-ideology. As put by Michael Runyan – describing Cisco adverts from Harry Sanderson's *Unified Fabric* research:

It's clear that this operation is infrastructure and a cultural platform. The video presents an aggressively normalized and aspirational image of American life. A white, affluent, hetero-normative nuclear family are seen pursuing their regular evening activities. The man works at a data centre during the day and in the evenings he is shown spending time with his family, taking his wife out for a romantic dinner and watching the big game in a sports bar with his buddies. As a propulsive and monotonous yet sentimental soundtrack plays relentlessly in the background, the sterile portrait of 'normal' life is accompanied by constantly scrolling sets of numbers: 'life in the data centre doesn't stop when you live your life.'

Leopoldina Fortunati, in *The Arcane of Reproduction*, meticulously critiques Marxian analyses of labour that posits 'production' as separate from 'reproduction', which, for example, serves as a separation of 'labour' from 'housework'. For Karl Marx, the production of goods is the fundamental character of capitalist production, and reproduction is merely supplanted as 'natural production', which we see when he writes: "But the capitalist may safely leave this to the worker's drives for self-preservation and propagation. All the capitalist cares for is to reduce the worker's individual consumption to the necessary minimum".



By noting the necessity of feminist readings of Marx, what I wish to suggest is that the semantic differentiation between 'work' and 'labour', beyond simply echoing the prosumerist, post-Fordist, shift in 'type' of work undergone in the West, also incorporates the affective conditions of reproductive labour and propositions of how we may visualise the structure of production – in the same vein that late capitalism incorporates and commodifies, or, as Tiqqun would put it, 'Young-

Girlifies', counter culture.

Affective Labour, different to the aforementioned 'immaterial labour' – a term most popularised by Maurizio Lazzarato, which diverges from labour of machines into office work, digital art practices et al – is a term most rigorously built by Italian Autonomist Feminists (such as those referenced in this text). Affective Labour is implicitly, work intrinsic to social fabric, creating emotional experiences in people. The rearing of children, the reassurance 'given' to a husband coming home after subjugation as a labourer, was the premise for the conceptualisation of this in the seventies. Now, affective labour is enforced as the saleable commodity par excellence for a labour force – the service class, and further, as prerequisite for ones' ontology.

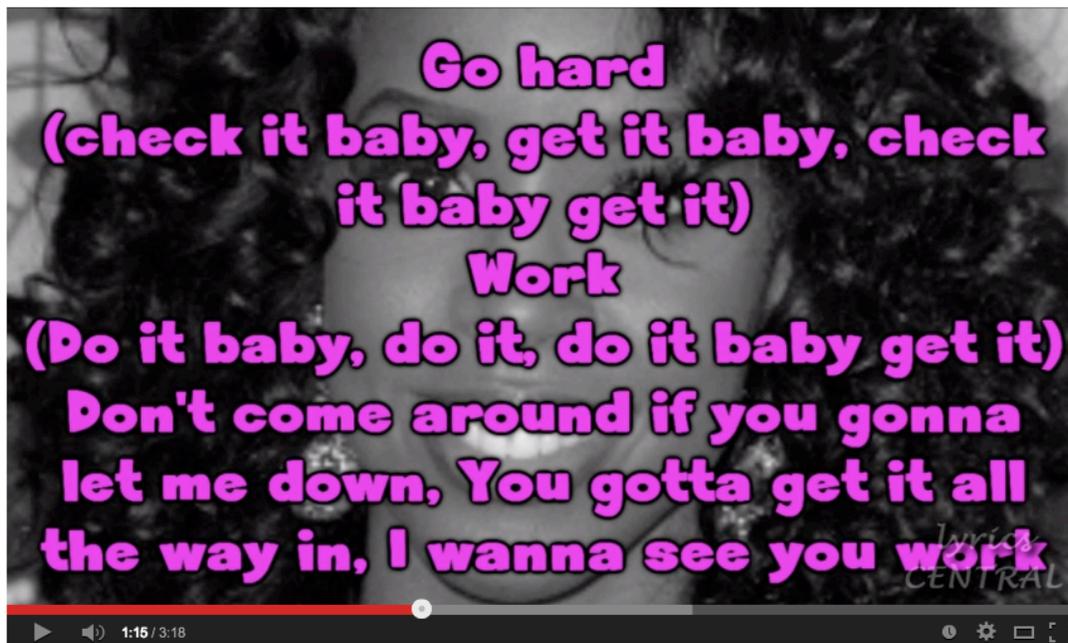


Paul Myerscough's text on the chain Pret A Manger, in the *London Review of Books*, evokes Mark Fisher's earlier description of the film *Office Space*, stating:

Pret workers aren't supposed to be unhappy. They are recruited precisely for their 'personality', in the sense that a talent show host might use the word. Job candidates must show that they have a natural flair for the 'Pret Behaviours' (these are listed on the website too). Among the 17 things they 'Don't Want to See' is that someone is 'moody or bad-tempered', 'annoys people', 'overcomplicates ideas' or 'is just here for the money'. The sorts of thing they 'Do Want to See' are that you can 'work at pace', 'create a sense of fun' and are 'genuinely friendly'. The 'Pret Perfect' worker, a fully evolved species, 'never gives up', 'goes out of their way to be helpful' and

'has presence'. After a day's trial, your fellow workers vote on how well you fit the profile; if your performance lacks sparkle, you're sent home with a few quid.

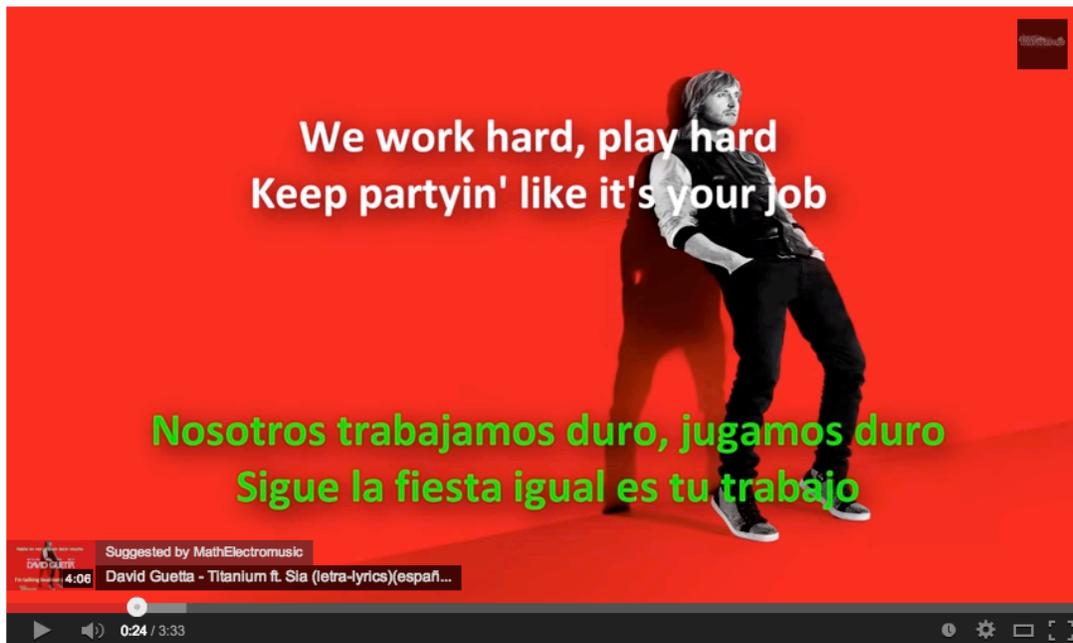
Further, in the paper *Affective Labour and Subject Formation: Feminist Emancipatory Politics Today*, Svenja Bromberg traces this category of 'affect' as it has been utilised by Hardt and Negri to describe such conditions as epitomised by Pret's matra for employment, whilst also proposing its promising characteristic of re-appropriating biopolitical life and formulating radical subjectivities. Not only does Bromberg point out that affective labour is firmly within the global marketplace, she also acknowledges its place in the *reproduction* of capitalist life and its manifestation as a *still gendered* work form; warning against over-essentialism of the (Spinozian) *potentia* that affect alludes to, or can carry, in small quantities. For example, I am most easily employed as a care-giver if I need part-time work, it is no surprise that I am female. 'Care-giver' is a position of employment that has an etymology of something deployed freely out of empathy. Care-giver is used to describe positions very much still associated and restricted to women, due to their 'natural character' and/or propensity, for such empathetic and apparently free labour, such as Nanny, nurse, midwife, and so on.



Affective Labour as necessary asset for waitresses, receptionists, shop assistants, and so on, typifies a type of post-Fordist employment whilst peddling the American dream – of working hard and *enjoying it*; thus reproducing the identity and ideology that constitutes work as a marker of ones' existential validity. Not only must we be aware of feminist reordering of Marx's analysis of capitalism, we must also look out and continue the reordering, as that which the critiques rail

against – the reproduction of capitalism, and forms of affective labour – is increasingly installed amongst all types of jobs and more, identity and ‘private life’.

Work under late capitalism is not a job, it is an existence; a term that reinforces neoliberal ideology and the celebration of structural conditions in which we live *as global labourers*. The separation of work from labour, or ‘departure’ of Fordist-type labour in the West – as an ideology of *what constitutes* work, is embroiled with a type of collective cognitive mapping that furthers huge disparities of wealth across the world, and further still, as Federici notes, the controlled the reproduction of the earth’s resources and primitive accumulation.



In this vein, *Work* as the moral condition of neoliberalism enables the *reproduction* of systems of capital – as it is infiltrated into, and perpetuated by, everyday life. Systems of aspiration, the affectivity required *to be* a global subject, a biopolitical mode of existence – where *Labour* is reserved for Foxconn factories and innumerable forms of mining and agriculture industries across the ‘third world’. *Work* is what we, in the West, should *enjoy* – as governed via imperatives of post-Fordist social order: you’re semantically alleviated from *Labour*, and *you’re loving it*.

[produce as a result [. . .] make efforts to achieve something [. . .] (work on/upon) exert influence or persuasion on [. . .] use one's persuasive power to stir the emotions of.]