of wasted labour', then *Capital* switches tack. This time the labour is minimal for maximal result. The techno-utopian conceit – and here comes the Whitmanic dimension again – seems to be to democratize *The Arcades*. It's the notion that anyone can do this stuff; all you need is a computer, a city and some time. Goldsmith has described the book as a love letter to New York, a work that brings in the marginal and that looks without cynicism upon the notion of New York as a harbour for the poor, huddled masses. Yet the book contradicts itself because so much of the material here is not particularly rare or marginal.

With 'The Body of Michael Brown' Goldsmith made a hubristic mistake; the problem with *Capital* is that it embodies all the things that led to that mistake. Although it attempts a kind of radical textual egalitarianism, it signally fails to fully represent marginal voices, writing over them once again. (One could hardly say, for example, that Joan Didion is a marginal voice, but nonetheless she is one of the few female sources in the book's 1008 pages.) Goldsmith perhaps needs to learn that uncovering the marginal involves work, and that that work is not automatically elitist, and that the 'I' is more complex than an either/or equation. As the poet and academic Fred Moten wrote when asked for a response to 'The Body of Michael Brown':

> Do you know that why you fucked up and how you fucked up are totally entangled? Do you know that entanglement is given in the raciality of the concept, as such? I wish I could be convinced that you're thinking right now about how and why you fucked up. I wish I could convince you that the continued existence of human life on this earth depends upon you thinking about why and how you fucked up.

Capital suggests that such thinking still hasn't taken place.

John Millar

Prêt-à-manger

Boris Groys, *In the Flow*, Verso, London and New York, 2016. 208 pp., £14.99 hb., 978 1 78478 350 1 hb.

In *Ecce Homo*, Friedrich Nietzsche famously diagnoses European culture as suffering from chronic dyspepsia. Nietzsche will offer no antacids or laxatives for 'the most constipated bowels and temperaments'. Rather, he presents himself as dynamite. To cure cultural blockage and intellectual bloating, something more explosive is needed. Boris Groys takes up the rheological character of Nietzsche's cultural criticism in his rich and absorbing new work, *In the Flow*. He does so, however, by shifting Nietzsche's emphasis from the explosion of cultural gastric reflux to art's immanently fluid status. As Groys puts it in his introduction, this amounts to grasping the study of art in terms of a 'rheology of art – discussion of art as flowing.' What this means rests on Groys's central thesis.

At the core of *In the Flow* is nothing less than a reconstruction of avant-garde practices running from Marcel Duchamp to Ilya Kabakov via Kazimir Malevich. Groys's conception of avant-garde art is mediated by three historical conditions: first, the theoretical dominance of a post-metaphysical and postmodern culture fully ensconced in the incessant reproduction of change; second, the expansion of the museum into an archive practising selection, re-arrangement and installation of pre-existing images and objects; and third, the complete neutralization of Duchamp's strategy of the readymade. (Through a formulation of the concept of *metanoia*, Groys develops the first condition in his *Introduction to Antiphilosophy.* The second and third conditions are explored in Groys's older but only recently translated book, *On the New.*) Connecting these three conditions is the notion of art's immanence to what Groys refers to as 'the flow of time': that is, the material flux of life generated under the conditions of the capitalist mode of production.

The basic premiss organizing Groys's 'rheology of art' is the fundamental transformation of the ontology of art produced by the modern: art is no longer defined by the production of discrete, self-contained works, but is the expression of an activity caught in a struggle to comprehend itself as distinctively artistic. Modern art constitutes the becoming-conscious of artistic activity grasped as a fluid process. Referring to Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in the 1970s, modern art, according to Groys, constitutes an attitude, a practice of life. (Although absent from the book, Allan Kaprow's definition of 'happenings' illustrates this ontological shift in a neat,

programmatic way: 'Context rather than category. Flow rather than work of art.')

For Groys, the comprehension of this shift from artwork to living activity is augmented by the transition from philosophy to post-philosophical theory that occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. The theoretical comprehension of the material flux of time finds its initial and most accomplished articulation in the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (this is developed by Groys in chapter 2). With Marx and Nietzsche, we leave the realm of immutable ideals, eternal reason and absolute spirit, and enter the flow of life in all its struggles, contradictions and upheavals. Alas, Groys does not explore Hegel's position within the transition of 'classical' philosophy into post-metaphysical theory; although, strikingly, Hegel reconstructed speculative thought as a living, dialectical movement – that is, as distinctively fluid. Hegel speaks of his project as an attempt to 'bring fixed thought into a fluid state [*Flüssigkeit*]'.

The corollary to this shift from philosophy to theories of life is that the course of life in advanced capitalist societies has liquidated our belief in metaphysics. We no longer organize our cultural existence in relation to the possibility of the objective knowledge of reality as such. Rather, culture is a pressure that compels us to live. It enjoins us to both 'demonstrate that one lives' and 'perform being alive'. According to Groys, it is modern art that most clearly defines this twofold demonstration and performance of life. Moreover, it is art that locates the subject that 'performs this knowledge of being alive'. Art is, then, an epistemological project. Neither finite (as human) nor infinite (as God), the subject of art is presented, by Groys, as an ambiguous entity punctuated by the paradoxical production of the illusion of infinitude in the negativity of finitude itself, a finitude understood as 'pure negation', 'self-nullification' and the 'self-reduction to zero'.

This ambiguous production of the infinite in finitude animates avant-garde art. Speaking of Malevich, Groys notes that

> to be a revolutionary artist … means to join the material flow that destroys all the temporary political and aesthetic orders. Here the goal is not change… Rather, radical and revolutionary art abandons all goals, and enters the nonteleological, potentially infinite process that the artist cannot and does not want to bring to an end.'

We are reminded here of Malevich's strategy of destruction in his 'On the New Systems of Art' (1919), in which we are told that creation consists of 'a question of constructing a device to overcome our endless progress'. Readers familiar with Groys's work will know that this anchors his presentation of the Russian avant-garde in *The Total Art of Stalinism*. To comprehend Malevich's proposition in light of *In the Flow*, one could state that the device arrests 'endless progress' by way of an infinite process. The infinite process of avant-garde art acts as a negation of the infinite progress of modern life.

In the Flow weighs in on the critical reception of the avant-garde through its theoretical invocation of the category of negation. As is well known, negation constitutes the centre of the debates on the character of avant-garde practices. Peter Bürger's conception of the 'historical avant-garde', for example, is paradigmatic: avant-garde art is the negation of the framing conditions that secure art's autonomy. Any reference to a Hegelian conception of negation is absent from Groys's reflections. This is a theoretical strategy that allows Groys both to critically distinguish his presentation of the avant-garde from Bürger's paradigmatic Hegelianism (recall that for Bürger, 'historical' avant-garde art consists of the sublation of art into the praxis of life – a sublation, we are told, that is to be grasped exclusively 'in the Hegelian sense') and to reconfigure a deconstructive conception of negation understood in terms of a destruction that can never supersede the remainders it produces. This is a conception of negativity that runs through Derrida's works, finding its most famous articulation in his study of Bataille's Hegelianism.

Groys's deconstructive approach, however, is distinct from academic deconstruction in that it brings into sharp relief the temporal status of the *present*, thus cutting a diagonal line through the 'destruction of the metaphysics of presence'. The avant-garde is not, according to Groys, a temporal category identifying a practice that is immanently structured by a political temporalization of history with a speculative relation to the future (a thesis developed by Peter Osborne). Rather, it constitutes an intra-artistic temporalization of the *presentness of the present* understood as fluid life. Thus, Groys contends that avant-garde art 'does not predict the future, but rather demonstrates the transitory character of the present – and thus opens the way for the new'. It is the fugitive and ephemeral character of the present (its 'essential quality of being present', as Baudelaire put it) that provides the conditions of possibility of the new.

This implies that the new is not, strictly speaking, negative in character (as the negation of the 'old' that it retroactively determines), but rather a remainder in

the artistic negation of the present from within the ontological character of the present itself. In other words, the non-teleological negation of avant-garde practices neither 'fails' (thus becoming 'historical' in a rather one-dimensional sense) nor 'succeeds' (thus becoming self-conscious; that is, as masters of their own destiny), since they do not presuppose immediately recognizable institutions of *art*. Rather, the negation of avant-garde practice is contemporary with the material flow of temporary and transitory status of *life*. (Groys's and Osborne's work on the legacies of avant-garde practices overlap at the point of art's immanence to the means of capitalist production, a point developed by Walter Benjamin in 'The Author as Producer'.)

Contemporaneity exploits the distinctive temporary quality of the present from within itself. It does this because it lives *with* the life flow in such a way that it is a constitutive part of that flow. (This is developed in chapter 9, with a particular emphasis on the paradoxical nature of the reconfiguration of 'aura' under the conditions of digital reproduction.) The contemporary character of the fugitive present is exposed by Groys as a constantly shifting archive, a kind of 'total context' in which the new is epistemologically identified through the reconfigurations of the archive. The infinity of the archive – most notably the 'museum' – is located merely within its capacity to expand endlessly. Rather, it is its *potentiality* of infinite decontextualization and recontextualization that temporalizes the archive as a kind of interminable present.

This is why, above all else, the Internet and (although in a different way) Duchamp's strategy of the readymade, constitute the grounding artistic forms of Groys's work. The contemporaneity of the Internet is characterized by its material supports – the hardware that overdetermines the seamless experience of the interface exhibited by software (see chapters 10–12). The contemporaneity of the Internet is internally bifurcated and inverted on this model: it makes immediately apparent the illusion of the shared life of the collective, singular subject of the globe – what makes 'us' all contemporaries – by way of an apparatus that restricts this contemporaneity to a set of infrastructural and ideological mechanisms that converts each user into an increasingly isolated, virtual monastic life, pregnant with the potentiality of endless *kenosis*; that is, the self-voiding of the individual's substantive, historical content through life practices. (The kenotic character of modern and contemporary art is presented in chapter 3.)

The kenotic character of art once again recentralizes Groys's reflections on avant-garde practices within the category of negation understood as *de-historicization*; that is, the paradoxical process of the historicity of emptying political and aesthetic orders of their historical fixity. It is at this point that we can critically reconsider the third condition organized in the general shape of *In the Flow*: the readymades.

Duchamp frames *In the Flow* not only theoretically, but also quite literally. Appearing on the first page and at the end of the last chapter, Duchamp's strategy of the readymades is understood as the attempt to '[extend] the museum privilege to all things, including all present things'. In a sense, this extension of the museum recalls Duchamp's definition of the readymade in the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surrealism*: 'an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of the work of art by the mere choice of an artist'.

For Groys, however, Duchamp does not take things far enough since the strategy of the readymade is focused on the transition of everyday articles of life into the distinctive 'dignity' of the work of art, thus short-circuiting its transformation into the life practice of artistic activity. This, however, sets aside a number of remarks that Duchamp made in both the context of the emergence of the readymades (1913) and his retrospective reflections on his practice in the 1960s (interviews with Pierre Cabanne and Philippe Collin, especially). It is not entirely clear the extent to which Duchamp's readymades, especially in their earliest iterations, can be comprehended as dignified artworks. For example, when Duchamp writes to his sister and confidante Suzanne in early 1916 informing her that he purchased a bottle drier (*Bottle Rack*, 1914) 'as a readymade sculpture', he notes that profanation is already at work in the context of everyday life. In other words, it is not an effect of the decontextualization and recontextualization of the museum qua 'sacred' space of a valorized, archived and acculturated tradition. Significantly, the opposition between art and life, between artistic and non-artistic activity, and between sacred and profane, is collapsed in on itself in Duchamp's seemingly inconsequential remark.

What kind of negation does this 'collapse' perform? The readymade does not function as a 'destruction' (always with remainder) of the political and aesthetic orders that form the material flow of time, since it does not adequately thematize artistic activity in terms of the construction of a 'device' that interrupts the flow. Rather, the readymade consists of a retroactive determination of the opposition of art

and life. This is achieved, initially, by way of the absence of any substantial modification to the bottle rack's form, thus thematizing the *experiential* content of both the suspension of the material flow of life and the fluid permeation of artistic and non-artistic activities *within their contradiction*. It is Groys's most valorized art practice – Duchamp's readymade – that potentially disrupts his reflections on art as a mode of the practice of contemporary life.

Hammam Aldouri

Fear of a frozen planet

Peter Fleming, *The Mythology of Work: How Capitalism Persists Despite Itself*, Pluto Press, London, 2015. 224 pp., £60.00 hb., £17.99 pb., 978 0 74533 487 5 hb., 978 0 74533 486 8 pb.

Ursula Huws, *Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2014. 208 pp., £45.00 hb., £15.00 pb., 978 1 58367 464 2 hb., 978 1 58367 463 5 pb.

When will work be over? This question, both urgent and plaintive, increasingly imposes itself as any fulfilment of the emancipatory promise of automation is indefinitely deferred and as work intensifies in both quality and quantity. These two books offer complementary interventions into the question of how work persists and how capitalism has survived its most recent secular crisis. The secret of this survival for Fleming is to be found in the successful promulgation of an ideology of work that creates a compulsion to labour that has little to do with economic necessity. For Huws, identifying the central site of confrontation between labour and capital through describing a typology of contemporary forms of labour is the central aim.

At the heart of Fleming's account of the ideology of work is what he terms the '"I, job" function': the transformation of work from something we do into something we are. It is this that takes the stage when work is no longer necessary and working has become little more than a pointless cultural ritual or symbolic gesture aiming to mitigate the experience of abandonment. Such ritualization takes a form analogous to addiction; an internalized coercion, nicely illustrated by Fleming as the overwork–paranoia complex spiralling out from the ideological truth that, although your fears about your colleagues may be simple paranoia, neoliberalism really *does* hate you, and doesn't care if you know it. Fleming's touchstone here is Deleuze's essay on societies of control, in which biopolitical regulation goes virtual and viral. Whereas in disciplinary regimes of labour the worker moves between defined and regulated times and spaces, now there is, Fleming argues, only the totalized 'frozen planet of work' in which the present appears to be permanent and in which every day is a work day. *The Mythology of Work* reads against Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* in this regard to describe a totality now 'virtual and viral rather than only structural'. If this perhaps suggests an oddly literal reading of Lukács's text, it nonetheless leads Fleming to his central claim that dialectical reason can no longer provide us with a means of escape because the densely complex and unpredictable meshing of labour and capital leaves no discernible outside space, no standpoint beyond this frozen planet from which contradictions may be productively identified and exploited. This totality is of course false, but its falsity cannot be revealed because there is no positive antithetical moment through which the dialectic can progress.

The concept of abandonment is central to Fleming's arguments in this regard. The 'I, job' function is premissed on the terror of abandonment, generating a compulsive need to work according to an 'all or nothing' logic. This logic threatens abandonment as the disciplinary outcome of any momentary infraction of neoliberalism's constant and insatiable demand for presence, attention and contact. In this position, however, workers should conceive themselves not as permanently terrorized by the threat of abandonment, but as always already abandoned. This thesis is advanced in a particularly interesting way in the final two chapters of the book, discussing first the perverse logic of corporate ideology as 'false truth telling', and, second, the dialogic culture of neoliberalism that seeks a transformation of the worker into a 'speaking machine' ritualistically engaged in speech that is never *to* power, but always already *with* it. In this culture, 'All is public yet nothing is permissible.' The corporation's cynical acknowledgement of its own contradictions, aggressions and failures – the general outlook that Fleming calls '"Fuck you!" capitalism' – seems to render dialectical critique, as a mode of dethroning power through the revelation of its constitutive contradictions, obsolete.

The strategies of resistance Fleming considers viable under these conditions include the activation of minor, 'peasant' knowledges, histories and discourses, the deployment of humour and cunning,