

Doing Labour Geography

Networking Meeting of the Working Group “Labour Geography”

Thursday, 08 February, 2024

Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Flakenstraße 29-31, 15537 Erkner (near Berlin)

13:30	Arrival with coffee & cookies, <i>Cafeteria</i>		
14:00	Programme start: Getting to know each other & icebreaker games <i>Cafeteria</i>		
14:30	Plenary lecture & discussion: Oliver Pye & Tatiana López: What is Labour Geography? Where is it (heading)? And how to do it?, <i>Conference Room (405)</i>		
15:30	Coffee break		
16:00	<p>Paper Presentations: <i>Conference Room (405)</i></p> <p>William Westgard-Cruise: The spatiality of energy-labour regimes: a Marxian approach</p> <p>Saumya Premchander: Mapping a Local Labour Control Regime: Work in the Indian Granite Economy</p>	<p>Paper-feedback session*: <i>Small Conference Room (402)</i></p> <p>Louisa Prause: The field as digital factory: Farm labor and the digital revolution in the corporate food regime</p>	<p>Paper-feedback session*: <i>Pavilion</i></p> <p>Janne Martha Lentz, Christiane Meyer-Habighorst, Melinh Riemann & Karin Schwiter: From exceptionalism to normalisation: How narratives of platform companies legitimise precarious work and commodified care</p>
16:45	<p>Marlen Ott: (Racialized) Difference and Plantation Labor Regimes: The Case of Costa Rican Pineapple Production</p>	<p>Paper-feedback session*: <i>Small Conference Room (402)</i></p> <p>Barbara Orth & Isabella Stingl: Becoming a ‘Platform Worker’: a biographical exploration of visa categories and worker subjectivities in the Gig Economy</p> <p><i>*Please read the paper drafts in advance. They will be shared with the conference participants by end of January.</i></p>	
17:30	Coffee break		
18:00	<p>Small Group Workshops: Exchange on current developments in key subfields of Labour Geography: What are the key concerns in our subfield? What are the current controversies? Where are the research gaps that need to be filled? moderated by Yannick Ecker & Karin Schwiter</p>		
18:45	Programme end & joint transfer to dinner		
19:10	Departure RE1-train from Erkner Bahnhof to Berlin Ostkreuz		
19:30	Joint dinner at <i>The Factory Pizza & Pasta, Sonntagstr. 30, 10245 Berlin</i> (paid individually)		

Friday, 09 February, 2024

Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, all plenaries in *Conference Room (405)*

09:00	Panel and workshop: Reflecting on labour struggles in 2023 and perspectives on organising in academia with Barbara Orth, Yannick Ecker and Aslı Vatansever , moderation: Anna Oechslen	
10:30	Coffee break	
11:00	Paper presentations in <i>Conference Room (405)</i> Fabian Namberger: On tech workers, click-workers and gig drivers: Divisions of labour within the Uber platform Alica Repenning: Digital Media Metro-nomes and Timespace Friction: Speeding up, Slowing down, and Losing Grip in Fashion Designers' Digital Labour on Instagram Lea Molina Caminero: "Post-Office": Spatio-temporal Transformation Processes in Knowledge-generating Forms of Cooperation	Paper presentations in <i>Small Conference Room (402)</i> Dilan Karatas & Thomas Bürk: Prekäre Pflegeinfrastrukturen in suburbanen und peripherisierten Regionen (Ostbrandenburgs): Zwischenergebnisse des Forschungsprojektes inCAREgio Rivka Saltiel & Anna Verwey: Collective Resources of Social Reproduction and Care: Urban initiatives of Commensality Stephan Liebscher, Nicolai Pfaff, Fabio Langenscheid & Emma Petersen: Composition of the university workforce. A case study within the cluster of excellence "Berlin-University-Alliance"
12:30	Lunch	
13:30	Keynote & workshop on methodologies of labour geography Peter Birke: Precarious work and poor peoples' agency. Experiences and methodological thoughts derived from a research project on work and migration moderated by Anne Engelhardt & Oliver Pye	
15:30	Coffee break	
16:00	Organizational matters, announcements & elections of the working group "Labour Geography" moderated by the current speakers Alicia Repenning, Isabella Stingl & Yannick Ecker	
17:00	Programme end & departure	

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Abstracts in alphabetical order:

Dilan Karatas & Thomas Bürk: Prekäre Pflegeinfrastrukturen in suburbanen und peripherisierten Regionen (Ostbrandenburgs): Zwischenergebnisse des Forschungsprojektes inCAREgio. *Presentation*

Das derzeit am Institut für Geographie der HU Berlin in Zusammenarbeit mit der IB Hochschule für Gesundheit und Soziales durchgeführte BMBF- finanzierte Forschungsprojekt inCAREgio (<https://in-caregio.org/>) untersucht seit dem Jahresbeginn 2023 Care-Infrastrukturen in Ost-Brandenburg. Dies beinhaltet primär auch die Auseinandersetzung mit den Arbeitsbedingungen in der häuslichen, (teil-)stationären und ambulanten Pflege. Unser aktuelles Forschungsinteresse umfasst die Auswirkungen von gesundheitspolitischen Entscheidungen auf die Arbeits- und Ausbildungsbedingungen von Pflegekräften, die auch den Raum und dessen Bevölkerung prägen (vgl. Christmann 2020: 5ff.). Die Krise der Reproduktion (vgl. Nancy Fraser 2017) zeigt, dass nicht nur sozial- und gesundheitspolitische Entscheidungen den Pflegenotstand intensiviert haben, sondern das auch wohlfahrtsstaatliche Prozesse eine Verbesserung der Situation hemmen (vgl. Bode & Vogd 2016b: 12f. Zit. In Mohan 2019: 15). Durch familiäre Zwänge oder geschlechtlich reproduzierte Berufsentscheidungen (vgl. Haller 2018: 69) finden wir uns in einer Pflegelandschaft weiter, in der überwiegend Frauen die Lücken im Raum und in der Versorgung ausgleichen müssen (vgl. Sevenhuijsen 1998: 6ff.; Münch 2021: 231ff.). Zusammengefasst, möchten wir aufzeigen, dass nicht nur demographische Faktoren, sondern die gezielte Verfolgung kapitalistischer Interessen den Pflegenotstand verschärft und manifestiert haben (vgl. Mohan 2019: 14ff.; Städtler-Mach 2020: 224f.).

Zentraler Topos der Debatte ist die auch für Ost-Brandenburg postulierte Notlage eines sogenannten Fachkräftemangels, also dem Fehlen von professionell qualifizierten Menschen, die in Pflege- und Therapieberufen arbeiten können oder wollen. Aus den von uns bisher durchgeführten Dokumentenanalysen sowie Gesprächen und Interviews mit Beschäftigten in ambulanten und stationären Pflege- und Therapieeinrichtungen - aber auch mit Koordinator:innen, Praxisanleiter:innen und Leitungspersonal diverser Trägerfirmen (Internationaler Bund und andere Träger) - wird die Dringlichkeit der Auseinandersetzung mit der Wechselbeziehung zwischen Pflegekräften, Fachkräftemangel, Raum und Gesundheitspolitik deutlich. Die Publikationen des lokalen Staats und wohlfahrtsstaatlichen oder privaten Vereinen zieht den demographischen Wandel auch Begründung des Fachkräftemangels heran (vgl. Gesundheitsamt Frankfurt Oder 2016; Fachstelle Altern und Pflege im Quartier im Land Brandenburg 2021). Wir verorten die vorgefunden Probleme jedoch in eine komplexere Begründungskulisse: Unattraktive Ausbildungs- und Arbeitsbedingungen führen dazu, dass interessierte Personen, sich für einen anderen Beruf entscheiden oder das bereits ausgebildete Pflegekräfte ihren Arbeitsbereich verlassen (vgl. Interview Schulz 2023; Mohan 2019: 203). Auch internationale Pflegekräfte erachten Deutschland als keinen einladenden Ort zum Arbeiten und Leben, da die bürokratischen Hürden und diskriminierende und ausschließende Phänomene und Praktiken auch außerhalb des Landes bekannt sind (vgl. Sammann 2023; Kinkartz & Kühnel 2023). Bisher wenig beachtet tragen Belastungen durch diskriminierende, sexistische und rassistische Arbeitsstrukturen- und kulturen in diesem sehr körperbezogenen, oftmals wenig distanzierten Arbeitsbereich zur geringen Attraktivität des Berufsfeldes bei (vgl. Betzelt et al. 2023: 29ff.). Neben den zudem oftmals prekären Arbeitsbedingungen bei niedriger Entlohnungen, verschulden unterschiedliche Entscheidungen der Gesundheitspolitik die vorhandenen personellen Lücken (vgl. ebd.: 13ff.; Mohan 2019: 198ff.). Beispielsweise das Einführen der Behandlungspauschale (vgl. Interview Schulz 2023; Mohan 2019: 201).

Dies wirkt sich nicht nur auf die Attraktivität eines Ortes aus, sondern ebenso auf die Gesundheit der Bewohner:innen (vgl. Christmann 2020: 7ff.). Dies färbt sich auf die häusliche Pflegesituationen und -

arrangements ab und erfordert eine hohe Resilienz der Pflegenden (vgl. Betzelt et al. 2023: 190ff.). Krankenhauspauschalen, Marktvereinigungen und lange Wege formen durch ihren Einfluss auf Pflegekräfte wiederum den Raum hinsichtlich ihrer Bevölkerungsstruktur, sozialen Praxis und die bauliche Umwelt, die in diesem Beitrag vorgestellt, vertieft und diskutiert werden sollen.

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Janne Martha Lentz, Christiane Meyer-Habighorst, Me-Linh Riemann & Karin Schwiter: From exceptionalism to normalisation: How narratives of platform companies legitimise precarious work and commodified care *Discussion of paper draft*

When platform companies first entered the scene, they claimed that their novel business models did not fit with existing regulations. In the meantime, this narrative of 'platform exceptionalism' has increasingly been discredited. This paper focuses on platform companies that mediate gig labour in the care sector and explores what legitimisation strategies they use today. We build our argument based on interviews with platform entrepreneurs and an analysis of the narratives on their websites, apps and advertisements. Our results identify a pervasive discourse of normalisation: Platform companies now primarily claim that their business models, forms of work and services are no different from other businesses. We interpret this shift in their legitimisation strategies as an attempt to counter critique and normalise the precarious working conditions in platform labour. Furthermore, we draw on feminist perspectives on social reproduction and care work to argue that this discourse also serves to justify a

capitalist system that leads to a continued devaluation of care work. Challenging the problematic imaginary of platformised care work as the solution to the crisis of social reproduction, we call for developing alternative imaginaries that allow time for care.

the paper is co-authored with Anke Strüver, Sarah Baumgarten, Sarah Staubli, Nicola Techel, and Sybille Bauriedl

Stephan Liebscher, Nicolai Pfaff, Fabio Langenscheid & Emma Petersen: Composition of the university workforce. A case study within the cluster of excellence “Berlin-University-Alliance” *Presentation*

Workers at German universities and research institutions have increasingly engaged in protest and strike action recently – across academic, student, technical, administrative professions. This is not only shown by the Twitter campaigns #IchbinHanna and #IchbinReyhan in summer 2021, but also the new Berlin Higher Education Act (2021-2023) and discussions around a law proposal on temporary employment by the Federal Ministry of Education and Science in 2023 and in the nationwide actions taken by student workers (TVStud) to fight for a fair bargaining agreement across Germany. In late 2023, the negotiations for a new bargaining agreement for all professional groups at universities (and the public sector) led to strike mobilisations across all professional groups unseen in decades with a sense of themselves as one workforce that has not been there before. While the working conditions of different professional groups are quite well documented by different studies – some of which commissioned by ministries, labour unions and university management – research in the subject is problematic in two ways: First, existing studies analyse professional groups separately (mainly academic and student staff), and second, they ignore questions of political organisation (merely quantifying union membership).

Against this backdrop, the student-led research project “Labour Geographies in Academia”, that has been carried out in summer term 2023, took a class perspective in order to include different professional groups at the university workplace and to identify possibilities and constraints of political organisation from a workers’ perspective. The central research question of the project was: How is the workforce at Berlin universities composed in terms of the labour process, the social fabric and the ability to organise collectively? Using the Workers’ Inquiry approach as developed by the British collective “notes from below” we investigated these questions at one institute of the cluster of excellence “Berlin-University-Alliance” (BUA). In the presentation, we will present the research design and initial results. We would also appreciate feedback from the audience on the potential of the pilot study to be implemented at other university workplaces in comparative frameworks.

Lea Molina Caminero (IRS): “Post-Office”: Spatio-temporal Transformation Processes in Knowledge-generating Forms of Cooperation *Presentation of a research project*

Digitalisation has fundamentally changed the organisation of work processes and modes of collaboration in creative and knowledge work (see e.g. Bürgin et al. 2022, Grabher et al. 2018). New spatial solutions, such as coworking and coliving spaces, and the growing role of digital technologies, which enable collaborative practices across spatial and organisational distances, have a significant effect on how and in which spatial constellations collaborative knowledge work takes place (Di Marino et al. 2023, Schäfer et al. 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic also accelerated these processes, as established offline collaboration routines and practices were abruptly interrupted and had to be adapted and changed within a very short timeframe.

The IRS research project "Post-Office" addresses the associated transformation processes. Knowledge workers have recently established or used new spaces for their (un)paid work, which is significantly changing the organisation and multilocality of work in rural and urban regions. As a result, spatial constellations of collaboration are increasingly emerging in which physical-spatial and digital-spatial work contexts are closely intertwined and their interplay is constantly renegotiated. Consequently, the project aims to understand the spatio-temporal dynamics of knowledge-generating collaborations with their disruptive elements and to discuss the resulting consequences for urban and rural regions. Using qualitative interviews and participant observations in collaborative workspaces (such as coworking spaces or collaborative living spaces), the project team investigates the extent to which the combination of different on/offline work and living spaces affects creative collaboration and the local socio-spatial fabric.

Fabian Namberger: On tech workers, clickworkers and gig drivers: Divisions of labour within the Uber platform *Presentation*

Critical debates on platformization, automation and gig work across various scholarly disciplines have done much lately to bring to the fore the daily experiences and lasting precarious working conditions of gig workers in different sectors of the service industries. While taking most seriously the experiences of 'front-line' (yet often largely invisible) gig workers, my contribution wants to partly expand on gig work 'as such' by bringing it into connection and partly contrasting it with other forms of 'material' and 'immaterial' labour that often form an equally prevalent part of many platform businesses' overall division of labour. Taking as an example the ridehail platform Uber, I argue that there is an intricate division of labour at work within Uber's platform that involves not only (i) Uber's gig-worker drivers, but also (ii) a considerable number of 'immaterial' workers such as tech staff, managers, policy and other experts as well as (iii) a largely invisible and widely outsourced armada of clickworkers dedicated, inter alia, on processes of data labelling within Uber's self-owned crowdwork platform Mighty AI (Spare 5). Taking Uber as my primary example, I argue that only a closer look at the various divisions of labour found 'within' the digital platform can reveal the full scope, diversity and variability of the forms of work that are needed to make a platform like Uber run 'smoothly'. I end with some reflections on to what extent this insight can be transferred onto digital platforms beyond the ridehail sector.

Barbara Orth: Becoming a 'Platform Worker': a biographical exploration of visa categories and worker subjectivities in the Gig Economy *Discussion of paper draft*

Most of the extant research on platform labour is focused on how digital technology, especially algorithmic management, changes the labour process and (re)produces precarious working conditions (Van Doorn and Shapiro 2023). This focus on the labour process risks missing out on the wider context of workers' realities includes their private and family lives, their housing, and engagement in unpaid reproductive labour. In this paper, we therefore do not primarily focus on how platforms change experiences of work but situate platform labour into workers' individual biographies and larger life trajectories. In our efforts to understand the wider context in which platform work occurs, we focus on one particular aspect, namely how the experience of migration underpins workers' engagements in the platform economy. Understanding how the experience of migration folds into labour subjectivities is highly relevant: studies from across the world have highlighted that workforces in place-based platform work predominantly consist of racialised and/or migrant workers (see e.g., ILO 2021; Piasna et al. 2022;). Given that platform work tends to be transitory for many workers, we are interested in the

nexus of this particular labour regime and immigration regimes that are increasingly marked by 'regulated' and 'forced' temporariness (Triandafyllidou 2022). To understand how temporary visas and precarious legal status intersect with the precarity of platform labour, we explore place-specific forms of work in the fields of cleaning, child care, adult/elderly care, and grocery delivery. The article is grounded in an analysis of one specific place, the German capital Berlin. The study draws on twenty-three semi-structured biographical interviews with young people from Argentina and Chile that were conducted in Berlin and Latin America between 2021 and 2023. The biographical approach allows us to situate platform-mediated work in the larger life trajectories of migrant workers and tease out the effects of the temporariness of the WHV category. Exploring the role of the WHV in platform-mediated work can thus both contribute to larger questions surrounding the future of work debate and illustrate the effect of this particular visa on migrants' (professional) lives.

We first situate the WHV within the existing literature on temporary migration regimes and present our conceptual perspectives from which we analyse the link between migration and platform work. Next, we explain our methodological approach of biographical interviewing and introduce our sample in more detail. We then present our empirical findings along three thematic episodes that illustrate the role of the WHV in the performance of platform work and show how migrants integrate this visa and form of work into longer-term mobility projects. In the final section, we summarise our findings, discuss how temporary migration regimes and migration experiences co-constitute worker subjectivities that are particularly susceptible to platform work, and suggest avenues for future research.

Marlen Ott: (Racialized) Difference and Plantation Labor Regimes: The Case of Costa Rican Pineapple Production *Presentation*

Pineapples have long become one of Costa Rica's most important export products. They, and other horticultural products, have been celebrated for creating jobs for the otherwise economically excluded rural population, especially in the country's northern regions. In reality, these agro-extractivist enclaves rely heavily on migrant workers, especially from the neighboring Nicaragua. This dissertation uses Labor Regime Analysis to observe the processes of racialization and how labor migration is strategically mobilized within the 'plantation labor regime.' It will further pay particular attention to the role of social reproduction in its upholding and the ways it produces difference. Thus, it engages with feminist scholarship, especially Social Reproduction Theory. This dissertation builds upon the assumption that labor regimes operate beyond the workplace/plantation and structure societal relations. My research intends to understand how the plantation labor regime and, therefore, racialized dynamics of global production affect everyday social relations in (rural) Costa Rica.

Ethnographic fieldwork in and around pineapple production will be conducted to answer these questions, including participative observation and interviews (individual and focus groups). A first explorative fieldwork was completed in September 2023. During this stay, a possible research site was identified. Based on this first stay and in preparation for the more extended field research stay planned for 2024, I would like to discuss the following questions:

- How can we deal sensibly with potential safety concerns of and for participants (Especially in the context of trade union persecution)? How can we communicate possible risks to our participants? How can we address different vulnerabilities within the field?
- How do we productively address existing power hierarchies within our research settings/field sites?

Louisa Prause: "The field as digital factory": Farm labor and the digital revolution in the corporate food regime *Discussion of paper draft*

In this article I develop the concept of the digital factory field as a theoretical entry point to understand the current shift from industrial agriculture to digital-industrial agriculture and its impacts on agrarian labor. Building on recent discussions around labor in digital capitalism, I argue that the digital factory field is characterised by a deepening and further entanglement of the real subsumption of labor and nature under capital through digital technologies. Two case studies from the South African fruit farming sector illustrate how digital technologies enable a more precise management and control of nature and labor and show that these processes are closely interrelated. Digital factory fields stabilize global production networks and potentially weaken labor as a social force for transforming the corporate food regime. The digital factory field also points to the importance of controlling rural labor in contemporary capitalism, where rural spaces become key areas for mitigating climate change and environmental damage that threatens to undermine the basis of capitalist production.

Saumya Premchander: Mapping a Local Labour Control Regime: Work in the Indian Granite Economy *Presentation*

India is the world's largest exporter of granite, and Jigani, is arguably India's largest wholesale marketplace for granite. With about 160 retailers, near Bangalore's electronic City, Jigani sits at the midpoint of the granite supply chain. Granite from quarries all over the country, primarily Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu,

Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Odisha, and Karnataka are sold by retailers in Jigani, some of whom export to countries across the world, but most supplying customers coming from all over the country.

I use Jigani as one node in the network from which to start mapping the supply chain for granite in South India with a particular focus on the kinds of work that go into granite extraction, processing, local retail and export. There is a marked lack of literature on the granite industry in India, and there are difficulties in access to other points of the network- mines, processing units, trucking businesses for example, which is why I selected Jigani as a starting point.

Moving outwards from Jigani my project seeks to map the supply chain for granite in South India with a particular focus on labour relations, practices, and processes at every node in the network. The aim of the project is to map the local labour control regimes in the granite economy and to understand transformations and changing processes. In a first attempt, this has led to a mapping of commercial, economic and social relations linked to Jigani as a site. The focus has been on networks within the Southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telengana and Tamil Nadu, as there is a degree of administrative homogeneity, and reduced transport costs leading to higher volumes of granite sales and supplies.

This presentation will have preliminary findings from data collection focusing on Jigani as an entry point to understanding the contours of the granite industry in the Bangalore metropolitan area. I will present two sites I have studied in detail: Jigani granite retail market in south Bangalore, and Narsapura granite quarry, north of the city of Bangalore, close to Kolar. Through these two cases, using ethnographic approaches which I should also like to discuss in the presentation, I will examine the control strategies employed by multiple stakeholders, and discuss some of the puzzles which the data has presented.

Alica Reppenig: Digital Media Metronomes and Timespace Friction: Speeding up, Slowing down, and Losing Grip in Fashion Designers' Digital Labour on Instagram *Presentation*

The literature on “platform capitalism”, “platform labour”, and “platform urbanism” has depicted a compelling picture of how digital platforms orchestrate urban relations against the backdrop of the platform’s model of value extraction. However, this literature rarely captures how digital platforms’ global timespaces are translated to platform workers’ daily realities and which frictions occur in this process. Therefore, the contrasts between the rhythms of the platform, nudging the users towards instantaneous data production and the possibilities of the humans, whose daily (work) life has become dependent on such platforms, remain largely unexplored.

Under the notion of timespace friction, the paper brings the literature on platform labour in dialogue with a timespace perspective to propose a framework to uncover the contrasting relationship between platform capitalism's and platform labour's conflating rhythms. The mechanisms are explored against the backdrop of an ethnographic case study of the digital labour of independent fashion designers in Berlin.

A perspective on timespace friction demonstrates that mobile and daily accessed apps can be seen as metronomes that nudge the timespaces of daily (work) life. Timespaces are thus negotiated in the polyrhythmic encounters of daily life, where the actors challenge the rhythms of the platform or accelerate their practices to follow the imposed pace. A timespace friction perspective thus sees beyond the smooth operating mechanisms of the platform economy that promise real-time data, just-in-time flexibility, and efficiency, revealing the hidden labour struggles of synchronisation (speeding up), de-synchronisation (slowing down) and losing grip (going viral).

Rivka Saltiel & Anna Verwey: Collective Resources of Social Reproduction and Care: Urban initiatives of Commensality *Presentation*

Various social initiatives in Graz regularly invite people to cook and eat together. Intending to create open spaces for “everyone”, neighborhood centers, NGOs and cultural or art spaces offer community cooking events and (cl)aim to foster urban togetherness across difference through these everyday cultural practices of commensality (eating together). Food is offered for free or on a donation basis and a diverse group of people is encouraged to participate as volunteers and to engage in a variety of ways (contributing recipe ideas, shopping, cutting vegetables, washing dishes, social programming).

These initiatives target both the needs for community as well as for food and thus form spaces of collectivized social reproduction and care – outside the home and the private sphere and beyond profit-driven undertakings. As examples of lived communality, they resist the capitalist logic of individualization and marketization and invite to practice and experiment with alternative ways of being and relating in common in the city.

In our ethnographic research we seek to unravel the complex social relations of initiatives of commensality. Applying a feminist care ethics perspective, we expand the notion of commensality emphasizing its gendered, classed, and racialized dimensions. What is more, a feminist analysis reveals the immense resources of unpaid work, on which many of the initiatives of commensality are based on. This comes with a range of ambiguities: The reliance on volunteers puts pressure on committed volunteers and often leads to exhaustion, tends to have precarizing and de-professionalizing effects and contributes to the informalization of care-work. Also, volunteering often involves notions of dependencies and hierarchies of helping, expressed in a tension between charity and solidarity.

Against this background, in our project we address questions regarding who is doing the work of cooking; how is food made accessibly and to whom; how do notions of affect, love and compassion come into play; how is food (work) racialized and how do attributions to food and culture persist in initiatives of commensality?

William Westgard-Cruice: The spatiality of energy-labour regimes: a Marxian approach *Presentation*

Today, we stand at the precipice of a major transformation in the geography of capitalist production. Although it is unfolding far too slowly and in a highly disorganized manner, we do seem to be embarking on a major shift from a socio-ecological metabolism powered primarily by fossil fuels to one powered increasingly by low-carbon energy sources. As Matthew T. Huber and James McCarthy (2017) have argued, the projected “energy transition” can be conceptualized, from a historical-geographical materialist perspective, as a shift from an energy regime of “intensive verticality” to an energy regime composed of “spatially extensive industrial undertakings” such as large-scale solar PV and wind power plants (p. 658, 665).

The main argument of this paper (and research project) is that the spatialities of labour processes and labour regimes in renewable power generation are highly distinct from the spatialities of labour regimes in thermal power generation and in the extraction and processing of fossil fuels. This does not mean that there is a single, universal “renewable energy labour regime.” Indeed, in the very same sense that our present “subterranean energy regime” is daily reproduced through the systemic integration of a wide variety of fragmented labour processes, so too will a horizontally-extensive “low-carbon” energy regime be highly internally variegated in terms of the content and spatiality of its constituent labour processes.

If the point is to change the world and not simply to interpret it (Marx, 1978 [1845]), then it is not sufficient to simply catalogue the complex landscape of labour regimes within this emerging energy regime. Rather, it is necessary to focus our analytical attention on some of the particular labour processes that are at the very heart of the emerging energetic metabolism of capital, and which are thereby determined as crucial sites of working-class strategic intervention. One such labour process is the maintenance of wind turbines, a branch of the social division of labour within which workers have been particularly militant in recent years. To adequately theorize the evolving spatiality of this labour regime and other ones like it, then we need to reproduce in thought the determinations of the transformation of capitalist labour processes and the contradictory development of the geographical organization of production in capitalism.

Huber, M., & McCarthy, J. (2017). Beyond the subterranean energy regime? Fuel, land use and the production of space. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 42(4), 655–668.

Marx, K. (1978 [1845]). "Thesen über Feuerbach." In *Marx-Engels-Werke*, Bd. 3 (pp. 3-7). Berlin: Dietz Verlag.