



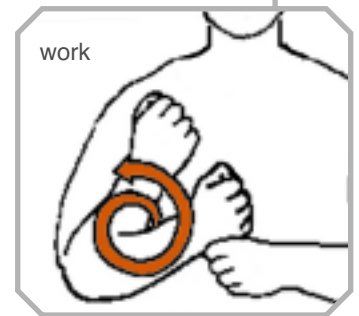
# Freedom means Work

\* a celebration

by Helena Waldmann (2007)

«Labour! Labour! What a blessing,  
Labour is the magic word,  
Labour is at the heart of happiness  
Labour is the home of peace  
Only labour can deliver us ...»

Heinrich Seidel



What, however, is left of man if you take away labour? An dishonourable, parasitic little lad whose life no longer has any hold without order and rules. A poor fool. Not a free man.

Human are only those who work. Only those who toil may be free. Shame, as with this concept of freedom, every fifth European capable of gainful employment is not free, and all the unemployed now make up a bunch of people whose most benign label would be individuals of private means.

But it isn't hard to suggest what labour is nevertheless: a cultural projection of the human brain. We want what we must do.

Helena Waldmann's upcoming work "Freiheit macht Arbeit" ("Freedom means Work", working title) sullies the prestige of work which is so easily taken for granted. Following her successful international co-productions around topics such as Islam ("Letters from Tentland", 2005), exile ("Return to Sender", 2006), tropicalism ("Headhunters", 2003) and occupation ("Emotional Rescue", 2005), she questions the myth of work, again in an international context.

In one's own life, work promises order, meaning and the absence of existential worries. Should this life return to be a utopia? Is there no alternative to labour? Paul Lafargue, the famous grandson of Karl Marx, remarked about it trenchantly: "Labour cannot be any good, otherwise the rich would not have left it to the poor."

In May 2007, Helena Waldmann and selected guests of the International Theatre Festival in Berlin ("Theatertreffen") will run a "Workshop -- shopping without working", where the possible lack of the two life maxims working and shopping will be examined. The workshop is about bringing together guests from different cultures with attitudes to work that are as different as possible.

In which cultures is industriousness suspicious?

What do Catholics have against work, as they fight for every national holiday?

Every pilgrim flees from work, every monk, every hermit -- and why are they more sanctified than the worker?

With a lack of hard work, would it be possible for us to create an honourable opposite of effort and drudgery? What is more, wouldn't this be appropriately convenient, miserly and cheap these days?



So: what is it about, this veneration of labour?

Work as prestige? Work is neither a sacred mission, nor does it serve the liberation of mankind. It is a way of life which is not even in keeping with our times any longer, and can only be a means for self-fulfilment in the very best scenarios.

How does the German saying go: "No-one has ever got rich by working." Nevertheless, work serves as a microscopic contribution each of us is supposed to make to the course of the world, its development and maintenance. Even if every society has a somewhat different view of work:

There is work as "labor", meaning (senseless) effort, versus "creatio", creating a work. There is work in the sense of self-determination, and just as often self-exploitation in artistic circles...

Work is based on religion:

Biblical writings do not point out the duty to work, but the duty to its limitation. The commandment of the sanctification of Sabbath, Sunday and other holidays is about the right to rest, not the right to work. The old testament's account of the Fall of Man (Genesis 3) describes labour as punishment and God's curse on mankind ("By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food!").

In other words: Not having to work would mean the deliverance from guilt.

The Torah says that man should not be like a labourer who works for the sake of a wage. In Hebrew culture, paid work is suspicious.

In Islam, salvation is attained solely through behaving correctly in public. One's own role in society should be about tending to the good fortune of the trades, not about maximising profits. Otherwise, all bazars, the centres of Muslim communities, would have been pushed away long since by supermarkets. But they weren't. Instead, they turn to Mecca five times a day.

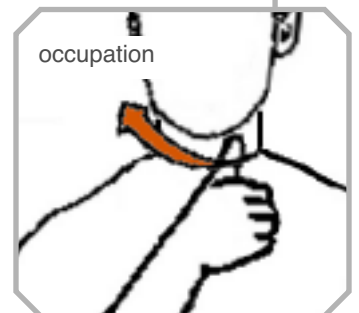
The Hindu Bhagavad-Gita says: "Your task is only to work, not to enjoy its fruits", renounce on a wage rather than doing nothing. For the presence is full of suffering, and the only path to freedom is built by doing something. No matter what.

The animistic West Africans of the Ayizo village in the Republic of Benin think: "All work has its age." For them, a certain type of work is assigned to each age range, and it changes with every birthday, if you will. To them, it is absurd that Europeans are grafting away in the same field until the end of their lives. But what happens when the young leave the village and leave their young work to the elders?

The Japanese use a word of German origin, "arubaito", to describe merely the part-time work which they pursue alongside their main profession. Why do Shintoists believe that Europeans only do odd jobs and don't work?

Freedom means work.

Labour and a labour society are, as all cultural phenomena, to a large extent the collective product of "will and imagination". I imagine I want to work. And as some people work, I too would like to imagine wanting only that. Only artists are a bit different in this respect. In Thomas Kapielski's words: "If sport is the brother of work, than art is the cousin of unemployment."



Or, in somewhat more catholic terms: Why are we so very obsessed by the will to work that we fear its expulsion like the devil fears exorcism?

In May, authors, directors, dancers and actors from all over the world will come to Berlin. Helena Waldmann welcomes them as is fit for international hospitality: with a dance festival, in the true sense of a festival or a celebration. That is, stopping work and even despising it for the duration of the festival. Often, the rewards of many months' work are squandered or sacrificed collectively within a few hours or days. Dance is the main expression and climax of every celebration. Dance is movement which is not aimed at usefulness or end-gaining, but it is the exact opposite of effort, trade and labour. Dance is part of a ritual murder of the status of work.

After the workshop, in the course of the year 2007, Helena Waldmann will create a piece with selected protagonists of the celebratory culture, with Asian shamans, African priests, European idle thinkers and dancers. The piece will be a celebration about the exorcism of work, in which the international cast will return to the roots of dance as celebration, thereby tarnishing the reputation of work. To counter the point-less work frenzy and to allow dance to rightfully defy work.



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